

Thomas Paine

The Eighteenth Fructidor

To the People of France and  
the French Army

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[—1797—]

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WHEN an extraordinary measure, not warranted by established constitutional rules, and justifiable only on the supreme law of absolute necessity, bursts suddenly upon us, we must, in order to form a true judgment thereon, carry our researches back to the times that preceded and occasioned it. Taking up then the subject with respect to the event of the eighteenth of Fructidor on this ground, I go to examine the state of things prior to that period. I begin with the establishment of the Constitution of the year 3 of the French Republic.

A better organized Constitution has never yet been devised by human wisdom. It is, in its organization, free from all the vices and defects to which other forms of government are more or less subject. I will speak first of the legislative body, because the legislature is, in the natural order of things, the first power; the executive is the first magistrate.

By arranging the legislative body into two divisions, as is done in the French Constitution, the one (the Council of Five Hundred), whose part it is to conceive and propose laws; the other, a Council of Ancients, to review, approve, or reject the laws proposed; all the security is given that can arise from coolness of reflection acting upon, or correcting the precipitancy or enthusiasm of conception and imagination. It is seldom that our first thought, even upon any subject, is sufficiently just.

The policy of renewing the legislature by a third part each year, though not entirely new, either in theory or in practise, is nevertheless one of the modern improvements in the science of government. It prevents, on the one hand, that convulsion and precipitate change of measures into which a nation might be surprised by the going out of the whole legislature at the same time, and the instantaneous election of a new one; on the other hand, it excludes that common interest from taking place that might tempt a whole legislature, whose term of duration expired at once, to usurp the right of continuance. I go now to speak of the executive.

It is a principle uncontrovertible by reason, that each of the parts by which government is composed, should be so constructed as to be in perpetual maturity. We should laugh at the idea of a council of five hundred, or a council of ancients, or a parliament, or any national assembly, who should be all children in leading strings and in

the cradle, or be all sick, insane, deaf, dumb, lame or blind, at the same time, or be all upon crutches, tottering with age or infirmities.

Any form of government that was so constructed as to admit the possibility of such cases happening to a whole legislature would justly be the ridicule of the world; and on a parity of reasoning, it is equally as ridiculous that the same cases should happen in that part of government which is called the executive; yet this is the contemptible condition to which an executive is always subject, and which is often happening, when it is placed in an hereditary individual called a king.

When that individual is in either of the cases before mentioned, the whole executive is in the same case; for himself is the whole. He is then (as an executive) the ridiculous picture of what a legislature would be if all its members were in the same case. The one is a whole made up of parts, the other a whole without parts; and anything happening to the one (as a part or section of the government) is parallel to the same thing happening to the other.

As, therefore, an hereditary executive called a king is a perfect absurdity in itself, any attachment to it is equally as absurd. It is neither instinct or reason; and if this attachment is what is called royalism in France, then is a royalist inferior in character to every species of the animal world; for what can that being be who acts neither by instinct nor by reason?

Such a being merits rather our derision than our pity; and it is only when it assumes to act its folly that it becomes capable of provoking republican indignation. In every other case it is too contemptible to excite anger. For my own part, when I contemplate the self-evident absurdity of the thing, I can scarcely permit myself to believe that there exists in the high-minded nation of France such a mean and silly animal as a royalist.

As it requires but a single glance of thought to see (as is before said) that all the parts of which government is composed must be at all times in a state of full maturity, it was not possible that men acting under the influence of reason, could, in forming a constitution, admit an hereditary executive, any more than an hereditary legislature. I go therefore to examine the other cases.

In the first place (rejecting the hereditary system), shall the executive by election be an individual or a plurality?

An individual by election is almost as bad as the hereditary system, except that there is always a better chance of not having an idiot. But he will never be anything more than a chief of a party, and none but those of that party will have access to him. He will have no person to consult with of a standing equal with himself, and consequently be deprived of the advantages arising from equal discussion.

Those whom he admits in consultation will be ministers of his own appointment, who, if they displease by their advice, must expect to be dismissed. The authority also is too great, and the business too complicated, to be intrusted to the ambition or the judgment of an individual; and besides these cases, the sudden change of measures that might follow by the going out of an individual executive, and the election of a new one, would hold the affairs of a nation in a state of perpetual uncertainty. We come then to the case of a plural executive.

It must be sufficiently plural, to give opportunity to discuss all the various subjects that in the course of national business may come before it; and yet not so numerous as to endanger the necessary secrecy that certain cases, such as those of war, require.

Establishing, then, plurality as a principle, the only question is, What shall be the number of that plurality?

Three are too few either for the variety or the quantity of business. The Constitution has adopted *five*; and experience has shown, from the commencement of the Constitution to the time of the election of the new legislative third, that this number of directors, when well chosen, is sufficient for all national executive purposes; and therefore a greater number would be only an unnecessary expense.

That the measures of the Directory during that period were well concerted is proved by their success; and their being well concerted shows they were well discussed; and, therefore, that five is a sufficient number with respect to discussion; and, on the other hand, the secret, whenever there was one (as in the case of the expedition to Ireland), was well kept, and therefore the number is not too great to endanger the necessary secrecy.

The reason why the two Councils are numerous is not from the necessity of their being so, on account of business, but because that every part of the Republic shall find and feel itself in the national representation.

Next to the general principle of government by representation, the excellence of the French Constitution consists in providing means to prevent that abuse of power that might arise by letting it remain too long in the same hands. This wise precaution pervades every part of the Constitution. Not only the Legislature is renewable by a third every year, but the president of each of the Councils is renewable every month; and of the Directory, one member each year, and its president every three months.

Those who formed the Constitution cannot be accused of having contrived for themselves. The Constitution, in this respect, is as impartially constructed as if those who framed it were to die as soon as they had finished their work.

The only defect in the Constitution is that of having narrowed the right of suffrage; and it is in a great measure due to this narrowing the right, that the last elections have not generally been good. My former colleagues will, I presume, pardon my saying this to-day, when they recollect my arguments against this defect, at the time the Constitution was discussed in the Convention.

I will close this part of the subject by remarking on one of the most vulgar and absurd sayings or dogmas that ever yet imposed itself upon the world, which is, "*that a Republic is fit only for a small country, and a Monarchy for a large one.*" Ask those who say this their reasons why it is so, and they can give none.

Let us then examine the case. If the quantity of knowledge in a government ought to be proportioned to the extent of a country, and the magnitude and variety of its affairs, it follows, as an undeniable result, that this absurd dogma is false, and that the reverse of it is true. As to what is called monarchy, if it be adaptable to any country it can only be so to a small one, whose concerns are few, little complicated, and all within the comprehension of an individual.

But when we come to a country of large extent, vast population, and whose affairs are great, numerous and various, it is the representative republican system only, that can collect into the government the quantity of knowledge necessary to govern to the best national advantage. Montesquieu, who was strongly inclined to republican government, sheltered himself under this absurd dogma; for he had always the Bastille before his eyes when he was speaking of republics, and therefore pretended not to write for France.

Condorcet governed himself by the same caution, but it was caution only, for no sooner had he the opportunity of speaking fully out than he did it. When I say this of Condorcet, I know it as a fact. In a paper published in Paris, July, 1791, entitled, *The Republican or the Defender of Representative Government*, is a piece signed THOMAS PAINE. That piece was concerted between Condorcet and myself. I wrote the original in English, and Condorcet translated it. The object of it was to expose the absurdity and falsehood of the above mentioned dogma.

Having thus concisely glanced at the excellencies of the Constitution, and the superiority of the representative system of government over every other system (if any other can be called a system), I come to speak of the circumstances that have intervened between the time the Constitution was established and the event that took place on the eighteenth of Fructidor of the present year.

Almost as suddenly as the morning light dissipates darkness, did the establishment of the Constitution change the face of affairs in France. Security succeeded to terror, prosperity to distress, plenty to famine, and confidence increased as the days multiplied, until the coming of the new third. A series of victories unequalled in the world, followed each other, almost too rapidly to be counted, and too numerous to be remembered.

The Coalition, everywhere defeated and confounded, crumbled away like a ball of dust in the hand of a giant. Everything, during that period, was acted on such a mighty scale that reality appeared a dream, and truth outstripped romance. It may figuratively be said, that the Rhine and the Rubicon (Germany and Italy) replied in triumphs to each other, and the echoing Alps prolonged the shout. I will not here dishonor a great description by noticing too much the English Government. It is sufficient to say paradoxically, that in the magnitude of its littleness it cringed, it intrigued, and sought protection in corruption.

Though the achievements of these days might give trophies to a nation and laurels to its heroes, they derive their full radiance of glory from the principle they inspired and the object they accomplished. Desolation, chains, and slavery had marked the progress of former wars, but to conquer for liberty had never been thought of.

To receive the degrading submission of a distressed and subjugated people, and insultingly permit them to live, made the chief triumph of former conquerors; but to receive them with fraternity, to break their chains, to tell them they are free, and teach them to be so, make a new volume in the history of man.

Amidst those national honors, and when only two enemies remained, both of whom had solicited peace, and one of them had signed preliminaries, the election of the new third commenced. Everything was made easy to them. All difficulties had been conquered before they arrived at the government. They came in the olive days of the Revolution, and all they had to do was not to do mischief.

It was, however, not difficult to foresee, that the elections would not be generally good. The horrid days of Robespierre were still remembered, and the gratitude due to those who had put an end to them was forgotten.

Thousands who, by passive approbation during that tremendous scene, had experienced no suffering, assumed the merit of being the loudest against it. Their cowardice in not opposing it, became courage when it was over. They exclaimed against terrorism as if they had been the heroes that overthrew it, and rendered themselves ridiculous by fantastically overacting moderation.

The most noisy of this class, that I have met with, are those who suffered nothing. They became all things, at all times, to all men; till at last they laughed at principle. It was the real republicans who suffered most during the time of Robespierre. The persecution began upon them on the thirty-first of May [1793] and ceased only by the exertions of the remnant that survived.

In such a confused state of things as preceded the late elections the public mind was put into a condition of being easily deceived; and it was almost natural that the hypocrite would stand the best chance of being elected into the new third. Had those who, since their election, have thrown the public affairs into confusion by counter-revolutionary measures, declared themselves beforehand, they would have been denounced instead of being chosen. Deception was necessary to their success.

The Constitution obtained a full establishment; the Revolution was considered as complete; and the war on the eve of termination. In such a situation, the mass of the people, fatigued by a long revolu-



tion, sought repose; and in their elections they looked out for quiet men. They unfortunately found hypocrites.

Would any of the primary assemblies have voted for a civil war? Certainly they would not. But the electoral assemblies of some departments have chosen men whose measures, since their election, tended to no other end but to provoke it. Either those electors have deceived their constituents of the primary assemblies, or they have been themselves deceived in the choice they made of deputies.

That there were some direct but secret conspirators in the new third can scarcely admit of a doubt; but it is most reasonable to suppose that a great part were seduced by the vanity of thinking they could do better than those whom they succeeded. Instead of trusting to experience, they attempted experiments. This counter-disposition prepared them to fall in with any measures contrary to former measures, and that without seeing, and probably without suspecting, the end to which they led.

No sooner were the members of the new third arrived at the seat of government, than expectation was excited to see how they would act. Their motions were watched by all parties, and it was impossible for them to steal a march unobserved. They had it in their power to do great good, or great mischief. A firm and manly conduct on their part, uniting with that of the Directory and their colleagues, would have terminated the war. But the moment before them was not the moment of hesitation. He that hesitates in such situation is lost.

The first public act of the Council of Five Hundred was the election of Pichegru to the presidency of that Council. He arrived at it by a very large majority, and the public voice was in his favor. I among the rest was one who rejoiced at it. But if the defection of Pichegru was at that time known to Conde, and consequently to Pitt, it unveils the cause that retarded all negotiations for peace.

They interpreted that election into a signal of a counter-revolution, and were waiting for it; and they mistook the respect shown to Pichegru, founded on the supposition of his integrity, as a symptom of national revolt. Judging of things by their own foolish ideas of government, they ascribed appearances to causes between which there was no connection. Everything on their part has been a comedy of errors, and the actors have been chased from the stage.

Two or three decades of the new sessions passed away without anything very material taking place; but matters soon began to explain themselves. The first thing that struck the public mind was, that no more was heard of negotiations for peace, and that public business stood still. It was not the object of the conspirators that there should be peace; but as it was necessary to conceal their object, the Constitution was ransacked to find pretenses for delays.

In vain did the Directory explain to them the state of the finances and the wants of the army. The committee charged with that business, trifled away its time by a series of unproductive reports, and continued to sit only to produce more. Everything necessary to be done was neglected, and everything improper was attempted. Piehegru occupied himself about forming a national guard for the Councils—the suspicious signal of war—Camille Jordan about priests and bells, and the emigrants, with whom he had associated during the two years he was in England.

Willot and Delarue attacked the Directory: their object was to displace some one of the directors, to get in another of their own. Their motives with respect to the age of Barras (who is as old as he wishes to be, and has been a little too old for them) were too obvious not to be seen through.

In this suspensive state of things, the public mind, filled with apprehensions, became agitated, and without knowing what it might be, looked for some extraordinary event. It saw, for it could not avoid seeing, that things could not remain long in the state they were in, but it dreaded a convulsion.

That spirit of triflingness which it had indulged too freely when in a state of security, and which it is probable the new agents had interpreted into indifference about the success of the Republic, assumed a serious aspect that afforded to conspiracy no hope of aid; but still it went on. It plunged itself into new measures with the same ill success, and the further it went the further the public mind retired. The conspiracy saw nothing around it to give it encouragement.

The obstinacy, however, with which it persevered in its repeated attacks upon the Directory, in framing laws in favor of emigrants and refractory priests, and in everything inconsistent with the immediate safety of the Republic, and which served to encourage the enemy to prolong the war, admitted of no other direct interpretation than that

something was rotten in the Council of Five Hundred. The evidence of circumstances became every day too visible not to be seen, and too strong to be explained away. Even as errors (to say no worse of them), they are not entitled to apology; for where knowledge is a duty, ignorance is a crime.

The more serious republicans, who had better opportunities than the generality had, of knowing the state of politics, began to take the alarm, and formed themselves into a society, by the name of the Constitutional Club. It is the only society of which I have been a member in France; and I went to this because it was become necessary that the friends of the Republic should rally round the standard of the Constitution. I met there several of the original patriots of the Revolution; I do not mean of the last order of Jacobins, but of the first of that name.

The faction in the Council of Five Hundred, who, finding no counsel from the public, began to be frightened at appearances, fortified itself against the dread of this society, by passing a law to dissolve it. The constitutionality of the law was at least doubtful: but the society, that it might not give the example of exasperating matters already too much inflamed, suspended its meetings.

A matter, however, of much greater moment soon after presented itself. It was the march of four regiments, some of whom, in the line of their route, had to pass within about twelve leagues of Paris, which is the boundary the Constitution had fixed as the distance of any armed force from the legislative body.

In another state of things, such a circumstance would not have been noticed. But conspiracy is quick of suspicion, and the fear which the faction in the Council of Five Hundred manifested upon this occasion could not have suggested itself to innocent men; neither would innocent men have expostulated with the Directory upon the case, in the manner these men did.

The question they urged went to extort from the Directory, and to make known to the enemy, what the destination of the troops was. The leaders of the faction conceived that the troops were marching against them; and the conduct they adopted in consequence of it was sufficient to justify the measure, even if it had been so. From what other motive than the consciousness of their own designs could they have fear?

The troops, in every instance, had been the gallant defenders of the Republic, and the openly declared friends of the Constitution; the Directory had been the same, and if the faction were not of a different description neither fear nor suspicion could have had place among them.

All those maneuvers in the Council were acted under the most professional attachment to the Constitution; and this as necessarily served to enfeeble their projects. It is exceedingly difficult, and next to impossible, to conduct a conspiracy, and still more so to give it success, in a popular government.

The disguised and feigned pretenses which men in such cases are obliged to act in the face of the public, suppress the action of the faculties, and give even to natural courage the features of timidity. They are not half the men they would be where no disguise is necessary. It is impossible to be a hypocrite and to be brave at the same instant.

The faction, by the imprudence of its measures, upon the march of the troops, and upon the declarations of the officers and soldiers to support the Republic and the Constitution against all open or concealed attempts to overturn them, had gotten itself involved with the army, and in effect declared itself a party against it.

On the one hand, laws were proposed to admit emigrants and refractory priests as free citizens; and on the other hand to exclude the troops from Paris, and to punish the soldiers who had declared to support the Republic. In the meantime all negotiations for peace went backward; and the enemy, still recruiting its forces, rested to take advantage of circumstances. Excepting the absence of hostilities, it was a state worse than war.

If all this was not a conspiracy, it had at least the features of one, and was pregnant with the same mischiefs. The eyes of the faction could not avoid being open to the dangers to which it obstinately exposed the Republic; yet still it persisted. During this scene, the journals devoted to the faction were repeatedly announcing the near approach of peace with Austria and with England, and often asserting that it was concluded. This falsehood could be intended for no other purpose than to keep the eyes of the people shut against the dangers to which they were exposed.

Taking all circumstances together, it was impossible that such a state of things could continue long; and at length it was resolved to bring it to an issue. There is good reason to believe that the affair of the eighteenth Fructidor (September fourth) was intended to have taken place two days before; but on recollecting that it was the second of September, a day mournful in the annals of the Revolution, it was postponed. When the issue arrived, the faction found to its cost it had no party among the public. It had sought its own disasters, and was left to suffer the consequences.

Foreign enemies, as well as those of the interior, if any such there be, ought to see in the event of this day that all expectation of aid from any part of the public in support of a counter revolution is delusion. In a state of security the thoughtless, who trembled at terror, may laugh at principles of liberty (for they have laughed), but it is one thing to indulge a foolish laugh, quite another thing to surrender liberty.

Considering the event of the eighteenth Fructidor in a political light, it is one of those that are justifiable only on the supreme law of absolute necessity, and it is the necessity abstracted from the event that is to be deplored. The event itself is matter of joy. Whether the maneuvers in the Council of Five Hundred were the conspiracy of a few, aided by the perverseness of many, or whether it had a deeper root, the dangers were the same.

It was impossible to go on. Everything was at stake, and all national business at a stand. The case reduced itself to a simple alternative—shall the Republic be destroyed by the darksome maneuvers of a faction, or shall it be preserved by an exceptional act?

During the American Revolution, and that after the state constitutions were established, particular cases arose that rendered it necessary to act in a manner that would have been treasonable in a state of peace.

At one time Congress invested General Washington with dictatorial power. At another time the government of Pennsylvania suspended itself and declared martial law. It was the necessity of the times only that made the apology of those extraordinary measures. But who was it that produced the necessity of an extraordinary measure in France? A faction, and that in the face of prosperity and success. Its conduct is without apology; and it is on the faction only

that the exceptional measure has fallen. The public has suffered no inconvenience.

If there are some men more disposed than others not to act severely, I have a right to place myself in that class; the whole of my political life invariably proves it; yet I cannot see, taking all parts of the case together, what else, or what better, could have been done, than has been done. It was a great stroke, applied in a great crisis, that crushed in an instant, and without the loss of a life, all the hopes of the enemy, and restored tranquility to the interior.

The event was ushered in by the discharge of two cannon at four in the morning, and was the only noise that was heard throughout the day. It naturally excited a movement among the Parisians to inquire the cause. They soon learned it, and the countenance they carried was easy to be interpreted.

It was that of a people who, for some time past, had been oppressed with apprehensions of some direful event, and who felt themselves suddenly relieved, by finding what it was. Everyone went about his business, or followed his curiosity in quietude. It resembled the cheerful tranquility of the day when Louis XVI absconded in 1791, and like that day it served to open the eyes of the nation.

If we take a review of the various events, as well conspiracies as commotions, that have succeeded each other in this Revolution, we shall see how the former have wasted consumptively away, and the consequences of the latter have softened. The thirty-first May and its consequences were terrible. That of the ninth and tenth Thermidor, though glorious for the Republic, as it overthrew one of the most horrid and cruel despotisms that ever raged, was nevertheless marked with many circumstances of severe and continued retaliation.

The commotions of Germinal and Prairial of the year 3, and of Vendemiaire of the year 4, were many degrees below those that preceded them, and affected but a small part of the public. This of Pichegru and his associates has been crushed in an instant, without the stain of blood, and without involving the public in the least inconvenience.

These events taken in a series, mark the progress of the Republic from disorder to stability. The contrary of this is the case in all parts of the British dominions. There, commotions are on an ascending scale; everyone is higher than the former. That of the sailors had

nearly been the overthrow of the Government. But the most potent of all is the invisible commotion in the Bank. It works with the silence of time, and the certainty of death. Everything happening in France is curable; but this is beyond the reach of nature or invention.

Leaving the event of the eighteenth Fructidor to justify itself by the necessity that occasioned it, and glorify itself by the happiness of its consequences, I come to cast a *coup-d'œil* on the present state of affairs.

We have seen by the lingering condition of the negotiations for peace, that nothing was to be expected from them, in the situation that things stood prior to the eighteenth Fructidor. The armies had done wonders, but those wonders were rendered unproductive by the wretched maneuvers of a faction.

New exertions are now necessary to repair the mischiefs which that faction has done. The electoral bodies, in some departments, who by an injudicious choice, or a corrupt influence, have sent improper deputies to the Legislature, have some atonement to make to their country. The evil originated with them, and the least they can do is to be among the foremost to repair it.

It is, however, in vain to lament an evil that is past. There is neither manhood nor policy in grief; and it often happens that an error in politics, like an error in war, admits of being turned to greater advantage than if it had not occurred. The enemy, encouraged by that error, presumes too much, and becomes doubly foiled by the reaction.

England, unable to conquer, has stooped to corrupt; and defeated in the last, as in the first, she is in a worse condition than before. Continually increasing her crimes, she increases the measure of her atonement, and multiplies the sacrifices she must make to obtain peace. Nothing but the most obstinate stupidity could have induced her to let slip the opportunity when it was within her reach. In addition to the prospect of new expenses, she is now, to use Mr. Pitt's own figurative expression against France, *not only on the brink, but in the gulf of bankruptcy*. There is no longer any mystery in paper money. Call it assignats, mandats, exchequer bills, or bank notes, it is still the same. Time has solved the problem, and experience has fixed its fate.

The Government of that unfortunate country discovers its faithlessness so much, that peace on any terms with her is scarcely worth

obtaining. Of what use is peace with a government that will employ that peace for no other purpose than to repair, as far as it is possible, her shattered finances and broken credit, and then go to war again?

Four times within the last ten years, from the time the American War closed, has the Anglo-Germanic Government of England been meditating fresh war. First with France on account of Holland, in 1787; afterwards with Russia; then with Spain, on account of Nootka Sound; and a second time against France, to overthrow her Revolution. Sometimes that Government employs Prussia against Austria; at another time Austria against Prussia; and always one or the other, or both against France. Peace with such a government is only a treacherous cessation of hostilities.

The frequency of wars on the part of England, within the last century, more than before, must have had some cause that did not exist prior to that epoch. It is not difficult to discover what that cause is. It is the mischievous compound of an elector of the Germanic body and a king of England; and which necessarily must, at some day or other, become an object of attention to France.

That one nation has not a right to interfere in the internal government of another nation, is admitted; and in this point of view, France has no right to dictate to England what its form of government shall be. If it choose to have a thing called a king, or whether that king shall be a man or an ass, is a matter with which France has no business. But whether an elector of the Germanic body shall be king of England, is an external case, with which France and every other nation, who suffers inconvenience and injury in consequence of it, has a right to interfere.

It is from this mischievous compound of elector and king, that originates a great part of the troubles that vex the Continent of Europe; and with respect to England, it has been the cause of her immense national debt, the ruin of her finances, and the insolvency of her bank. All intrigues on the Continent, in which England is a party, or becomes involved, are generated by, and act through, the medium of this Anglo-Germanic compound. It will be necessary to dissolve it. Let the elector retire to his electorate, and the world will have peace.

England herself has given examples of interference in matters of this kind, and that in cases where injury was only apprehended. She



engaged in a long and expensive war against France (called the Succession War) to prevent a grandson of Louis XIV being King of Spain; because, said she, it will be injurious to me; and she has been fighting and intriguing against what was called the family-compact ever since.

In 1787 she threatened France with war to prevent a connection between France and Holland; and in all her propositions of peace today she is dictating separations. But if she look at the Anglo-Germanic compact at home, called the Hanover Succession, she cannot avoid seeing that France necessarily must, some day or other, take up that subject, and make the return of the elector to his electorate one of the conditions of peace. There will be no lasting peace between the two countries till this be done, and the sooner it be done the better will it be for both.

I have not been in any company where this matter has been a topic, that did not see it in the light it is here stated. Even Barthelemy, when he first came to the Directory (and Barthelemy was never famous for patriotism) acknowledged in my hearing, and in company with Derche, secretary to the legation at Lille, the connection of an elector of Germany and a king of England to be injurious to France. I do not, however, mention it from a wish to embarrass the negotiation for peace. The Directory has fixed its *ultimatum*; but if that ultimatum be rejected, the obligation to adhere to it is discharged, and a new one may be assumed.

So wretchedly has Pitt managed his opportunities, that every succeeding negotiation has ended in terms more against him than the former. If the Directory had bribed him, he could not serve his interest better than he does. He serves it as Lord North served that of America, which finished in the discharge of his master.<sup>1</sup> Thus far I had written when the negotiation at Lille became suspended, in consequence of which I delayed the publication, that the ideas suggested in this letter might not intrude themselves during the interval. The

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<sup>1</sup> "The father of Pitt, when a member of the House of Commons, exclaiming one day, during a former war, against the enormous and ruinous expense of German connections, as the offspring of the Hanover Succession, and borrowing a metaphor from the story of Prometheus, cried out: "*Thus, like Prometheus, is Britain chained to the barren rock of Hanover, whilst the imperial eagle preys upon her vitals.*"

ultimatum offered by the Directory, as the terms of peace, was more moderate than the Government of England had a right to expect. That Government, though the provoker of the war, and the first that committed hostilities by sending away the Ambassador Chauvelin,<sup>2</sup> had formerly talked of demanding from France, indemnification for the past and security for the future.

France, in her turn, might have retorted, and demanded the same from England; but she did not. As it was England that, in consequence of her bankruptcy, solicited peace, France offered it to her on the simple condition of her restoring the islands she had taken. The *ultimatum* has been rejected, and the negotiation broken off. The spirited part of France will say, *tant mieux*, so much the better.

How the people of England feel on the breaking up of the negotiation, which was entirely the act of their own Government, is best known to themselves; but from what I know of the two nations, France ought to hold herself perfectly indifferent about a peace with the Government of England. Every day adds new strength to France and new embarrassments to her enemy. The resources of the one increase, as those of the other become exhausted.

England is now reduced to the same system of paper money from which France has emerged, and we all know the inevitable fate of that system. It is not a victory over a few ships, like that on the coast of Holland, that gives the least support or relief to a paper system. On the news of this victory arriving in England, the funds did not rise a farthing. The Government rejoiced, but its creditors were silent.

It is difficult to find a motive, except in folly and madness, for the conduct of the English Government. Every calculation and prediction of Mr. Pitt has turned out directly the contrary; yet still he predicts.

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<sup>2</sup> It was stipulated in the treaty of commerce between France and England, concluded at Paris, that the sending away an ambassador by either party, should be taken as an act of hostility by the other party. The declaration of war (February [1], 1793) by the Convention, of which I was then a member and know well the case, was made in exact conformity to his article in the treaty; for it was not a declaration of war against England, but a declaration that the French Republic is in war with England; the first act of hostility having been committed by England. The declaration was made immediately on Chauvelin's return to France, and in consequence of it. Mr. Pitt should inform himself of things better than he does, before he prates so much about them, or of the sending away of Malmesbury, who was only on a visit of permission.

He predicted, with all the solemn assurance of a magician, that France would be bankrupt in a few months. He was right as to the thing, but wrong as to the place, for the bankruptcy happened in England while the words were yet warm upon his lips. To find out what will happen, it is only necessary to know what Mr. Pitt predicts. He is a true prophet if taken in the reverse.

Such is the ruinous condition that England is now in, that great as the difficulties of war are to the people, the difficulties that would accompany peace are equally as great to the Government. While the war continues, Mr. Pitt has a pretense for shutting up the Bank. But as that pretense could last no longer than the war lasted, he dreads the peace that would expose the absolute bankruptcy of the Government, and unveil to a deceived nation the ruinous effect of his measures. Peace would be a day of accounts to him, and he shuns it as an insolvent debtor shuns a meeting of his creditors. War furnishes him with many pretenses; peace would furnish him with none, and he stands alarmed at its consequences.

His conduct in the negotiation at Lille can be easily interpreted. It is not for the sake of the nation that he asks to retain some of the taken islands; for what are islands to a nation that has already too many for her own good, or what are they in comparison to the expense of another campaign in the present depreciating state of the English funds? (And even then those islands must be restored.)

No, it is not for the sake of the nation that he asks. It is for the sake of himself. It is as if he said to France, Give me some pretense, cover me from disgrace when my day of reckoning comes!

Any person acquainted with the English Government knows that every minister has some dread of what is called in England the winding up of accounts at the end of a war; that is, the final settlement of all expenses incurred by the war; and no minister had ever so great cause of dread as Mr. Pitt. A burnt child dreads the fire, and Pitt has had some experience upon this case.

The winding up of accounts at the end of the American War was so great, that, though he was not the cause of it, and came into the Ministry with great popularity, he lost it all by undertaking, what was impossible for him to avoid, the voluminous business of the winding up. If such was the case in settling the accounts of his predecessor, how much more has he to apprehend when the accounts to be settled

are his own? All men in bad circumstances hate the settlement of accounts, and Pitt, as a minister, is of that description.

But let us take a view of things on a larger ground than the case of a minister. It will then be found, that England, on a comparison of strength with France, when both nations are disposed to exert their utmost, has no possible chance of success. The efforts that England made within the last century were not generated on the ground of natural ability, but of artificial anticipations. She ran posterity into debt, and swallowed up in one generation the resources of several generations yet to come, till the project can be pursued no longer.

It is otherwise in France. The vastness of her territory and her population render the burden easy that would make a bankrupt of a country like England. It is not the weight of a thing, but the numbers who are to bear that weight that makes it feel light or heavy to the shoulders of those who bear it. A land-tax of half as much in the pound as the land-tax is in England, will raise nearly four times as much revenue in France as is raised in England. This is a scale easily understood, by which all the other sections of productive revenue can be measured. Judge then of the difference of natural ability.

England is strong in a navy; but that navy costs about eight millions sterling a year, and is one of the causes that has hastened her bankruptcy. The history of navy bills sufficiently proves this. But strong as England is in this case, the fate of navies must finally be decided by the natural ability of each country to carry its navy to the greatest extent; and France is able to support a navy twice as large as that of England, with less than half the expense per head on the people, which the present navy of England costs.

We all know that a navy cannot be raised as expeditiously as an army. But as the average duration of a navy, taking the decay of time, storms, and all circumstances and accidents together, is less than twenty years, every navy must be renewed within that time; and France at the end of a few years, can create and support a navy of double the extent of that of England; and the conduct of the English Government will provoke her to it.

But of what use are navies otherwise than to make or prevent invasions? Commercially considered, they are losses. They scarcely give any protection to the commerce of the countries which have

them, compared with the expense of maintaining them, and they insult the commerce of the nations that are neutral.

During the American War, the plan of the armed neutrality was formed and put in execution; but it was inconvenient, expensive, and ineffectual. This being the case, the problem is, does not commerce contain within itself, the means of its own protection? It certainly does, if the neutral nations will employ that means properly.

Instead them of an *armed neutrality*, the plan should be directly the contrary. It should be an *unarmed neutrality*. In the first place, the rights of neutral nations are easily defined. They are such as are exercised by nations in their intercourse with each other in time of peace, and which ought not, and cannot of right, be interrupted in consequence of war breaking out between any two or more of them.

Taking this as a principle, the next thing is to give it effect. The plan of the armed neutrality was to effect it by threatening war; but an unarmed neutrality can effect it by much easier and more powerful means. Were the neutral nations to associate, under an honorable injunction of fidelity to each other, and publicly declare to the world, that if any belligerent power shall seize or molest any ship or vessel belonging to the citizens or subjects of any of the powers composing that association, that the whole association will shut its ports against the flag of the offending nation, and will not permit any goods, wares, or merchandise, produced or manufactured in the offending nation, or appertaining thereto, to be imported into any of the ports included in the association, until reparation be made to the injured party—the reparation to be three times the value of the vessel and cargo—and moreover that all remittances on money, goods, and bills of exchange, do cease to be made to the offending nation, until the said reparation be made: were the neutral nations only to do this, which it is their direct interest to do, England, as a nation depending on the commerce of neutral nations in time of war, dare not molest them, and France would not.

But while, from the want of a common system, they individually permit England to do it, because individually they cannot resist it, they put France under the necessity of doing the same thing. The supreme of all laws, in all cases, is that of self-preservation. As the commerce of neutral nations would thus be protected by the means that commerce naturally contains within itself, all the naval opera-

tions of France and England would be confined within the circle of acting against each other; and in that case it needs no spirit of prophecy to discover that France must finally prevail. The sooner this be done, the better will it be for both nations, and for all the world.

THOMAS PAINE.