

An addres[s] from the United States in Congress assembled to the legislatures of the several states.

An **ADDRES** from the **UNITED STATES** in **CONGRESS** assembled, to the **LEGISLATURES** of the several **STATES**.

When the interests of a people are endangered, either through the defect of the government they have established, or the want of timely and vigorous exertions to give efficacy to its operations, it becomes the duty of those to whom the sacred trust of watching over the welfare of the nation is delegated, to awaken it to a sense of its danger, and to urge the adoption of such measures, as may avert the calamities with which it is threatened.

Impressed with a sense of this high obligation, and an anxious and affectionate concern for the interest, honour and safety of their constituents, the United States in Congress assembled, have, at various periods, and on various occasions, exercised this important trust; but on none more solemn and interesting, than on the 18th February last, when after a mature and serious consideration of the state of the nation, they were constrained to declare,—"That a reliance on the requisitions to discharge the engagements of the confederacy, would be dangerous to the welfare and peace of the union: That for want of a timely exertion in establishing a general revenue, not only the existence of the confederacy was hazarded, but those great and invaluable privileges for which they had contended; and therefore that, whilst Congress were denied the means of satisfying these engagements, which they had constitutionally entered into for the common benefit of the union, it was their duty to warn their constituents that the most fatal evils would inevitably flow from a breach of public faith, pledged by solemn contract, and a violation of those principles of justice which are the only solid basis of the honour and prosperity of nations."

Library of Congress

It would be unnecessary on this occasion to recapitulate the reasons which induced the recommendation of the revenue system of the 18th April, 1783. The necessity of a compliance with the general impost (which constituted a principal part of this system) and the benefits or evils which would inevitably flow from a neglect or adoption of the measure, are so forcibly pointed out in the act of Congress of the 16th December, 1782, (which accompanied their address of the 18th April, 1783, and by their subsequent resolves of the 18th February last, that nothing can be added to enforce the policy and necessity of the measure; unless it be this solemn and lamentable truth,— that the experience of the last year has added further proof of the utter inefficacy of relying upon requisitions for supporting the expence and credit of the union.

By this requisition the states were called upon to pay into the general treasury, on or before the first day of May last, the sum of three million of dollars, of which one million of dollars was to be discharged by specie, and two million of dollars by discounts of interest on the domestic debt. The objects for which the monies proposed to be raised were to be appropriated, are distinctly pointed out. By this it appears that the sum of eight hundred and forty thousand dollars, were absolutely and indispensibly necessary to be paid some months since in specie, to defray the charges of the civil government, and the interest of the foreign debt.

What have been the effects of this requisition? Notwithstanding the serious and interesting appeal of Congress to the justice and wisdom of the several states, which soon followed it; and in which, after stating the public receipts and expenditures for the four preceding years, it is proved that the receipts of the last fourteen months, were not adequate to the bare maintenance of the federal government, on the most economical establishment, and in time of profound peace: Only eight states out of the thirteen have passed acts apparently complying with the requisition; and by such as have complied, not more than the sum of 100,000 dollars has been paid into the general treasury to the present date, in actual specie.

Library of Congress

In examining the acts of the several legislatures, passed in consequence of the resolves of the 27th September last, it is found that in most states, the monies intended for the purposes of the union, and those of the state, are blended in the same collection; that scarcely in any state, funds are pointed out by the law for providing its quota; and that in several, a paper currency is made receivable as specie in all payments whatsoever. To these, amongst other circumstances, may be imputed in a great degree, the inefficacy of the revenue laws in the several states, and an almost total stagnation in the payment of the general quotas.

If it be asked, to what end then is another requisition made, whilst such heavy balances remain still unsatisfied? The answer is, That the United States in Congress are bound by every principle of good faith and justice, and a regard to national character, to exercise that authority (however inadequate) which is vested in them, for obliging the different members of the union to contribute their respective quotas for the support of the general government; and to manifest to the world, that they are not unworthy the high and honourable trust of watching over the welfare of a free people.

The states will observe that in the present requisition, no less than 1,723,626 dollars 47-90ths, ought to be forthwith raised in specie, for the express purpose of paying the interest, and certain installments of principal of the foreign debt, which will become due in the present, and in the course of the next year. So values the accumulation of the debt, which has been brought on the people for want of an early and general adoption of the resolves of Congress of the 18th April, 1783!

The general impost (therein recommended) was expressly appropriated for the purpose of discharging the principal and interest of the national debt; the probable amount of it was at that time calculated at near a million of dollars annually. Supposing this sum greater than this revenue is likely to produce in a regular state of commerce; when the extraordinary importations which were poured into the states for the first two years after the peace, are taken into consideration, it may safely be averred, that by the end of the year 1787, a

Library of Congress

revenue would have accrued from the execution of that plan of near four million of dollars; if it had commenced its operation in the early part of the year 1784.

It may in this place be proper to state what have been the sums necessary to be raised in specie, for the interest and principal of the foreign debt, to the end of the year 1787, and to compare the aggregate with the probable amount of that revenue to the same period.

By the schedule of the principal and interest due on the foreign loans, which was transmitted to the several states with the act of Congress of 15th February last, it appears that the aggregate of principal and interest, due on the French and Dutch loans, to the end of the year 1787, is Dollars, 1,710,044 On the the Spanish loan of 174,000 dollars, seven years interest, 60,900 Due to foreign officers and individuals in France, say 44,000 Due to foreign individuals for principal and interest of debts contracted abroad, about, 100,000
1,914,944

Deduct this sum from the probable amount of the impost to the year 1787, and it appears that two million of dollars of surplus revenue might, under a proper arrangement, have been applied towards the reduction of the capital of the domestic debt.

When to these circumstances are added the influx of specie from the revival of credit, and the happy effects it would have had on the present unfavorable balance of commerce, and consequently on the collection of taxes throughout all the states, it is scarcely possible to foresee the extent and number of the advantages which would have flowed from the operation of this system.

It is a painful task, either in nations or individuals, to call to mind circumstances of advantage which have escaped their controul, and to compare a situation of present distress, with what (under the auspices of heaven) would have been the direct reverse, had they availed themselves of advantages once within their power to command.

Library of Congress

But it is by an honest and serious examination of past errors, that experience only is gained, and better systems adopted in the management of public or private affairs. It becomes therefore the duty of the guardians of a free and enlightened people (however painful the task) to execute this high trust, and to conceal nothing that may induce the nation to investigate, and pursue in future their essential interests.

It is not to be expected that in a government composed of thirteen independent deliberative powers, and owing its origin to an extreme jealousy of public liberty, that the judgment of the several members of the confederacy, should at the same time embrace the wisdom and necessity of every measure which may be recommended by the general government, particularly in the case of an untried system of revenue, the most difficult of all objects (even in long established governments) to carry into execution.

The firm and enlightened patriots throughout the states, appear impressed with the necessity of rescuing the union from the danger and disgrace with which it is threatened. The several legislatures have at length passed acts for granting to the United States in Congress, the power of levying a general impost, to be appropriated agreeably to their recommendations of the 18th April, 1783; and though in two states of the union, the laws which have been enacted for this purpose, require some alteration to give a general operation to the collection of this revenue, from the wisdom and patriotism for which those states have been long distinguished, the United States in Congress cannot entertain the idea, that they will refuse to give efficacy to a measure whose immediate operation is the corner stone of the public weal; or that they will take upon themselves the responsibility of all those evils, which must inevitably devolve on the union, by leaving the national safety to the mercy of events.

Much may still be effected towards the relief of public burthens, if an immediate operation is given to the collection of the general impost throughout the states; for though its product to the end of the ensuing year, cannot be in any degree adequate to the foreign demands during that period, the establishment of a productive system of revenue, expressly

Library of Congress

appropriated for the discharge of the national debt, would, we trust, give success to negotiations for making the future annual payments more adequate to the resources of the union, than they are at present.

Under the heavy accumulation of the foreign debt, it becomes, however, peculiarly incumbent on the different states to exert themselves to fulfil that duty, which they owe to their own character and the welfare of the confederacy, by enacting laws more efficacious for bringing into the general treasury their respective quotas of the present requisition, than has hitherto been the case.

To effect this great and desirable object, the wisdom of the respective legislatures will undoubtedly discover, that the following general principles are essentially necessary:

1st. That the taxes intended for the purpose of the union, should be distinct from those which are appropriated to the service of the state.

2d. That they should (as far as is practicable) be simple in their nature, and depend more for their execution, on the mode of the tax, than on the diligence of the officers entrusted with the collection.

3d. That the sums raised by the individuals, should be paid in like manner as the quotas are receivable from the several states, that is to say, that the proportion of specie pointed out by the requisition should keep pace with the payment of the discounts of interest.

An attention to these principles would undoubtedly promote in a great degree the collection of the revenue.

But a far more powerful cause is still remaining, to which the public embarrassments, as to the object of finance, are principally to be imputed. The general balance of our trade is daily growing more unfavorable. In all commercial countries, the easy and successful collection of the revenue must in a principal degree depend on the favorable state of

Library of Congress

trade; and the latter cannot flourish unless a power is somewhere vested, to cherish those branches of commercial intercourse which are favorable to the nation, and to check those of a contrary tendency. Both reason and experience demonstrate that this power (however essential to the welfare of the nation) cannot be exercised by the government of any state.

Hence it is that our navigation (the surest source of our wealth and security) is nearly annihilated; our commerce in every part of the globe obstructed; the flag of our nation insulted; and the few mariners who venture on the ocean, exposed to linger out their days in all the bitterness of captivity, from a barbarous and hostile power. That a brave and enlightened people, who encountered every hardship and distress, in opposing a system of government which they deemed adverse to their welfare and liberty, before they had even experienced the mischiefs which they foresaw from its establishment, should (whilst the memory of their former principles and heroism is still fresh on their recollection) become the voluntary suicides of their own interest, their own happiness and their own honour, is a circumstance too disgraceful to human nature to admit of belief.

By the union of the several states they have rescued themselves from the tyranny of a powerful nation, and established constitutions on the free consent of the people, which are the admiration of the intelligent and virtuous part of mankind; and the firm support of the civil and religious rights of all who live under the shadow of their influence. But these constitutions cannot long outlive the fate of the general union; and this union cannot exist without adequate funds to defray the expences of the government, and to discharge those engagements which have been entered into with the concurrence of the citizens of all these states, for their common benefit.

An appeal (and too probably a last one) is now made to the reason, the justice, and the interest of the several states. Whatever may be the fate of the measures submitted to their consideration for giving strength and reputation to the union, **THE UNITED STATES IN CONGRESS, BY VIRTUE OF THE POWERS OF THE CONFEDERATION**, call upon the

Library of Congress

different members to pay into the general treasury, at the time stipulated, the quotas laid on them respectively by the present requisition, for the support of the general government.

The purposes for which the monies are to be appropriated are fairly stated, and the evils pointed out which will attend a non-compliance. The delinquent states (if such there can possibly be) must take upon themselves the responsibility for all those calamities which will most assuredly flow from a disregard to the political ties which unite them with the other members of the confederacy, and to those principles of justice and good faith, which can alone support the existence of a free government. **SAMUEL OSGOOD, ARTHUR LEE.**