INTRODUCTION

The American Constitution is the oldest, still effective, written constitution in the world. Many books have been written about the framing of the Constitution in 1787, but a closer look reveals some interesting issues. Writings about the Articles of Confederation are rare. As main support of the new constitution the Federalist Papers are quoted, but at the same time the Anti-Federalist Papers were written. The anti-federalists have a special position in the American history. Although they were strongly opposed to the proposed constitution, they are considered, together with the federalists, as two sides of the same coin.¹

In this article I would like to highlight two interesting subjects in the discussion between federalists and anti-federalists. How did party's think about the proposed bicameral system in the new constitution? What role did the example of the Dutch Republic of the Seven United Netherlands play in the discussion about the constitution?

It is important to realize that one should not be misled by the names of the parties involved in the discussion. Federalists are in favour of a strong national government and limited powers to the individual states. The anti-federalists are supporting a real federal system, with a small role for the central government and powerful states.

1 HISTORY

Right from the very start, the Articles of Confederation were a result of a union of thirteen states, who were proud of their own independence, against England. "The said states hereby severally enter into a firm league of friendship with each other" and thus the confederation of the United States became a fact. However, some weak elements corrupted the new system. The confederation had no power to collect taxes or to have army's. Very soon the results became clear. The troops of general Washington were selfsupporting during the battle for Independence. This resulted in the dramatic events at Valley Forge. During the stern winter Washington's soldiers died of malnutrition. Many times the Congress of the Confederation has been compared to the United Nations.² It could ask for money, but could not enforce payment. It could enter into treaties, but it could not ensure them. It could borrow money, but it was not able to pay back. The Dutch Republic was one of the main supporters of the American Revolution.

"How are the Dutch? We owe them money, it is true; and are they not willing that we owe them more? Mr. Adams applied to them for a new loan to the poor, despised Confederation. They readily granted it."³

Despite these difficulties the First Congress accomplished some important facts. The first governmental agencies were established, the Peace of Paris was signed en besides the Postoffices three other departments were created: Foreign Affairs, Finance and War. The problems however remained.

Trade suffered because of economic sanctions and the shortage of money. The states started to raise taxes at foreign goods, but lack of uniformity broke these tariff barriers. In 1784 a revision of the articles was suggested but Rhode Island and North Carolina opposed. The states started to issue paper money. Trouble started in North Carolina when
