

Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, December 15, 1790, Report, from the Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

REPORT ON BRITISH NEGOTIATIONS J. MSS.

[December 15, 1790.]

Report on certain letters from the President to Mr. Gouverneur Morris, and from Mr. Morris to the President, relative to our difficulties with England —1790.

The Secretary of State having had under consideration the two letters of October 13th, 1789, from the President of the United States to Mr. Gouverneur Morris; and those of Mr. Morris to the President, of January 22d, April 7th, 13th, May 1st, 29th, July 3d, August 16th, and September 18th, referred to him by the President, makes the following report thereon:

The President's letter of January 22d, authorized Mr. Morris to enter into conference with the British ministers in order to discover their sentiments on the following subjects:

1. Their retention of the western posts contrary to the treaty of peace.
2. Indemnification for the negroes carried off against the stipulations of the same treaty.
3. A treaty for the regulation of the commerce between the two countries.
4. The exchange of a minister.

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The letters of Mr. Morris before mentioned state the communications, oral and written, which have passed between him and the ministers; and from these the Secretary of State draws the following inferences:

1. That the British court is decided not to surrender the post in any event; and that they will urge as a pretext that though our courts of justice are now open to British subjects, they were so long shut after the peace as to have defeated irremediably the recovery of debts in many cases. They suggest, indeed, the idea of an indemnification on our part. But probably were we disposed to admit their right

to indemnification, they would take care to set it so high as to insure a disagreement.

2. That as to indemnification for the negroes, their measures for concealing them were in the first instance so efficacious, as to reduce our demand for them, so far as we can support it by direct proof, to be very small indeed. Its smallness seems to have kept it out of discussion. Were other difficulties removed, they would probably make none of this article.

3. That they equivocate on every proposal of a treaty of commerce, and authorize in their communications with Mr. Morris the same conclusions which have been drawn from those they had had from time to time with Mr. Adams, and those through Major Beckwith; to wit, that they do not mean to submit their present advantages in commerce to the risk which might attend a discussion of them, whereon some reciprocity could not fail to be demanded. Unless, indeed, we would agree to make it a treaty of *alliance* as well as *commerce*, so as to undermine our obligations with France. This method of stripping that rival nation of its alliances, they tried successfully with Holland, endeavored at it with Spain, and have plainly and repeatedly suggested to us. For this they would probably relax some of the rigors they exercise against our commerce.

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4. That as to a minister, their Secretary for foreign affairs is disposed to exchange one, but meets with opposition in his cabinet, so as to render the issue uncertain.

From the whole of which, the Secretary of State is of opinion that Mr. Morris' letters remove any doubts which might have been entertained as to the intentions and dispositions of the British cabinet.

That it would be dishonorable to the the United States, useless and even injurious, to renew the propositions for a treaty of commerce, or for the exchange of a minister; and that these subjects should now remain dormant, till they shall be brought forward earnestly by them.

That the demands of the posts, and of indemnification for the negroes should not be again made till we are in readiness to do ourselves the justice which may be refused.

That Mr. Morris should be informed that he fulfilled the object of his agency to the satisfaction of the President, inasmuch as he has enabled him to judge of the real views of the British cabinet, and that it is his pleasure that the matters committed to him be left in the situation in which the letter shall find them.

That a proper compensation be given to Mr. Morris for his services herein, which having been begun on the 22d of January, and ended the 18th of September, comprehended a space of near eight months; that the allowance to an agent may be properly fixed anywhere between the half and the whole of what is allowed to a Chargé d'affaires; which, according to the establishment of the United States at the time of this appointment, was at the rate of \$3,000 a year; consequently,

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that such a sum of between one and two thousand dollars be allowed him as the President shall deem proper, on a view of the interference which this agency may have had with Mr. Morris' private pursuits in Europe.