

Source C: John Jay, letter to Thomas Jefferson detailing problems with the government established under the Articles of Confederation, October 27, 1786

The inefficacy of our government becomes daily more and more apparent. Our treasury and our credit are in a sad situation; and it is probable that either the wisdom or the passions of the people will produce changes. A spirit of licentiousness has infected Massachusetts, which appears more formidable than some at first apprehended. Whether similar symptoms will not soon mark a like disease in several other States is very problematical.

The public papers herewith sent contain everything generally known about these matters. A reluctance to taxes, an impatience of government, a rage for property and little regard to the means of acquiring it, together with a desire of equality in all things, seem to actuate the mass of those who are uneasy in their circumstances. To these may be added the influence of ambitious adventurers, and the speculations of the many characters who prefer private to public good, and of others who expect to gain more from wrecks made by tempests than from the produce of patient and honest industry. As the knaves and fools of this world are forever in alliance, it is easy to perceive how much vigor and wisdom a government, from its construction and administration, should possess, in order to repress the evils which naturally flow from such copious sources of injustice and evil.

Much, I think, is to be feared from the sentiments which such a state of things is calculated to infuse into the minds of the rational and well-intended. In their eyes, the charms of liberty will daily fade; and in seeking for peace and security, they will too naturally turn towards systems in direct opposition to those which oppress and disquiet them.

If faction should long bear down law and government, tyranny may raise its head, or the more sober part of the people may even think of a king.

In short, my dear sir, we are in a very unpleasant situation. Changes are necessary; but, what they ought to be, what they will be, and how and when to be produced, are arduous questions. I feel for the cause of liberty, and for the honor of my countrymen who have so nobly asserted it, and who, at present, so abuse its blessings. If it should not take root in this soil, little pains will be taken to cultivate it in any other.

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<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch5s13.html>.