

Connecticutensis: To the People of Connecticut, *American Mercury*, 31 December 1787

A revenue is absolutely necessary for every nation. Money must be raised for public uses. The United States are still largely in debt on account of the expenses of the late war. Foreign states who have lent us their money in the time of our distress must be paid. Gratitude and justice requires it; and this is not all, they can make reprisals upon us, and let us know that we must pay, or the worst will be our own. Our own patriotic citizens who have lent their money to the public ought to be and must be paid. Money must be provided for our current national expense.

How shall these things be done? We have strained the point of dry taxation to its highest pitch. The farmer, who has a moderate decent farm just sufficient comfortably to support himself and family, finds it exceedingly hard to save enough out of his yearly earnings to pay the frequent demands of collectors. There is an easier way, my fellow citizens, to raise such sums of money as are necessary for public use; indirect taxation, duties laid upon those foreign articles which are imported and sold among us. Such duties are paid, in the first place, by the merchant; by the man that is buying, and selling, and getting gain, and has the money to pay. It is true that he will not bear the whole of this in the end; he will ask a higher price for his goods. But I ask you, is it not easier for you to give a little dearer for the goods you buy when you can pay in your way, and if they are higher, can buy a little the less; is not this easier than it is to have a collector come and dun you for a round sum of money, and pay it you must or your cattle and land must be sold at public vendue? Everyone must see that this way of indirect taxation is by far the easiest for the people. Reason shows us that this must be the case. The experience of all civilized nations shows us the same. In England, more than three-fourths of the public revenue is raised by indirect taxation; much the same way likewise may be said of the other European nations.

This advantage will also arise from taxing foreign commodities, that it will in reality encourage our own produce and manufactures. It has heretofore been our foolish policy to load our own commodities with taxes and let those of foreigners go free. We tax all our own commodities, not excepting the most favored, not excepting even our wool and flax. Although we do not charge our sheep in the list, yet we tax the land which they feed upon, which operates as a tax upon the wool itself. We tax the ground on which our flax grows, the oxen employed in tilling it, and the polls of those employed in raising and dressing the flax; so that in reality, this useful material for our own domestic manufactures pays a heavy tax. The lands on which our orchards grow are taxed; and thus the wholesome juice of our own apple pays a heavier tax than those fiery distilled spirits which destroy the health, property, and morals of the people. Now by taxing our own commodities higher than those of foreign nations, we discourage our own and give the preference to foreign produce and manufactures. This, my countrymen, is going on in the high road to national poverty and distress. But in our present divided situation, we must go on so; we cannot adopt a rational system of trade and finance.

Instead of adopting a general system founded upon principles of justice and equality, the states are trying to take undue advantages of each other. The neighboring states have laid duties upon imported goods. We purchase these goods and use them; the consumer ultimately pays the duties. In this way, we the citizens of Connecticut are constantly paying an impost of forty thousand pounds a year into the treasury of New York. The collector of impost in that state has a salary of 3,000 dollars a year; if the new Constitution is adopted, the New York impost and Colonel [John] Lamb's salary go over the dam together. It is no wonder, then, that he is taking so much pains to circulate the Centinel and other factious pieces among us. But does he believe the people of Connecticut are such fools as to think it is for their interest to pay to the State of New York a yearly tribute of 40,000 pounds, because it is his interest to receive 3,000 dollars for collecting it?

The plain state of the matter is this: indirect taxation is by far the easiest and wisest way of raising a revenue. This mode cannot be adopted by the states, with any kind of justice or equality, in their present disunited situation. If the new Constitution should be adopted, the principal part of the public revenue would be raised in this most eligible way. Therefore, considering the subject in this light, there is a weighty reason for adopting the new Constitution.

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