

THIS LETTER IS FICTIONAL BUT AUTHENTICALLY REPRESENTS THE IDEAS OF THE HISTORICAL FIGURE. QUOTATIONS INDICATE STATEMENTS ACTUALLY MADE BY THE HISTORICAL PERSON.

Dear President Washington,

Before you decide to use troops against the farmers of Western Pennsylvania, I urge you to consider what has brought us to this crisis. The protests of these men are a direct result of the harm they suffer under Secretary Hamilton's financial plan, particularly his tax on the manufacture and sale of whiskey. Mr. Hamilton's plan unfairly benefits the merchants and bankers at the expense of the farmers. Farmers must distill grain into whiskey for financial survival. It is difficult to get their corn to market over rough mountain roads. Turning the corn to whiskey reduces the size and weight of their only cash crop.

Mr. Hamilton has said of the common man: "The people is a great beast!" I disagree. "I am not among those who fear the people. They, and not the rich, are our dependence for continued freedom." Free people who own their own plot of land have a stake in the prosperity of their community. They will be vigilant about protecting their liberties and contributing to the common good of their society. Mr. Hamilton promotes the development of a nation of merchants and businessmen. Merchants will not have the same protective loyalty to our country. Indeed, "merchants have no country. The mere spot they stand on does not constitute so strong an attachment as that from which they draw their gains." To protect our liberty, I must oppose Mr. Hamilton's plan. Instead of an independent, virtuous people, he would create a lower class totally dependent on an upper class for their livelihood. We must keep the people in control of their own workplace. "Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue," and encourages the greedy to manipulate the people to gain power.

Secretary Hamilton cites the Revolution in France to support his call for using force against the people of Pennsylvania. But the French people are simply declaring their natural right to rule themselves. Their violence is a result of continued abuse of their rights by the tyrant Louis XVI and the French upper class. We should learn from that error. The Pennsylvania farmers understand the threat of a distant, unresponsive government with too much power. They are reacting just as we Patriots did when we opposed King George III and his abusive agents.

I urge you to listen to these men's legitimate grievances and negotiate a reasoned settlement to this crisis. Our new nation should not be dominated by a centralized government as we were under the British. Most government should be local so that it is close to the people who live under it and responsive to the majority's will. "A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits... and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government."

Sincerely,

Thomas Jefferson