

II TAXES AND TROOPS

such sentiments are representative of the concerns about—and fears of—the army which were rapidly gaining currency among Jerseymen.

15 Aaron Learning to his Cape May Constituents

[Aaron Learning Papers, f.2, 709, Frank L. Stewart Collection, Glassboro State College Learning Resource Center.]

The dispute between Governor William Franklin and the assembly over the supplying of the barracks came to a head in 1770-1771: the lower house adamantly refused to authorize any more funds for the soldiers, and the chief executive prorogued the legislature. Aaron Learning II (1715-1780), who represented Cape May in the assembly from 1745 to 1771, was one of the leading opponents of military expenditures. In fact, throughout his long legislative career, Learning, one of the wealthiest residents of the county, consistently resisted public appropriations of any kind. In explaining his position to his constituents, he demonstrates how Jerseymen viewed the problem of troops within the context of post-1763 imperial developments.

May 26, 1771

Dear & worthy Gentlemen

The Affair now between the Governor and Assembly appears to me to be more Delicate in its nature and of Greater consequence than any thing that has been agitated in the House since I have had the honour of being your Representative.

As you have undoubtedly a great deal depending it is necessary you should be fully informed of this Subject which I shall endeavour to explain [in as few words as I can to be intelligible].¹

It should Seem that the People in Great Britain had little knowledge of these Colonies before the commencement of the War in 1755. The Theater of that war being in North America Necessarily called to these parts from Great Britain a large number of General Officers and other Gentlemen of Rank and consequence at home. These Gentlemens business lay mostly in the Great Cities; either with the Governors or other [of] the principal Gentlemen of them places; or if they were travelling they Generally took that rout and were advised to those places where they could be sure of the best accomodations. In all these places the utmost abilities of the inhabitants were exerted to make their entertainment agreeable. Some of these were Scot[c]hmen who had been long used to the Barrens and poverty of that nation; many of them were English, and All of them had been bred up in the firm belief that America was a mere desart of poverty and distress, and the Inhabitants little if any better than Savages. But when they saw the Rich Tables and Beads that were dressed for them, and that North America raised 20,000 men and enabled England to give Law to

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France and Spain: From one Extreme they immediately fell² upon another. From considering us as the Seat of Poverty and distress they immediately eyed us as the Seat of Riches and happiness and without making the proper allowances and distinguishing that these were entertainments prepared for them by men of the greatest fortune in the place. And without considering that the raising them men was the Overflowing of Our Zeal for the kings service for Conquering Canada which was an Object our Ancestors had always aimed at or without considering that we had Mortgaged our Country for 20 years to come. They esteemed all this as the overflowing of our Riches and Seemed to think that all the country lived in that Splendid manner. And when these Officers wrote or went home they all agreed in representing us in that Flourishing happy and Oppulent State.

The People in England then considered us in a manner very different from what they had ever done before. They grew jealous that we Should in time rival England itself; That Too much Liberty had made us too rich; That while England was involved with a weight of Taxes they were never to see the end of, we their fellow Subjects were rich and almost free from Taxes. It then became a matter of Patriotism how they Should ease themselves of their Taxes, and lay the burthen upon us. On this Plan George Greenville³ midwifed into the world the Stamp act. This put us upon an enquiry what were our priviledges; when we found we had a right to be Taxed by none but ourselves. It also put the parliament upon Asserting powers their Ancestors never claimed. They admitted it was the birth right of an Englishman to be taxed by none but themselves; but they Set up this absurd idea that we were virtually represented in the house of Commons, & therefore they might Tax us. However Heaven reserved Mr. Pit[t]⁴ to Save us at that time. Still there was a party that was for continuing the taxes and claim upon us. Charles Townsend was the foremost of these; and he procured the present Revenue act: Which tho it is repealed in part, the duty on tea is reserved as a continuance of their claim to tax us at pleasure.

On Occasion of these 2 acts I believe all of the Assemblies on the continent asserted their Right and Priviledges by Resolves.⁵ The acts created Some riots which centered mostly in the colonies Eastward of New-Jersey. These Riots Mr. Bernard⁶ who then happened to be Governor of Boston, represented home as Rebellion: And this representation was very pleasing to some, as it was made a handle of by that party that was against Mr. Pit[t], who was our friend.

These acts also produced Associations by the american merchants, not to import or Use Goods of British Manufacture. These Associations the Parliament (or rather the Ministry) termed unwarrantable combinations to distress the trade of England. And the Ministry took advantage of this to Send a Fleet and Army to North America. This Fleet drew up in a Line before Boston and the Army made a regular discent, as if it was an Enemys Town. But when they came into it, they found the City in perfect Tranquility, except the disturbance that they themselves made. However, after about a years Stay in the place the insolence of the Soldiers created two Riots, at which the Soldiers fired upon the Townsmen; by which Six of the inhabitants lost their lives.⁷

As the Chief Stand was made in these Northern colonies, they quartered Troops in Pennsylvania and all the Eastern colonies.

The professed design of these troops are, to keep us in Subjection to the Crown & parliament of Great Britain. We acknowledge Subjection to the Crown of Great

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Britain, but none to the Parliament. They are our fellow Subjects. And this is the Contest between us.

When these Troops were Sent here, the parliament passed an Act that the Several colonies where they resided, Should furnish them with Salt, vinegar, Small beer, firewood & candles.⁸

At first there was about 240 troops quartered in this Colony. We did not Chuse to Submit to the Act of Parliament, nor refuse the Grant: But in hopes they would soon to be drawn out of this province, we annually provided for them, by Acts of Our own. And they keep increasing the troops upon us, 'till now they amount to 431 tho the province was & is in profound peace.

This money we committed to Six Barrack masters of Our own appointing: Who managed it So as to wrong the province out of a great deal, which frauds being discovered we removed all the Barrack masters, and granted £500 to the Governor for the Use of the troops, to be disposed of as the Governor pleased.⁹ He Appointed a Commissioner with a Sallary of £50 a year. His accounts we have seen but did not approve them fully as we find he is a good manager for himself.

As all the Colonies are now in profound peace; and the Associations of the Merchants broke; and the troops are not removed; we see no end of their being continued upon us. And have therefore refused all further Supplies.

Upon that refusal I advised them to Assign for reasons, "That we esteemed the Troops dangerous to Liberty" and place our Defence upon that principle. But the wiser Members of the house that Observed *that* would immediately engage us with the parliament which its likely it would: So they concluded to plead the poverty of the colony: Which they could do with great truth.

In handling this contest the Governor has not only treated us with an Air of Great Superiority But has unfairly charged us with falsifying our declarations to the king in our resolves & addresses and told us that we were Setting ourselves up in Opposition to the king & parliament.

This was very ungenerous. To the king we owe all allegiance. To the Parliament we Owe none. They are our Fellow Subjects And we cannot transfer our Allegiance to them.

If we Submit to them the right of raising Taxes upon us, or of placing troops here to keep us in Subjection to the¹⁰

1. Brackets enclose material crossed out in the manuscript.
2. "Feel" in the manuscript; probably a slip of the pen.
3. Grenville.
4. William Pitt, outspoken critic of the Stamp Act, who in 1766 became a member of the House of Lords by virtue of appointment as the Earl of Chatham.
5. See Sec. I, Doc. 11 and Sec. II, Doc. 4 for the Jersey resolves.
6. Francis Bernard, governor of New Jersey from 1758 to 1760, chief magistrate of Massachusetts Bay from 1760 to 1769.
7. The reference is to the Boston Massacre. Relations between soldiers and citizens in Boston, which had steadily gone from bad to worse since the troops first arrived in October 1768, reached a climax the night of March 5, 1770. In circumstances that are not at all clear, a detachment of soldiers fired into the midst of a belligerent crowd, killing three men and mortally wounding

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two others. At a trial held in October of that year, two of the soldiers were found guilty of manslaughter and released after suffering burning of the hand; the other five were acquitted.

8. The Mutiny (Quartering) Act of 1765.

9. The assembly appointed barracks masters in June 1765; control over expenditure of funds for the military was given to Governor Franklin in September 1770.

10. The manuscript ends here at the bottom of a page; presumably the rest of the draft has been lost.