



**ADDRESS TO THE READERS OF THE  
SUNBURY AND NORTHUMBERLAND  
GAZETTE, JUNE 29, 1799**

**Thomas Cooper**

Having no correspondence to communicate, it is my duty to fill up the vacant columns of the week as well as I am able; and as this is the last opportunity I shall have to intrude on the patience of the public in the capacity of Editor, I shall dedicate the space that is left to a subject of some importance.

There is a party in this country accused of an indiscriminate opposition to the measures of government; who in their turn insinuate an indiscriminate support of every measure calculated to increase the power of the Executive at the expence of the interest of the country. Like all other party accusations, these are doubtless too violent on both sides; but I cannot help thinking that of late years, measures have been adopted and opinions sanctioned in this country, which have an evident tendency to stretch to the utmost the constitutional authority of our Executive, and to introduce the political evils of those European governments whose principles we have rejected. I do not feel myself in any degree authorized to reflect on the motives or undervalue the judgment of the gentlemen, whose conduct and opinions I disapprove. With superior talents, and more ample means of information, they may well be in the right: But these do not confer infallibility; and therefore the *tendency*

of the measures pursued, however praise worthy the motives which have led to them, is a fair object of decent and temperate discussion.

I can best illustrate my meaning by supposing a case. Let me place myself in the President's chair, at the head of a party in this country, aiming to extend the influence of the governing powers at the expence of the governed; to increase the authority and prerogative of the Executive, and to reduce by degrees to a mere name, the influences of the people. How should I set about it? What system should I pursue?

1st. As the rights reserved by the State Governments and the bounds and limits set by the Constitution of the Union, are the declared barriers against the encroachments of entrusted power, my first business would be to undermine that Constitution, and render it useless, by claiming authority which, though not given by the express words of it, might be edged in under the cover of general expressions or implied powers—by stretching the meaning of the words used to their utmost latitude, —by taking advantage of every ambiguity —and by quibbling upon distinctions to explain away the plain and obvious meaning. It would be my business to extend the powers of the Federal Courts and of Federal Officers—to encroach upon the State jurisdictions—to throw obloquy on the State Governments as clogs upon the wheel of the General Government—for that purpose to promote a spirit of party among them, and subject to accusations of disaffection those who were opposed to the measures I would pursue. In addition to this I would now and then exercise trifling acts of authority not granted by the Constitution, under some undefined notion of prerogative. If by such means one encroachment should be made good, it would be a precedent for another, until the public by degrees would become accustomed and callous to them.

2. My next object would be to restrict by every means in my power the liberty of the press. For the free discussion of public characters is too dangerous for despotism to tolerate. Hence I would multiply laws against libel and sedition, and fence round the characters of the officers of government by well contrived legal obstacles. Whatever should tend to bring them into contempt should

be sedition, however contemptible or reprehensible they might be. Hence too, I would impress the idea that all who were opposed to my measures were enemies of the government, that is (in my construction) of their country. It should be the business of my partizans to inculcate this, and cry down all such persons as dangerous and seditious, as disturbers of the peace of society, and desirous of overturning the Constitution. The obloquy induced by these charges, dwelt upon in the public prints under my controul, and vociferously urged by the dependants of office in private conversation, would make opposition to my measures obnoxious and dangerous, and suppress all political conversation.

3. In conformity to this plan, I would treat with derision and abhorrence the doctrine of the Rights of Man, and the Sovereignty of the People. I would seize upon every fault and every folly of the French in particular to bring those principles into contempt; every accidental abuse of them should be held out as their necessary consequence. I would decidedly prefer the nations whose government inclined to despotism, and treat with coldness and reserve, republics founded on the same basis with our own. Every known friend to those principles I would carefully discountenance, and prohibit the emigration hither of every foreigner who might be suspected of attachment to them. They should be the constant theme of abuse in the prints which I should deem it prudent to encourage, and the companies which my partizans should frequent.

4. The more completely to enlist the ambitious, the needy and the fashionable, under my banners, I would take care it should be known that no place, no job, no countenance might be expected by any but those whose opinions and language were implicitly and actively coincident with my own. A principle that I would strictly carry through every appointment in my immediate gist or under my controul. Opinions in conformity to my own I would endeavour to make the passport into what is called genteel and fashionable company, and give them a currency and a tone with the rich and the vain. For the same reason I would multiply grades and distinctions in society, and extend as far as I dared, the forms of rank and etiquette.

5. By strict attention to the forms of religion—by great outward respect for the Clergy—by a declared preference of religious characters—by loud declamations against infidels and atheists—by frequent appointments of days of humiliation and prayer, I would gain over the interest of the Clergy, and acquire the popular reputation of sanctity. Suspicion would be laid asleep as to the motives of my conduct, and the voice of the bigotted and the ignorant, as well as the interested, would be loud in my praise.

6. It would be my evident interest to cultivate the monied men of the country; hence I would shew a decided preference to mercantile people and to the mercantile interest over the agricultural. Besides, merchants are a richer, a more enterprizing, a more gregarious and a more noisy class of society, than plain unspeculating farmers; they could do me more harm as well as more good. Hence too I would encourage the Banking and the Funding systems. The latter particularly, because the more money I could borrow on any pretence, the more jobs, the more contracts, the more means should I have, of gaining over adversaries and rewarding partizans.

7. But the grand engine, the most useful instrument of despotic ambition, would be a standing army. The system of Volunteer Corps among the fashionable and would-be fashionable young men, created by alarm, and maintained by no permanent fund, however useful as an auxiliary, could not long be depended on; the gradual dissipation of fears artificially excited, the want of discipline, of regular pay, and the interference of business, would speedily render them useless. But in no instance whatever has a standing army, regularly maintained, failed of rendering the governing powers independent of the people. The common soldiers of an army are machines; their first duty is to act and not to think; they are by profession supporters of passive obedience and non-resistance, which being accustomed to toward their officers, they can easily think right in the people toward their rulers. The officers of an army, deriving their situation from the governing powers, are apt to regard themselves as under personal obligations to and dependent upon those powers; whose interest and inclinations, whose directions and opinions they are for the most part in constant readiness to support.

A Standing Army, renders a Militia idle, and therefore useless and contemptible. It provides for the partizans of government, it arms the partizans of government, it disarms, it paralyzes their opponents. Hence the predilection of the monarchies of Europe for standing armies; not to defend themselves against invaders from without, but against the friends and principles of liberty from within.

It would therefore be my business to invent, to forge, to create reasons for appointing a standing force, if no real motive existed. If there were no fears I would manufacture subjects of alarm—if there were no foe, I would raise them—if invasion were impossible, I would be loud in my apprehension of it—if by good luck I could find some real cause of contention with a foreign power, I would be cautious of ending the dispute until the army was completely organized. I would send ambassadors to every court of Europe, that I might multiply the chances of incipient dispute, and the pretences for continuing or increasing the standing force. Regarding all other means of accomplishing my purposes as subsidiary and this is the principal. The well-known, long practiced, and successful experience of Europe would justify this firm and implicit reliance.

8. With the same view, I would encourage a naval armament; these measures not only afford a vast sum of money to expend in rewarding and gaining over adherents by offices, posts and contracts, but the navy in particular furnishes a most convenient method of inducing the chance of temporary hostility with other powers; and of course the pretexts for continuing an army. By a navy I could seek for occasions of offence; but with an army alone, I must wait for them. My ambassadors would be useless without a navy, for in this country we can interfere with European politics in no other way. By a navy I lay hold of the popular prejudices of the people; I can assist in many ways a monarchy hostile to liberty against republicans;—I gain over to a man the mercantile interest for whose protection it is ostensibly (and indeed in great measures really) raised: and it furnishes an opportunity of commanding the sea-port towns of any state, who might venture a more active opposition to my views than I could safely submit to.

Such appear to me the obvious measures for a man to adopt placed in a situation to aim at power independent of the people, and inclined to make the attempt. I accuse no man or set of men in this country of any such intention; most of the measures that have struck me as objects of jealousy, have been adopted after fair discussion, and sanctioned by the highest constitutional authority of the people; until repealed or revoked by equal authority, they claim the obedience of every friend to good order and his country.

But we have adopted measures that, were I placed in the situation above described, I should sedulously have promoted.

In direct opposition as I think to the apparent meaning of the constitution, vesting the right of regulating commerce in Congress, the *Treaty-making* power has been conceded to the Executive. And as Treaties are part of the Supreme Law of the land, the most important acts of legislation are thus placed in the discretionary power of an individual!

Contrary as I think to the principles of our Constitution the right of demanding *Appropriations* for created officers has been insisted on.

The doctrine of *Confidence* in the Executive has been urged in this country with almost as much perseverance as by the friends of Mr. Pitt in England.

Fair, open, decent and argumentative opposition to the measures of the prevailing party has been constantly treated in doors and without, as evidence of disaffection, of designs hostile to the union; of preference to French interests, and enmity to our country: and this in terms of gross, persevering, and most ungentleman-like abuse.

The *Alien Law*, calculated to operate against the emigration of persons hostile to the tyranny of Europe, has been enacted in evident opposition to the language and principles of the constitution. The *Sedition Law*, founded and defended upon the quibbling distinction between regulating and restraining, has been passed also, directly in the teeth of what has usually been conceived the plain meaning of that Constitution. Doubtful of the distinction the advocates for those laws have boldly resorted to the comprehensive

doctrine of *implied powers*. A doctrine which permits any stretch of authority to be assumed and defended.

Disregarding the wise counsel of General Washington, to avoid as much as possible European politics and connections, we have been prodigal of *Embassies* to the courts of Europe. Nor can I suggest any reason why Prussia, Russia or the Porte should claim our attention, that would not equally serve for the Emperor of China or the great Mogul.

The *State Governments* have lately been the objects of distrust and abuse in the prints usually regarded as favouring the prevailing party. Mr. Fenno's Philippic against republican governments, the acknowledged principles of liberty, and his ridicule of the old sow with her farrow of pigs, will not be forgotten in haste. Nor can the forcible (not to say violent) language of the President against the principles of freedom, adopted and propagated by the French nation in common with ourselves—doctrines, at the head of which are the Sovereignty of the People, and Rights of Man, be otherwise than grating to the true friends of our Constitution. However good his intentions, too much I think has been urged, in his answers to addresses, against French principles and false philosophy. Principles and philosophy, which (however abused) will stand the test of all the argument, all the sarcasm, and all the declamation of their opponents, whoever they may be. Nor can the evident preference of the interests of Great Britain, nor the fashionable violence of language against the French, nor the irritability manifested in all our proceedings against that nation (unjustifiable as much of their conduct towards us has been) be generally approved. If they have attacked us, let us return it; but the unbecoming, ungentlemanly violence of expression used in our Legislature, and in publications of authority against that nation, has been most disgraceful to the country in which it has been adopted.

Nor shall I dwell on the obvious objections to the *Navy* and to the *Army*; the favourite measures of the partizans of the day. The navy is useful to defend one million of dollars at the expence of four; but wherefore the army is *now* to be organized, as the prospect of war is vanishing, it would not be easy to tell.

Other circumstances occur to me, but I have been too long already; the coincidence of these measures and opinions with what a leader inclined to despotism might wish, will naturally excite a jealousy of their tendency. I hope they will be steadily opposed, but opposed in the only justifiable way of opposition under a free government, by discussion in the first instance, and a change of persons by constitutional election, if no other method will succeed.

THOMAS COOPER.