

response, he declared: "I shall always be ready to afford every assistance and security in my power to such undertakings, when they are really meant and are not merely schemes of trade with views of introducing English manufactures into America, under pretense of their being the substance of persons going there to settle."⁴⁵ When Jesse Taylor of Belfast asked Franklin to help a group of Irish artisans to migrate to America, the American minister asked for the names, sexes, and ages, and the names of the vessels they plan to take, in order to "procure them all the security desired" to make the trip. Passports were used to identify them, should an American or French ship stop them on the high seas, and to introduce them as friends rather than spies in American ports. Taylor sent the list by messenger because the regular channels would have led to trouble, "should such a paper be intercepted, & fall unto Improper hands." Franklin, in turn, instructed his close associate in London, Edward Bancroft, to assist the group.⁴⁶

One surprisingly full account of Franklin's dealings with a prospective group of industrial immigrants has survived to give modern historians a complete insight into Franklin's evolving attitude towards the problem of technology piracy during the Revolutionary War. In 1778, while Englishmen and colonists were fighting each other in North America, a group of textile workers from the Stockport area near Manchester formed an association called the "Emigrant Club." The Stockport district was a hotbed of industrial espionage in the 1770s and 1780s, and even during the War of Independence local newspapers warned of the many industrial spies roaming the region. In the fall of 1781, Henry Royle, a skilled calico printer, approached Franklin on behalf of the group and proposed a deal. The potential emigrants, he explained, would bring their know-how to the underdeveloped United States in exchange for "the following Conditions." (1) The emigrants requested that the government of the United States support them while they waited for their

Atlantic journey and subsidize their transportation to the New World; (2) they demanded immediate naturalization upon arrival and exemption from military service; (3) they expected the government of the United States to grant them a seven-year monopoly on the manufacturing of the cotton and silk goods that they promised to produce with the machinery and knowledge they planned to smuggle out of Britain.⁴⁷

On January 2, 1782, one of the group's leaders, Henry Wyld, gained an audience with Franklin in Paris.⁴⁸ Franklin was initially warm. He saw no problems with the second and third demands, but resisted the passage subsidy. "Having therefore no Orders or Authority either from Congress or the State of Pennsylvania to procure Settlers or Manufacturers, by engaging to defray them, I cannot enter in the Contract proposed. The other articles would meet with no difficulty." He suggested that the emigrants wait until the peace treaty was signed and then go via Ireland to avoid the "Law to restrain the Emigration of Manufacturers." While Franklin did not back up his support with cash he openly attacked the British restrictions on artisanal migration and called on the Stockport group to violate them. He called these laws "weak," "wicked," and "tyrannical" and charged that they "make a Prison of England, to confine Men for no other Crime but that of being useful and Industrious." For Franklin, the anti-emigration laws were symbolic of the capricious hypocrisy of the British ministry and of the social injustice of English society. They restricted the movement of hard-working artisans "while they suffer their idle and extravagant Gentry to travel and reside abroad at their Pleasure, spending the Incomes of their Estates, rack'd from their laborious honest Tenants in foreign Follies, and among French and Italian Whores and Fiddlers." Franklin concluded his reply urging the group to ignore the British law because it was "too glaringly unjust to be borne with."⁴⁹

In a show of support Franklin lent Wyld ten guineas to be repaid