

II TAXES AND TROOPS

13 “Cethegus” on Nonimportation

[*New-York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, October 8, 1770.]

For all their spirit and resolve, New Jerseyans were fighting a losing battle in attempting to hold the line on economic sanctions against Great Britain. With the defection of Philadelphia merchants on September 20, New Jersey stood alone among the middle colonies in supporting the boycott. Soon thereafter, nonimportation in Jersey was abandoned for essentially the reasons explained by “Cethegus.” In the end the boycott proved a two-edged sword, working acute hardship on Americans who lacked the economic resources to sustain the sanctions over a prolonged period.

New-Jersey, September 25, 1770

Messrs. Printers.¹

Before the late War,² the People of this Country were very little known or considered in England, nor indeed was our Importance fully understood, either by our Fellow Subjects or ourselves, before the ever memorable Period of the Stamp-Act. By the oppressive Acts of the British Legislature, we were then roused out of a supine Inattention to the common Interest and combined Strength of the Continent, and led to form an Estimate of our Powers, to feel our own Consequences, and to impress a new, and that a very high Idea of our Importance to the Mother Country. We exerted ourselves with Vigour and with Unanimity. The Effect was proportioned to our Wishes.

The Means by which our Deliverance was supposed in a great Measure to be wrought, was a cordial Agreement to cease the Importation of British Goods. By this Means the Manufacturers, Mechanics and their Connections, who before this Time had scarcely ever extended their Views further than the Merchant who bought their Goods, finding their Employment at an End, thro’ the Stoppage of Orders from this Country, were taught to revere our Interest, and conspired with the Merchants to forward a Repeal.

Upon new Acts of Oppression, the same Means have been attempted, and we flattered ourselves that we might hope for the same Success. But alas! a different Prospect is now presented. After more than three Years we seem as far from the Completion of our Hopes, as when we set out; and what is infinitely worse, we seem to have lost Sight of that friendly Union, which prevailed during our former Struggle. Instead of that unanimous Resolution and universal Concord of Sentiment, by which we were then united as one Man to oppose the Enemies of our Liberty, an Opposition of Measures, a Contradiction of Opinions, Party Spirit, mutual Rancour and Complaints, and every Mark of a divided People are gaining too much Ground. If these continue we are undone. Divided among ourselves we shall be an easy Prey to the Enemies of our Freedom.

As it has been with great Anxiety that I have observed this Temper, and as some Cause must have produced it, I should think myself happy if my Attempts to point out and remove that Cause, should be crowned with Success.

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

To what can it be owing that our Agreements are broken? For I cannot account for it from any religious Quarrel, as that seems to have subsided; nor from any Party Spirit, because it was but the other Day the common Principles, and indeed the Glory of every Party to adhere to them. The true Cause, I apprehend, is in the Agreement itself. From one Extreme we have pass'd to another; from not regarding to over-rating our own Importance. Flushed with the new acquired Idea of our Consequence, and elate with Victory, we supposed that the Parliament of Great-Britain might be brought to our own Terms, by the same Means at all Times, without making any Allowance for obstinate Perseverance or favourable Accidents on their Part.³ We entered precipitately into a Non-Importation Agreement, so extensive, that it was calculated after some Time to defeat itself, unless speedy Redress was obtained. The Parliament has persevered, the English have found other Markets for their Goods: Accident have favoured them, and we are left to struggle with Impossibilities. It is vain to think that we can hold Breath always, and as vain to think that we can, not only turn the Course of our Trade, but annihilate it altogether. The Notion is chimerical, and accordingly our Agreements have come to nothing, and that merely from the Circumstances of their being too extensive. I shall not enquire, whether the not obtaining Redress is owing to the Treachery of Boston.⁴ It is not obtained, and our Agreements cannot be persevered in. It is true, this could not be foreseen at first; and therefore the entering into them was not so imprudent as may be supposed by some Persons. It was not known that we should need to persevere so long; and it is owing in a great Measure to unexpected Demands from other Parts of the World, that so long a Struggle has been necessary. Besides, the Experiment had but once been tried, and it had then succeeded. I could wish too that we had persevered a little longer; that we had, if possible, tried one more Session of Parliament; for we certainly derived Advantages from the Agreement, even in a commercial View, and it was rather early to give over, as soon as these commercial Advantages were at an End. But the Die is cast; and we have only to chuse, whether to unite in maintaining an Agreement of a more restricted Nature, or to go on disputing about a Shadow, which cannot longer be realized. It is indeed possible to drop all Trade with England, and it is possible for us to go naked too; but it cannot be expected. We may go on reproaching and complaining of each other; we may widen still more the Differences which already prevail amongst us, and we may perhaps forever destroy all Hopes of recovering that Union, on which our Safety depends; but we cannot possibly maintain so extensive an Agreement for any Length of Time. Is there not reason to hope that we might all unite once more, in maintaining an Agreement not to import dutiable Articles? Most People are of Opinion that it had been better to have made this Agreement at first; but they would not seem to relax from their Resolutions: It would look as if all our Agreements would come to nothing. But surely it would be better to correct our Mistake, than to persevere, or rather to pretend to persevere, beyond what we are able. Whilst we are attempting something which is within the Verge of Possibility, we may be feared; but when we offer to go beyond this, we shall really be despised, for our Enemies are sensible that we shall do nothing. What I fear, and I think I have Reason to fear it, is, that our intestine Divisions will grow so high, as to drive some through Party spirit to import even dutiable Articles; and then adieu to Liberty! We have not yet bowed our Neck to the Yoke, but the Instant we consent to pay these Duties, we submit to Slavery. Because the Outworks have been deserted as untenable, let us be the more cautious,

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that we be not driven from the Fortress; and let us be exceedingly careful to unite as one Man in its Defence.

Yours, &c.
CETHEGUS^s

1. Samuel Inslee and Anthony Carr.
2. The French and Indian War, 1754-1763.
3. The reference is to the boycott instituted during the successful protest against the Stamp Act in 1765-1766.
4. The "treachery of Boston" refers to the increased belligerence of the Bostonians in flaunting imperial authority, which resulted in British troops being sent to the Massachusetts capital in October 1768; it was thought by many that the provocative action of the Bay Colony served only to induce Great Britain to take a harder line against America.
5. It is not certain which "Cethegus" the writer has in mind; probably Marcus Cornelius, the Roman general and magistrate who died in 196 B.C.

14 Hunterdon County Freeholders to John Hart and Samuel Tucker

[West Jersey Manuscripts, New Jersey Historical Society. This document is inaccurately transcribed and printed in *NJA*, 10:269-73.]

It was to be expected, given the nature of the arguments raised against the Stamp Act and Townshend duties, that Jerseymen would begin to challenge the presence of troops in the province on political and constitutional as well as economic grounds. That a group of West Jersey farmers would consider it necessary to address their elected representatives on the matter indicates the seriousness of their convictions about the threat to civil liberties and public morals posed by a standing army. (No action was taken since the letter was an instruction rather than a petition.) "Honest John" Hart (1713?-1779), Hopewell farmer, served in the assembly from 1761 to 1771. He also performed the duties of justice of the peace and judge of the county court of common pleas. An ardent Whig, he was a member of various local patriot organizations as well as the Provincial Congress (1775-1776) and the Continental Congress (1776), where he signed the Declaration of Independence. Samuel Tucker (1721-1789), Trenton merchant and landowner, held the government posts of justice of the peace, high sheriff of the county, and assemblyman from 1769 to 1776. He was extremely active in the protest-independence movement at both the local