

Document A: B.W.'s Public Letter (Excerpted from Original)

This public letter appeared on the front page of The Boston-Gazette and Country Journal, a colonial newspaper, on October 7, 1765. The author's name was printed as "B.W."

To the Inhabitants of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay.

MY DEAR COUNTRYMEN,

Had not His Excellency the Governor seen fit to adjourn the General Assembly so suddenly, the House of Representatives would doubtless, in a few days, have desired a recess; in order to consult with, and take the Directions of their Constituents, respecting the necessity of a Compliance with the *grievous* and *unconstitutional* Tax laid upon the Colonies by the Stamp Act; after first acquainted His Excellency, by Way of Answer to his Speech, that they considered the Act as inconsistent with the Charter Rights of the province, and that themselves *were not convinced of the Necessity of a Submission*. But His Excellency it seems was in an unparliamentarily Way, informed of the Intentions of the House; and, to prevent their taking Place, adjourned the Court before the Committee and prepared the Draft of an Answer.

You have now, my Countrymen, the same Opportunity to instruct your Representatives as you would have had if the House had requested a Recess.

I hope you will at this important Crisis, excuse an animated address, from a hearty Friend to your Civil Liberties, intended to warm your Imagination, and excite your Activity; in the Prosecution of which, I shall, with great Freedom use the Words and adopt the Sentiments of a late inspired Writer: without marking the particular Passages, for which I am obliged to that patriotic Genius.

It is a standing Maxim of English Liberty 'That no man shall be taxed but with his own consent,' and you very well know we were not, in any *sober* Sense, represented in parliament, when this tax was imposed. When the Legislature decree a Tax, as they represent the Community, such tax ought to be considered as the voluntary Gift of the People to be applied to such uses, as they, by their Representatives, shall think expedient. In the Preamble to this Act it is said to be, "For defraying the Expences of defending, protecting and securing the British Colonies." But lest you should fall in Love with the Act on Account of these Words in the Preamble, I would just observe to you that Impositions of this Kind are commonly ushered in under the Pretence of general Utility, to make them the more easy to go down with the People. The Colonies, my dear Friends, are of so much importance to the Mother Kingdom, that its very Existence, as a free State, depends on them. . . .

Awake! Awake my Countrymen, and, by a regular & legal Opposition of those who enslave us and our posterity. Nothing is wanting but your own Resolution –For great is the Authority, exalted the Dignity, and Powerful the majesty of the people. –And shall you, the Descendants of Britain, born in a land of Light, and reared in the Bosom of Liberty –shall you commence Cowards, at a time when reason calls so loud for your Magnanimity? I know you scorn such an injurious Aspersion –I know you disdain the Thought of so approbrious a Servility. –Some of you perhaps imagine all Endeavors unavailable. –Banish so groundless a Fear. Be Men, and make the Experiment. –Truth is omnipotent, and Reason must be finally victorious. This is your duty, your Burden, your indispensable Duty. Ages remote, Mortals yet unborn: will bless your generous efforts, and revere the Memory of the Saviours of their Country.

The Love of Liberty is natural to our Species and interwoven with the human Frame. –Inflamed with this Love, do not countenance an Act so detrimental to your Privileges. Perhaps you conceive we shall after all be obliged to comply. What! –do you take it for granted that so it must be? Did you not then think your selves free? Will you trifle with an inestimable Jewel? Regardless of your Country's welfare, will you yield, and resign without a Struggle? Are you not desirous to bequeath to Posterity the priceless Treasure you yourselves enjoy? Doubtless you resent the Insinuation. Courage then, my Brethren, and be not remiss in a Concern so momentous. Retrospect the Zeal of your Ancestors for the Enjoyment of the Rights and Privileges. Trace the Renown of your Progenitors & recollect the Stands, the glorious Stands they have often made against the Yoke of Thralldom: –For their inviolable Attachment to the inestimable Blessings of Freedom. History will resound their deathless Praises; and adorned with the precious Memorials of their heroic and irrepressible Struggles against Imposition of every Sort, will paint with eternal and undecrying Splendor. Impelled by their illustrious Example, disdain the Tho't of servile Acquiescence in a burdensome law. Consider gentlemen, that the least infraction of your Liberties is a Prelude to Encroachments. Such always was, and such will always be the Case. Recede therefore not an inch from your indisputable Rights –On the contrary, declare your Thoughts freely, and scruple to deliver your sentiments in an Affair of such unspeakable Consequence. Indolence –Indolence has been the Source of irretrievable Ruin –Langour and Timidity, when the Public is concerned, are the origin of Evils mighty and innumerable. Why then, in the name of Heaven, should you behold an Infringement supine and inanimate? Why should you too late deplore your Irresolution? Alas! When shall we see the Glorious Flame of Patriotism lighted up and blazing out with unextinguishable flame? When shall we have *our Interest*, and that Interest *the common Good*?

To assert your Rights doth your Resolution fail you? Are you destitute of Courage? Tamely will you submit, and yield without a Contest? Come then, and by Imagination's Aid, penetrate into Futurity. Behold your Offspring bred up to Bondage. Behold the Province swarming with Slaves and beggars, and your Lands: those lands you so much delight in, all owned by haughty and domineering Lords!

Pause, therefore, My Countrymen, and consider. Revolve the Consequences in a dispassionate Mind. –Weigh them in the Scale of Reason- in the Balance of cool deliberate Reflection: if any of you have been until this Time insensible to your Danger, awake now out of your Lethargy –Start, O start from your Trance: By the unconquerable Spirit of the ancient Britons: -by the Genius of that Constitution which abhors every species of Vassallage; -by the august Title of Englishmen; -by the grand Prerogatives of Human Nature; the lovely image of the Infinite Deity; -and what is more than all, by that Liberty wherewith Christ *has made you free*; I exhort you to instruct your Representatives against proceeding by any ways or means whatsoever, the Operation of this grievous and burdensome Law. Acquaint them *fully* of your Sentiments of the matter: that they may be inexcusable if they should act contrary to your declared Minds. They are clothed with Power, not to sport with the Interests of Human nature; but to be faithful guardians of the liberties of the Country –We have therefore a Right to expect that they will do every Thing in their Power for our Relief under our pressing Difficulties –We have also from the Change in the Ministry, some Reason to hope for a repeal of the Act. –Happy, thice happy I should be, to have it in my Power to congratulate my Countrymen on so memorable a Deliverance: whilst I left the Enemies of truth and liberty to humble themselves in Sackcloth and Amen.

B.W.

Source: B.W. “*To the Inhabitants of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay,*” The Boston-Gazette and Country Journal, October 7, 1765.

Document B: From a London Newspaper (Original)

Will Alfred wrote this public letter to Secretary Henry Seymour Conway. Conway was one of two of Britain's Secretaries of State and was responsible for relations with the American colonies. The letter was first published in a London newspaper and then was published in the Boston Gazette Supplement on January 27, 1766, nearly three months after the Stamp Act went into effect.

From a late London Paper.

To Mr. Secretary Conway

There was an article lately in the news-papers, which well merits your utmost attention, and loudly calls for the interposition of government; I mean the insurrection at Boston in America to prevent the execution of the Stamp Act. Within these few years request have been the alarms, that the State was in danger, nor would I venture to affirm that they have been entirely without foundation; but government has never been in any perilous situation from any act of the Crown or its Ministers (whatever might have been the voice of a discontented faction) tho' it may at this moment totter on the brink of distruction from the unbounded licentiousness of the people. It is of little consequence to enquire by what means this evil as arisen to such an enormous height; but it is a work well worthy of the best man, or the ablest Minister, to check its progress, and prevent its finally over turning the constitution. The spirit of riot has so long disturbed the repose of the island, has at length infected our colonies, and already begins to embroil there the administration of public affairs.—The fire is kindled, which it may be difficult to extinguish, and it is much to be dreaded, that the evil example of the rebellious Bostonites will be followed in all the other provinces. They have arose, you see, with violence; attacked several of the King's servants, broke into and plundered their houses, and have committed the most daring outrages: They have even ventured to destroy the house of the Lieut. Governor, and have stripped him of all his effects, even to this cloaths: And in Rhode Island, terrified by the like tumultuous proceedings, some of the principal inhabitants have been forced to abandon their habitations, and betake themselves to the ships for shelter from the fury of the mob—How alarming are such acts of barbarity in a civilized country! How subversive of all order, and how inconfident with all government! Too long has Great Britain been torn with civil dissensions: Ireland is still shook with intestine commotions: If in these circumstances, our colonies rebel, how very feeble and infirm must our government soon become; how easy to prey to a foreign foe.—

The occasion of the riotous behavior of the Bostonites is peculiarly remarkable: Had the Parliament taxed their small beer an half penny a quart, the tax would then have been most severely felt; they would naturally have murmured; and an improper conduct on such an occasion had been less a matter of surprize; and

perhaps ought less to have roused the indignation of government: But in the present case, *the tax to be levied affects none of the necessaries of life; will never fall upon many of the poor; and will touch very gently and very seldom such of them as it may light upon:* Even a very poor person cannot be much hurt by paying a shilling or eighteen pence when he is married, puts his son for apprentice to a trade, or when he makes his will. The tax on News-papers concerns only a very few—the common people don't purchase news-papers. Is it not surprising then that the mob should be so much alarmed by the apprehension of a tax (by which they are to be so little affected) as to be guilty of such dreadful enormities, as the Bostonites have been, even before the tax is begun to be levied. I was expressing my wonder at this, when I was informed, that it was not the burthen of the tax to be raised, but the *manner in which it was imposed*, that created the discontent: If this is so, the matter is more serious than it may first appear. The common people are no judges of the manner of imposing taxes; and this is an idea they never enter into, unless instigated by others; and if gentlemen, who may be judges of such matters, and have influence enough to excite tumults, have from whatever motives, been the abettors of such atrocious insults to government, I hope administration will take the proper steps to counteract such traitors, and to bring the authors of such disturbances in the State to condign punishment.

At the same time they wish to see the Minister act with spirit and intrepidity on this occasion, I should be sorry to see his actions were the mere deeds of power. The colonists are our brethren and fellow-subjects; free-born with us, to every privilege of a Briton. We should enquire therefore whether we have behaved to them as brethren, and whether we have not exacted from them what we should have judged extremely hard to suffer ourselves. The first birth right privilege of a Briton is, that he cannot be legally tried but by his Peers—One of the next is, that he cannot be taxed but by a parliament in which he is represented—or rather by gentlemen who pay a share of the tax they impose on him; for the law, not trusting too much to virtue, wisely proceeds on this supposition; that however inattentive a man may be to the concerns of others, he will probably pay some regard to his own interest; and it is in this view that the law requires a man to be possessed of a certain estate to entitle him to represent others. Are the colonists then represented in this manner in the parliament of Great Britain? Do these who impose taxes on them pay also themselves a share of these taxes?—If this is not the case, what have the colonists done that they are to be stripped of one of the most valuable privileges of Britons? Have the parliament of Great Britain a right to take from any, the lowest of the subjects, the smallest privilege, which he inherits by birth-right, unless forfeited by law?—You, Sir, are abundantly able to answer these queries—I speak not of the power of parliaments; I know they are omnipotent: They may of power pass a law, by which all the inhabitants of any county should be deprived of the privileges of being tried by a jury; but could they of right do it? and must not power be opposed to power? Some of the colonists I am informed would have applied by petition to parliament last sessions, praying to be heard against the manner of imposing the Stamp tax: but no member would present their petitions—It seems it was against the forms of the house. But ought rules of order to stand in the way of right? And are the colonists to lose one of their most valuable privileges, as Britons, rather than that the

House of Commons should break in upon their forms? If a chapter of Magna Charta was the impediment, it should be annulled. If the colonists are prevented from endeavouring to have their grievances redressed in this manner, can we blame them if they attempt it in another? Or is it not naturally to be expected they should, though perhaps that other may be less agreeable to us?

This month Deputies from all of the assemblies of America were to assemble at New-York; and it is probable they will again attempt to petition parliament. It is your business, Sir, to endeavor that their petitions be not treated as some were last year. If their demands are reasonable, justice requires they should be granted; if they are otherwise, parliament will have opportunity of pointing out to them the impropriety of their requests; and I am well convinced they will insist on nothing that is unreasonable. The utmost wisdom of parliament will be wanted on this occasion; and no member will advise an improper exertion of power. It is the interest of Britain to acquire and retain, and not to alienate the affections of the colonies; and this can be done only by kind usage, and by always considering them, as they most certainly are in all respects as on the same footing with ourselves, and of right entitled to every privilege we in Britain enjoy.

The colonies are so many distant provinces of the British Empire, founded upon which it will rise firm and strong, and defy the shock of ages. But if, instead of improving this accession of dominion for the purpose of strengthening the State, we make enemies of our friends, and convert this blessing of Heaven into a curse, then indeed may we have cause to weep over our late conquests, and Britain may in the end be conquered in America. But I hope better things, tho' I thus write. I trust the favourable opportunity will be eagerly embraced of uniting and incorporating the colonies with Great Britain, and that they shall be henceforth considered as one state. Never was there an ampler field for acquiring honour; never a fairer occasion of securing immortality, the man, who shall do this piece of real service to the State, will infallibly insure to himself everlasting renown, and his memory will be endeared to latest ages—Whoever he may be, who nobly undertakes it, may success accompany him in this great and good work!—My warmest wishes are for the prosperity of Britain.

WILL ALFRED

Source: Will Alfred, "To Mr. Secretary Conway," Boston Gazette Supplement, January 27, 1766.

Document C: A Stamp Act Collector's Letter (Excerpted from Original)

John Hughes, a stamp tax collector in Philadelphia, wrote this letter to his bosses in London.

Philadelphia January 13:th 1766.

My Lords,

I have once before, taken the Liberty, to write to your Lordships, on a Subject, that I conceived, to be of Infinite Importance, to His Majesty, & his Ministers, to be well acquainted with, I mean the Situation, & Disposition, of His Majesty's Subjects in North America, And altho', no Man (I think) can be more attached to his Country, or more averse to Insinuate, any Thing to it's Disadvantages, Yet my Loyalty to my King, compels me at this Time, to say some Things, that I sincerely hope your Lordships will committed, in all the old Provinces, not only upon the Stamp Officers, but in some places, insulted His Majesty's Governor's, under Pretence, that the Stamp Act, was unconstitutional, and oppressive.

It is no part of my Intention, at this Time, to animadvert on that Act, but to suggest some Things, to your Lordships, that convince, not only me, but many others, that the Stamp Act, being an unpopular Act, is only made use of to animate, and Inrage the people, & at the same Time, to conceal other Measures, that a certain party amongst us, and their Adherents, have at Heart, and think this, a favourable Opportunity, to engage, and carry the populace, into such Rebellious, & violent Measures, that it will be impossible, for them to Retreat, with Honor, & then I make no Doubt (from what is seen, and heard here publickly) but the Grand Project, will come out, however wild , & unaccountable, it may appear, to His Majesty, and your Lordships.

It is apparent to many People here, that the Presbyterians, who are very Numerous in America, and are avowedly, at the head of these Riots, are at this Time, as averse to Kings, as they were in the Days of Cromwell, and some begin to cry out,-- No King but King Jesus; but this is only done, by some of the Lower Class as yet, But the Leaders, and the Clergy, keep up a Correspondence, from one end of America, to the other, and fill every News Paper, with Inflammatory [*sic*] Pieces, and reputable, & Loyal Accounts (as they call them) of Exploits committed, by those Rioters, against the Stamp Act, & Stamp Distributors, in every Province, so that the Minds of the common people of all Denominations, are kept in a continual ferment, and ready for any Mischief whatever, and no Paper, or Piece, is suffered to be printed, that tends to cool the People's Minds, for should any Man, attempt it at this Time, he would be called a Friend, to the Stamp Act, and this Insinuation, would at once, put Life, and Fortune, in Danger, nor do I think, there is a Printer on the Continent, but what would endeavor, by Informations, to Destroy any Man, that would write, or attempt any Thing, to cool the People's minds.

Your Lordships cannot readily, form an adequate Idea, of the mischievous Measures, and Indefatigable Industry, of the Presbyterians in America, in alienating the Affections of His Majesty's Subjects, and disposing the Minds of the Common People, of all Nations, and Societies on the Continent, to open Rebellion, and they really succeed, in spreading the Infatuation, far beyond any Thing I could imagine; And as the Presbyterians, are united with the People in Power, and are many of them, in Power themselves, in this Province, these, and the others, countenance, and privately encourage, Riots, so that I really know not, what may be the Consequence, for a few Days ago, the London Ships came up, with some Stamps, and one of the Captains happening, to put a Box of Stamps on Shore, Instantly, the two printers, Messrs: Bradford and Hall, got a Drum, and caused it to be beat, about the Streets, and raised a Rabble of Boys, Sailors, & Negroes &c. to destroy the Stamps, but they were taken on board again, And the Captain's notwithstanding, were obliged to take an Oath, that they would not land them in the Province, But not one single Magistrate, gave or shewed, the least Disapprobation of this Conduct, Nor is the Justice, who swore them, Mr. George Bryan (who is a Red hot Presbyterian by the by) any ways blamed by the Governor, for his proceedings on the Occasion, which I think may clearly shew, how far his Honour approves these Measures secretly.

The Stamps, however, are preserved, and will be delivered in to the care of Captain Hawker, for I desired the Captains, to call upon his Honour, & let him know, they had seen me, & that I told them, that the violence of the People was such, that I could not Receive them, and therefore, must refer them to his Honour, who was his Majesty's representative, and he gave for Answer, that Captain Hawker, should be apply'd to... I am convinced, the Presbyterians intend nothing less, than the throwing off their Allegiance and Obedience, to his Majesty, and the Proprietor, & forming a Republican Empire, in America, & being Lords and Masters themselves; and of this His Majesty, and your Lordships, I am afraid will have but too much Conviction, in a little Time, for I have good Reasons to believe, that the Presbyterians, are ripe for open Rebellion, when they have poisoned, the Minds of the people enough.

I am daily Threatened, by Verbal Messages, and Anonymous Letters, with a Mob of several Thousand People, from the Jerseys, New York, and New England, but I think my Friends, & Relations, and my Credit, and popularity, in this province, will prevent such a Step from being taken, but if Presbyterian Schemes succeed, I shall in a little time fall a Sacrifice, unless I can fly to Britain for Shelter.

Your Lordships may perhaps conceive, that I am seized with a panick, and magnify the Danger, but on the contrary, If I may credit, a great many of my Friends, they think me, much too Resolved and apprehend, that it would be best for me, to resign my Commission of Stamp Distributor absolutely, to preserve my Life, and fortune, but, be the Consequence what it may, No Act of mine, shall Demonstrate Cowardice, or Disloyalty to my King, while I retain my Senses.

It may not be amiss, to inform your Lordships, that sometime ago, I wrote to His Grace, The Archbishop of Canterbury, & gave him some Account, of the State of the Church, & Academy or Colledge, in this Province, but possibly His Grace, may not consider it, in the Light it deserves; But if some effectual Measures, are not taken, to support the Church in this New World, I am clear in Opinion, that it will soon fall a Sacrifice, to Presbyterian Machinations, & the whole Continent with it.

In some provinces to the Eastward, I think the Presbyterians are gone so far, that Nothing short of Force, will reinstate his Majesty's Authority, But in this Province, I am firmly persuaded, that if his Majesty, immediately assumed the Powers of Government, agreeable to the Prayers of our Petitions, and should be fortunate enough, to appoint some Discreet person, no Ways attached, to the Proprietary Interest, to Govern us, such a Man, with a little Acquaintance in the Province, might easily secure the Allegiance, of a Great Majority, of the People here, if not the whole, But if these Measures are Delayed, I Dread the Consequences.

If I am not mistaken, The Powers of Government, cannot by William Penn's Will, be vested in Thomas & Richard Penn, at this Time, unless assignable, which I think they are not, and if not, it will then follow, that the Heir to the Powers of Government, under our Charter, is Mr. Springet Penn, a Son of the elder Branch of old Mr. Penn's Family, and as I am informed, is kept out of it, by his Uncles, Messrs Thomas, and Richard Penn, under Pretence, of some Instrument made and executed, by the Young Gentleman's Father, in his Life Time. . . .

I sincerely hope, Your Lordships will, seriously consider, what has been said, and also be pleased, to make proper Allowances, for the Stile, and Address, of an old Fellow, born and educated, in the Wilds of America, at a Time, when the Schools were but few, and the Masters, by no Means Qualified, for that Duty, which they undertook to perform.

Give me Leave my Lords, to conclude with praying, that the Almighty may Direct, and prosper, the Councils, & Determinations, of His Majesty, & his Ministers, and enable them to prosecute, such Measures, as may secure, the Allegiance of America, to the Crown of Britain, to the End of Time, By destroying the Seeds of Rebellion, that now seem to sprout, like Grass in the Spring, and will not be kept down, but by salutary, & prudent Measures, as well as some Degree of Force, to punish the Ring Leaders, in these Riots, that have happened, in every Province, on this Occasion.

I am My Lords, with Great Respect,
Your Lordships Most Obedient
& Most Humble Servt
Jn Hughes

Source: *John Hughes, written in Philadelphia, January 13, 1766.*