

(Circular)

Office of Finance 21st October 1782

Sir, I have on many Occasions warned the States of the Consequences which must follow from Delays in supplying the public Treasury. The Expense which attends such Delays has frequently been mentioned, and Instances daily occur to show how much the public Debt has increased by the Want of a timely Provision. To cite them all would be useless, but there is one of an inconsiderable Magnitude which I think it proper to state for your Consideration. I had contracted on the Part of the United States for the Supply of Nations to the main Army at ten Pence Pennsylvania Currency and to the Garrison at West Point for nine Pence half Penny, and had agreed to pay at the commencement of each month for the Issues of the preceding Month. These beneficial Contracts have been dissolved by my Inability to make punctual Payments, which rendered the Contractors incapable of performing their Engagements. After many Efforts on my Part to supply the Want of Cash and on their Part to substitute private Credit and Promises in the Place of ready Money, they found it impracticable to proceed further on the moderate Terms stated in the Contract. Some of them told me so, and asked (what any Persons in their Situation ^{naturally} would have asked) the Promise of Indemnification for any Damages they might sustain, and a Promise to pay at the End of each Month one half the amount of Issues for the preceding Month in Coin, and three Times the remaining Half in Bills or Notes receivable in Taxes. They offered if I would agree to these Propositions to go on and supply the Army, but declared that if I would not, they could no longer perform their Engagements.

From this Moment I was obliged to consider the Contract as dissolved, because the Dissolution of it appeared to be inevitable. I had already by entering into the Contract promised on the Part of the Public a Payment of the whole Money due for the monthly Issues. A new Promise of the Half would have given no additional Security, and therefore I considered that stipulation as a Request that I should on my private and personal Honor assure them the Public Funds would enable me to make such Payment. But of this I had no good Prospect. The greater Part of what little came in from Taxes was the same Kind of Paper with that which they asked for, being what I had long before issued for other Services. If indeed I could have trusted the Assurances made to me, I might have given the Assurances required by them. But Experience had taught me Caution, and the Event has shown that if I had made the Promise it should have now been chargeable with Falshood.

I think the Contractors were prudent in requiring a Promise of Indemnification. Their Situation made it necessary. But it was a Promise which I could not

not make, for altho I had Reason to confide in their Integrity, and would have done it in my private Capacity, yet as a public Officer I should not. For there would have been no longer any Certainty of the Extent to which their Expenditures might have been carried off, for it should have become a matter of Indifference to their private Interest what Price should be given for Supplies.

Thus, Sir, I found myself reduced to the Alternative of making a new Agreement for Subsistence of the Army and Garrison, or of leaving them to subsist themselves by military Collection. The latter was to be avoided if possible, for it would have been the most expensive Mode of obtaining Supplies, not to mention other Consequences. The former therefore was to be adopted, and accordingly gave Instructions to Mr. Cornell Inspector of the Contracts to consult with the Commander in Chief, and take the necessary Arrangements. It could not be expected that a Contract dictated by Necessity could be made on economical Terms, and the Inability to perform old Engagements would necessarily influence the Rate of new Ones. Besides this it was indispensibly necessary to obtain a longer Credit, because otherwise the Burthen would have been shifted, not removed, and the Debt must have returned with equal Speed and greater Magnitude. Under such unfavorable Circumstances it was necessary to pay for Credit in order to obtain it. A new Contract is made and the Rations issued now are to be paid for three Months hence at the Rate of thirteen Penna Pennsylvania Currency per Ration, which is an Advance of about one third upon the former Price. The Public therefore will pay for this Advance of Money equal to feeding the Army at the Rate of thirty three and one third per Cent for three Months, or to make the Matter more simple, they must pay for feeding them three Months as much as would have fed them four Months. Besides this, the public Credit sustains material Injury, and Damages will be exacted by the former Contractors.

If, Sir, it should be supposed that this is the only Instance of Loss sustained from the low State of the Treasury, it is a great Mistake. The Attempt to establish economical Systems is vain unless we can support them by Punctuality. Congress have placed me in a Situation where I am exposed in the first Instance to Claims & Demands but these must come home to the several Legislatures and eventually to their Constituents. My Situation therefore makes it a Duty to expostulate freely on the Circumstances of my Department. I am not to learn that free Representations will sometimes give Offence, and I know that those will always be most offended who are most in Fault.

but I shall make no apologies for what I have to say. 188 It is necessary that the Truth should be known to the People. To our Enemies it is known already, and has been for a long Time. They hold up to Contempt and Derision the Contrast between Intentions to carry on the War at every Expense and Receipts of Nothing in some States, and very little in all of them put together. Those who court public Favor at the Expense of public Good, are very apt to enrage against Taxes, and to flatter the Indolent and Avaricious with the Idea that War can be carried on without Labor or Money. But it is Time ^{for the People} to distinguish between their Flatterers and their friends. Sooner or later the current Expense must be paid, and that Payment must come from the Purses of Individuals. If it were made in Season it would be lighter by one Half than it is. Congress have called for a certain Sum, and that Sum punctually paid would have answered the Purpose; but they cannot be responsible for the Consequences of Delay. The Expense will necessarily in such Case exceed their Calculations, and of Course further Sums must be required.

There are certain Arguments, Sir, which ought not to be used if it is possible to avoid them, but which every One invested with public Authority should suggest to his own Mind for the Government of his ^{own} Conduct. — How long is a Nation who will do Nothing for itself to rely on the Aid of Others? In a War waged by one Country to obtain Revenue from an Other — what is to be expected in Case of Conquest? How long will one Part of a Community bear the Burthens of the Whole? How long will any Man undergo Want in the Midst of Plenty? How long will they endure Misery without Complaint, Injustice without Reproach, — and Wrongs without Redress? These are Questions which cannot be solved by arithmetical calculation. The moral causes which may procrastinate or precipitate Events are hidden from mortal View. But it is within the Bounds of human Knowledge to determine that all earthly Things have some Limits which it is imprudent to exceed, others which it is dangerous to exceed, and some which can never be exceeded. It is possible that we are near the Close of this War, and perhaps we are only in the Middle of it. But if the War should continue we have to blame ourselves; for were those Resources called forth into Action which we really possess, the foreign Enemies would soon lose all Hope, and abandon their Enterprise. The greatest Injury therefore which we sustain is not from foreign but from domestic Enemies: From those who impede the necessary Executions.

I have mentioned one among many Instances to shew the Consequences of

withholding the public Revenue; and I take the Liberty to observe that it would be
more manly to declare at once for an admitted Submission to British Tyranny, than to
make specious Declarations against it, and yet take the direct Road to bring it about
by opposing the Measures necessary for our Defence. That open Declaration will doubt-
less be restrained by the Fear of general Resentment, but the other Conduct is so much the
more ^{dangerous} criminal as it is calculated to close People's Eyes while they approach the Preci-
pice, that they may be thrown down with greater Ease and more absolute certainty.

I trust that your Excellency and every other real Friend to our Country will urge
forwards that speedy and effectual Collection of Taxes which can alone give Vigor and Stability
to all our Measures. And I wish to inform you that the public Service shall be
performed (if the proper Revenues be obtained) at less than Half of what would otherwise
be expended.

I am Sir With perfect Respect

Your Excellency's
Most obedient

Humble Servant

Thos Morris

His Excellency

The Governor of Northamptonshire

Letter from Mr Morris
at 10 o'clock
21st of Decr 1782