

sentiments, and so far, which was as far as I, almost unaided, could go, to do my Duty."

CONGRESS AND TAXATION

The demands on the Continental Treasury were staggering, not only because of the inflated price of goods produced at home, but also because so much had to be imported because it was unavailable in America. On November 10, for example, Congress directed the Committee of Foreign Affairs to write to the commissioners of the United States in France and Spain and to have them "purchase and ship, on continental account, in armed vessels, in addition to what has been heretofore ordered by Congress, five hundred tons of lead, four hundred tons of powder, one million gun-flints, tents for fifty thousand men, and ten thousand yards of flannel for cartridges." The "continental account," at least in America, had become a farce. Writing to General Washington on November 13, President Laurens noted: "Our Treasury is nearly exhausted, a circumstance the more unfortunate as it happens in the moment when demands had conspired which exceed all former sudden Calls."

On October 7 Congress resolved to print another million dollars, but the Continental money had nothing to back it, so this action could only increase the inflation in the price of necessities for Congress as well as private citizens. Laurens was determined as president of Congress to do something about the "ruinous State" of the Continental Treasury, especially concerning the former "amazing misconduct of dealing Money out by Millions to particular Persons, under those accursed four words--'he to be accountable' and totally neglect to demand Accounts." Laurens insisted that a solution to the problem be found, as is indicated in a letter Cornelius Harnett, a delegate from North Carolina, wrote to William Wilkinson on November 20: "I never in my life went through so much fatigue, being obliged to sit all day in Congress and often very often in the Treasury board till 11 at night." In a letter of the same date to Thomas Burke, Harnett explained the financial problem facing Congress in detail:

Our finances are in such a situation that unless the States agree immediately, to tax as high as the people can possible bear, the credit of our money must be ruined. Another very large emission must take place, there is no preventing it. The Treasury Boards see the fatal consequence of this measure, but they also perceive that when we have no money, we shall have no Army. The Loan Offices are already drained to their utmost farthing. The prospect before us is truly distressing, we must however continue further emissions. I tremble at the consequences."