

A Landholder I, *Connecticut Courant*, 5 November 1787

To the Holders and Tillers of Land.

The writer of the following passed the first part of his life in mercantile employments and, by industry and economy, acquired a sufficient sum on retiring from trade to purchase and stock a decent plantation on which he now lives in the state of a farmer. By his present employment he is interested in the prosperity of agriculture and those who derive a support from cultivating the earth. An acquaintance with business has freed him from many prejudices and jealousies which he sees in his neighbors, who have not intermingled with mankind nor learned by experience the method of managing an extensive circulating property. Conscious of an honest intention, he wishes to address his brethren on some political subjects which now engage the public attention and will in the sequel greatly influence the value of landed property. The new Constitution for the United States is now before the public; the people are to determine, and the people at large generally determine right when they have had means of information.

It proves the honesty and patriotism of the gentlemen who composed the General Convention that they chose to submit their system to the people rather than the legislatures, whose decisions are often influenced by men in the higher departments of government, who have provided well for themselves and dread any change lest they should be injured by its operation. I would not wish to exclude from a state convention those gentlemen who compose the higher branches of the assemblies in the several states, but choose to see them stand on an even floor with their brethren, where the artifice of a small number cannot negative a vast majority of the people.

This danger was foreseen by the Federal Convention, and they have wisely avoided it by appealing directly to the people. The landholders and farmers are more than any other men concerned in the present decision; whether the proposed alteration is best they are to determine, but that an alteration is necessary, an individual may assert. It may be assumed as a fixed truth that the prosperity and riches of the farmer must depend on the prosperity and good national regulation of trade. Artful men may insinuate the contrary, tell you let trade take care of itself, and excite your jealousy against the merchant because his business leads him to wear a gayer coat than your economy directs. But let your own experience refute such insinuations. Your property and riches depend on a ready demand and generous price for the produce you can annually spare. When and where do you find this? Is it not where trade flourishes and when the merchant can freely export the produce of the country to such parts of the world as will bring the richest return? When the merchant doth not purchase, your produce is low, finds a dull market—in vexation you call the trader a jockey and curse the men whom you ought to pity. A desire of gain is common to mankind and the general motive to business and industry. You cannot expect many purchasers when trade is restricted, and your merchants are shut out from nine-tenths of the ports in the world. While they depend on the mercy of foreign nations, you are the first persons who will be humbled. Confined to a few foreign ports, they must sell low, or not at all; and can you expect they will greedily buy in at a high price, the very articles which they must sell under every restriction?

Every foreign prohibition on American trade is aimed in the most deadly manner against the holders and tillers of the land, and they are the men made poor. Your only remedy is such a national government as will make the country respectable, such a supreme government as can boldly meet the supremacy of proud and self-interested nations. The regulation of trade ever was and ever must be a national matter. A single state in the American Union cannot direct, much less control it. This must be a work of the whole, and requires all the wisdom and force of the continent, and until it is effected our commerce may be insulted by every overgrown merchant in Europe. Think not the evil will rest on your merchants alone; it may distress them, but it will destroy those who cultivate the earth. Their produce will bear a low price and require bad pay, the laborer will not find employment, the value of lands will fall, and the landholder become poor.

While our shipping rots at home by being prohibited from ports abroad, foreigners will bring you such articles and at such price as they please. Even the necessary article of salt has the present year been chiefly imported in foreign bottoms, and you already feel the consequence; your flaxseed in barter has not returned you more than two-thirds of the usual quantity. From this beginning learn what is to come.

Blame not our merchants; the fault is not in them but in the public. A federal government of energy is the only means which will deliver us, and now or never is your opportunity to establish it on such a basis as will preserve your liberty and riches. Think not that time without your own exertions will remedy the disorder. Other nations will be pleased with your poverty; they know the advantage of commanding trade and carrying in their own bottoms. By these means they can govern prices and breed up a hardy race of seamen to man their ships of war when they wish again to conquer you by arms. It is strange the holders and tillers of the land have had patience so long. They are men of resolution as well as patience, and will I presume be no longer deluded by British emissaries, and those men who think their own offices will be hazarded by any change in the constitution. Having opportunity, they will coolly demand a government which can protect what they have bravely defended in war.

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