

Circular

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Office of foreign affairs, Philadelphia,
19th February 1782

Sir

When a Government is composed of independent States, united, not by the Power of a Sovereign, but by their common interest, the executive departments form a center of communication between each State & their chief Council, & are so far links of the chain which should bind them together, as they render to each similar views of ^{great} national objects, & introduce unanimity in their measures for the establishment of general interests — A mistaken idea of our own importance to the other nations, of their attachment to us, & of the weakness of our common enemy having lulled us into a very imprudent security — I beg leave to state to your Excellency the information last received from Europe. Our success in this important War, under the favor of Heaven, must be built upon the weakness of our Enemy, the strength & perseverance of her foes in Europe, & our own exertions — It is an undeniable

fact,

That Britain has not in the course of the last campaign
gained any advantage of her enemies, but on the contrary
has seen their fleets ride triumphant in the seas she
proudly calls her own, & an army in which she
placed her fondest hopes made captive. - But on the
other hand, we are compelled to admit that she has met with
no such reverse of fortune as entirely to debilitate her, or
weaken her resources for another campaign - Her trade has
for the most part returned in safety - Her fleets have
blocked up those of the Dutch, & upon the separation
of the combined fleets recovered the superiority in the
European seas - The army taken in America is only so far
decidedly ruinous to her affairs here as we know how to
avail ourselves of the advantage it affords - That her pride
is not humbled, that she did not wish for peace prior to
this advantage is obvious - 1st from her refusing to
make a separate peace with the Dutch, who under
the mediation of the Empress of Russia, seemed anxiously
to wish it - 2^d From her neglect to notice the last
proposals of the mediating powers, which yet remain
unanswered - So that if any alteration is made in

their

their sentiments on this subject, they must originate in their ill success in America, for in every other quarter, their defensive War seems to have been supported with advantage — How far this will operate, admits of a doubt which prudence directs us not to rely upon — Money, the great support of modern Wars, has been raised with more facility in England than in any Country in the world, & we find the minority last year censuring Lord North for giving the advantage of lending to his friends — These hopes may, indeed, render subscriptions more expensive to the public, but there is no well grounded room to suppose they will not fill — and still less reason to believe, if the means for carrying on the War are attainable, that the vindictive spirit of the King & his ministry, & the overweening pride of the nation will soon yield to make a peace which involves their disgrace & humiliation.

But as strength or weakness are meer comparative Terms, we can form no judgment of the measures of Britain, but by attending to the force & disposition of her Enemies.

The United Provinces were evidently dragged into the War, & have prosecuted it as if they momentarily expected Peace — The Colonies in the West Indies have

have been taken without being in a state to make the
smallest resistance, & the active interposition of France
alone saved those in the east from sharing the same
fate - Our last Letters from Holland place the distress of
their Commerce in a strong point of view - they are
unhappily rent by parties, which clog the wheels of
government, tho' it is said that the party opposed to
England are the most numerous and growing in strength,
so that at some future day we may reasonably hope
they will assume the entire ascendancy, yet we can
build very little on this till the close of another
year - This much is certain - they are not yet
allied to us, nor have they given us reason to
believe they intend to be so - they wish for peace
& will take no measures that can obstruct it
They have lent us no money, nor are they like to do
it, from whence we may presume either that they
doubt our success or do not much interest themselves
in it - Our expectations from Spain are scarce more
flattering, some little aids of money have been received
after long solicitations, hardly so much as paid
the

the expense of soliciting - We have reason to suppose that no more will be granted - They are still cold with regard to our alliance, nothing but brilliant success can bring it to a conclusion - Nor have we the smallest reason to expect any pecuniary aid from her, even if she should confederate with us, in time to be of use for the next campaign - She has at this moment very many & very expensive operations on hand - And till she has allied herself to us, we have no certainty that she will chuse to continue the war for the attainment of our independence, if Britain should be sufficiently humbled to sacrifice to her the objects which led her into the war - To France then we turn, as the only enemy of Great Britain who is at the same time our ally, who will persevere in the War for the attainment of our independence, - She has already done so much for us, in order to afford us the means of doing something for ourselves that she may reasonably hope to find the effects of her benevolence - Her fleets have protected our coasts, her armies have fought our battles - She has made various efforts to restore our finances, by paying the interest of our Loans, by obtaining credit in Europe on our account, for cloathing, arms & necessaries

By advancing money — and by opening & guarantying a loan for us to a considerable amount in Holland, when by the abolition of paper our finances were totally deranged — These sums are nearly expended — Another campaign is about to be entered upon; — France assures us that it is not in her power to make us further grants of money — Her ministers repeat this to us in every letter in a tone that persuades us of their determination on that point — What then is to be done? — Are we to relinquish the hopes which the present debility of the Enemy afford us of repelling them by one decided effort, & compensating all our losses by the enjoyment of an active commerce? Are we to return to the wretched oppressive system we have quitted? — Are we to carry on a weak defensive War with an unpaid Army, whose precarious subsistence must depend on what can be torn by violence from the industrious husbandman? — Shall we vainly, & I think, disgracefully supplicate all the powers of Europe for those means which we have in our hands, if we dare to call them forth, and which after all must be called forth, if we continue the war (and upon that subject there can be no doubt, till the end for which we took up arms is attained) — the only question is whether each State shall fairly & regularly contribute its quota, or whether that which happens to be the seat of War, shall, ^{or bear the whole burden, and} as has too often been the case, suffer more from the necessities

necessities of our own Troops than the ravages of the enemy
whether we shall drive the enemy from their posts with
a strong body of regular Troops, or whether we shall
permit them to extend their devastations, while with
weak Battalions, & fluctuating Corps of militia, we pro-
tract a weak defensive war, till our allies are discouraged
& some unfavorable change takes place in the system of
Europe - Your Excellency, I am persuaded, will pardon
the freedom with which I write - you see the necessity
which dictates my letter, & were it in my power to commu-
nicate all that our friends in Europe think of our inactivity
I am persuaded you would urge your State to exertions
in much stronger terms than I dare venture to use - When
Congress call upon a State for supplies, they are usually
answered by pleas of disability, urged too by the State
with good faith, & a firm persuasion that they speak
their real situation - a recurrence to facts that have
passed under their own observation will convince them
that they are deceived

From the time that the depreciation of the
Continental bills of credit began, till they were no longer
current; the States that received them paid a tax equal to

all the expenditures of the army, & a very considerable
one beyond it - For if we suppose ten millions of
dollars in specie a year to be necessary for their
support, then the expence till the close of the campaign
1779, must have amounted to upwards of fifty millions
exclusive of supplies from Europe - And yet in March
1780, the whole national debt ^{contracted in America} did not in fact amount
to five millions - so that forty five millions were paid
by the United States in those five years of the War, when
they had the least commerce of agriculture, & when they
were most distressed by the enemy - And this tax too was
the most unjust & partial that can be conceived, unless
we except that by which we have since raised much
more from the people, without giving so much to the
public, I mean the laws for impressing, &c which
placed the greatest burden of the war upon the
shoulders of a particular order Men in particular
States only - Now surely, if by partial & unjust
means we have been able to draw from every
state a far more than equal to the present demand
no state can say that it cannot afford its proportion

of a more equitable tax - Those who have hitherto borne the weight of the war, must warmly espouse a measure which is so greatly calculated for their relief - Those who have hitherto been eased from the burden, must be more able to take it up at this time, when they have the most promising expectation of relinquishing it soon.

It is certain, if we put ourselves in a state to take advantage of circumstances early in the ensuing Spring, that we have the best grounded reason to hope that a few months will remove the war from our doors - Whereas, if we delay to enable Congress to say to their allies "We are ready for an effectual cooperation with any force you may send" - they will turn their attention to other objects, & leave us to lament in vain for the opportunities we have lost - Every motive, then - National honor - National interest - public economy - private ease - and that love of freedom which pervades every Legislature on the continent, calls loudly, not only for a compliance with the requisitions of Congress, but for so early a compliance as to render it effectual - It is true we are at present in such a situation as to have no apprehensions
for

for the final establishment of our independence, but surely it is a matter of some moment to us, whether we shall obtain it, or at least be freed from the ravages of the enemy, & the burdens of the war in the course of six months, at the expense of eight millions of dollars, or whether we shall wait for it, till a general and perhaps a distant peace, & be subject in the mean while to infinitely greater expense, & all the distresses that attend the country which is the seat of war —

But, Sir, it is time to dismiss a subject which wants no arguments to illustrate it; I am confident that you will use every means to convince the State over which you preside, of the danger which will result, from relying more upon the weakness of the enemy than their own strength, more upon the aid of their allies, than their own exertions, more upon unjust, partial, hazardous & expensive expedients, than upon an equal & regular support of the measures which Congress, upon the most mature deliberation, has recommended to their attention.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

with

with the greatest respect & esteem

Your Excellency's

Most obedient humble servant

W. H. Livingston

From Rob^t W. Livingston
of 19 Feb'y 1782

Circular
Letter from Rob^t W. Living-
ston, Sec. of Foreign Affairs
urging motions for vigorous
efforts to prosecute the war.
Feb. 19, 1782.