

**Daniel Leonard's letter of January 9, 1775 (abridged)**

LETTER V.

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

MY DEAR COUNTRYMEN.

Some of you may perhaps suspect that I have been wantonly scattering firebrands, arrows and death, to gratify a malicious and revengeful disposition: The truth is this; I had seen many excellent detached pieces, but could see no pen at work to trace our calamity to its source, and point out the many adventitious aids, that conspired to raise it to its present height; though I impatiently expected it, being fully convinced that you wait only to know the true state of facts, to rectify whatever is amiss in the province, without any foreign assistance. Others may be induced to think, that I grudge the industrious poor of Boston their scantlings of charity. I will issue a brief in their favour. The opulent, be their political sentiments what they may, ought to relieve them from their sufferings, and those who, by former donations, have been the innocent cause of protracting their sufferings, are under a tenfold obligation to assist them now; and at the same time to make the most explicit declarations, that they did not intend to promote nor ever will join in rebellion. Great allowances are to be made for the crossings, windings and tergiversations of a politician: he is a cunning animal, and as government is said to be founded in opinion, his tricks may be a part of the *arcana imperii*. Had our politicians confined themselves within any reasonable bounds, I never should have molested them; but when I became satisfied, that many innocent, unsuspecting persons were in danger of being drenched with blood and carnage, I could restrain my emotions no longer; and, having once broke the bands of natural reserve, was determined to probe the fore to the bottom, though I was sure to touch the quick. It is very foreign from my intentions to draw down the vengeance of Great-Britain upon the whigs; they are too valuable a part of the community to lose, if they will permit themselves to be saved: I wish nothing worse to the highest of them, than that they may be deprived of their influence, till such time as they shall have changed their sentiments, principles and measures.

Sedition has already been marked through its zigzag path to the present times. When the statute for regulating the government arrived, a match was put to the train, and the mine, that had been long forming, sprung, and threw the whole province into confusion and anarchy. The occurrences of the summer and autumn past are so recent and notorious, that a particular detail of them is unnecessary. Suffice it to say, that every barrier that civil government had erected for the security of property, liberty and life, was broken down; and law, constitution and government trampled under by the rudest invaders. I shall not dwell upon these harsh notes much longer. I shall yet become an advocate for the leading whigs; much must be allowed to men in their situation, forcibly actuated by the chagrin of disappointment, the fear of punishment, and the fascination of hope at the same time.

Perhaps the whole story of empire does not furnish another instance of a forcible opposition to government with so much specious and so little real cause, with such apparent probability without any possibility of success. The stamp-act gave the alarm. The instability of the public counsels, from the Grenvillian administration to the appointment of the earl of Hillsborough to the American department, afforded as great a prospect of success, as the heavy duties, imposed by the stamp-act, did a colour for the opposition. It was necessary to give the history of this matter in its course, offend who it would, because those acts of government, that are called the greatest grievances, became proper and necessary, through the misconduct of our politicians; and the justice of Great-Britain towards us, could not be made apparent without first pointing out that. I intend to consider the acts of the British government, which are held up as the principal grievance, and enquire whether Great-Britain is chargeable with injustice in any one of them; but must first ask your attention to the authority of parliament. I suspect many of our politicians are wrong in their first principle, in denying that the constitutional authority of parliament extends to the colonies; is so, it must not be wondered at, that their whole fabric is so ruinous: I shall not travel through all the arguments that have been adduced, for and against this question, but attempt to reduce the substance of them to a narrow compass, after having taken a cursory view of the British constitution.

The security of the people from internal rapacity and violence, and from foreign invasion, is the end and design of government. The simple forms of government are monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, that is, where the authority of the state is vested in *one*, a *few*, or the *many*. Each of these species of government has advantages peculiar to itself, and would answer the ends of government, were the persons, intrusted with the authority of the state, always guided themselves by unerring wisdom and public virtue; but rulers are not always exempt from the weakness and depravity, which make government necessary to society. Thus monarchy is apt to rush headlong into tyranny, aristocracy to beget faction and multiplied usurpation, and democracy to degenerate into tumult, violence and anarchy. A government, formed upon these three principles in due proportion, is the best calculated to answer the ends of government, and to endure. Such a government is the British constitution, consisting of King, Lords and Commons, which at once includes the principal excellencies, and excludes the principla defects of the other kids of government. It is allowed, both by Englishmen and foreigners, to be the most perfect system that the wisdom of ages has produced. The distributions of power are so just, and the proportions so exact, as at once to support and controul each other. An Englishman glories in being subject to and protected by such a government. The colonies are a part of the British empire. The best writers upon the law of nations tell us, that when a nation takes possession of a distant country, and settles there, that country, though separated from the principal establishment or mother-country, naturally becomes a part of the state, equal with its ancient possessions. Two supreme or independent authorities cannot exist in the same state. It would be what is called *imperium in imperio*, and the height of political absurdity. The analogy between the political and human body is great. Two independent authorities in a state would be like two distinct principles of volition and

action in the human body, dissenting, opposing, and destroying each other. If then we are a part of the British empire, we must be subject to the supreme power of the state, which is vested in the estates of parliament, notwithstanding each of the colonies have legislative and executive powers of their own, delegated or granted to them for the purposes of regulating their own internal police, which are subordinate, and must necessarily be subject, to the checks, controul and regulation of the supreme authority.

This doctrine is not new; but the denial of it is. It is beyond a doubt that it was the sense both of the parent country and our ancestors, that they were to remain subject to parliament; it is evident from the charter itself, and this authority has been exercised by parliament, from time to time, almost ever since the first settlement of the country, and has been expressly acknowledged by our provincial legislatures. It is not less our interest than our duty to continue subject to the authority of parliament, which will be more fully considered hereafter. The principal argument against the authority is this; the Americans are entitled to all the privileges of an englishman; it is the privilege of an englishman to be exempt from all laws that he does not consent to in person, or by representative; the Americans are not represented in parliament, and therefore are exempt from acts of parliament, or, in other words, not subject to its authority. This appears specious; but leads to such absurdities as demonstrate its fallacy. If the colonies are not subject to the authority of parliament, Great-Britain and the colonies must be distinct states, as completely so as England and Scotland were before the union, or as Great-Britain and Hanover are now. The colonies in that case will owe no allegiance to the imperial crown, and perhaps not to the person of the King; as the title to the crown is derived from an act of parliament, made since the settlement of this province, which act respects the imperial crown only. Let us waive this difficulty, and suppose allegiance due from the colonies to the person of the king of Great Britain; he then appears in a new capacity, as king of America, or rather, in several new capacities, as king of Massachusetts, king of Rhode-Island, king of Connecticut, &c. &c. For, if our connection with Great Britain, by the parliament, be dissolved, we shall have none among ourselves; but each colony will become as distinct from the others, as England was from Scotland before the union. Some have supposed, that each state having one and the same person for its king, it is a sufficient connection: Were he an absolute monarch, it might be; but, in a mixed government, it is no union at all. For, as the king must govern each state by its parliament, those several parliaments would pursue the particular interest of its own state; and however well disposed the king might be to pursue a line of interest that was common to all, the checks and controul, that he would meet with, would render it impossible. If the king of Great-Britain has really these new capacities, they ought to be added to his titles; and then another difficulty will arise, the prerogatives of these new crowns have never been defined or limited. Is the monarchical part of the several provincial constitutions to be nearer, or more remote from absolute monarchy, in an inverted ratio to each one's approaching to, or receding from a republic? But let us suppose the same prerogatives inherent in the several American crowns, as are in the imperial crown of Great-Britain; where shall we find the British constitution, that we all agree we are entitled to? We shall seek for it in vain in our provincial assemblies. They are but faint

sketches of the estates of parliament. The houses of representatives or burgesses have not all the powers of the house of commons: in the charter governments they have no more than what is expressly granted by their several charters. The first charters, granted to this province, did not empower the assembly to tax the people at all. Our council-boards are as destitute of the constitutional authority of the house of lords, as their several members are of the noble independence and splendid appendages of peerage. The house of peers is the bulwark of the British constitution, and, thro' successive ages, has withstood the shocks of monarchy, and the sappings of democracy, whilst the constitution gained strength by the conflict. Thus, the supposition of our being independent states, or exempt from the authority of parliament, destroys the very idea of our having a British constitution. The provincial constitutions, considered as subordinate, are generally well adapted to those purposes of government, for which they were intended, that is, to regulate the internal police of the several colonies; but, having no principle of stability within themselves, tho' they may support themselves in moderate times, they would be merged by the violence of turbulent ones. The several colonies would become wholly monarchical or wholly republican, were it not for the checks, controuls, regulations and supports, of the supreme authority of the empire. Thus, the argument that is drawn from their first principle of our being entitled to English liberties, destroys the principle itself; it deprives us of the bill of rights, and all the benefits resulting from the revolution, of English laws, and of the British constitution.

Our patriots have been so intent upon building up American rights, that they have overlooked the rights of Great-Britain, and our own interest. Instead of proving, that we were entitled to privileges which our fathers knew our situation would not admit us to enjoy, they have been arguing away our most essential rights. If there be any grievance, it does not consist in our being subject to the authority of parliament, but in our not having an actual representation in it. Were it possible for the colonies to have an equal representation in parliament, and were refused it upon proper application, I confess, I should think it a grievance: But, at present it seems to be allowed, by all parties, to be impracticable, considering that the colonies are distant from Great-Britain a thousand transmarine leagues. If that be the case, the right or privilege that we complain of being deprived of, is not withheld by Britain; but the first principles of government, and the immutable laws of nature, render it impossible for us to enjoy it. This is apparently the meaning of that celebrated passage in Governor Hutchinson's letter, that rang through the continent, viz. there must be an abridgement of what is called English liberties. He subjoins, that he had never yet seen the projection, whereby a colony, three thousand miles from the parent-state, might enjoy all the privileges of *that* parent-state and be subject to it, or in words to that effect. The obnoxious sentence, taken detached from the letter, appears very unfriendly to the colonies; but, considered in connection with the other parts of the letter, is but a necessary result from our situation. Allegiance and protection are reciprocal. It is our highest interest to continue a part of the British empire; and equally our duty to remain subject to the authority of parliament. Our own internal police may generally be regulated by our provincial legislatures; but, in national concerns, or where our own assemblies do not answer the ends of government, with respect to ourselves, the

ordinances or interposition of the great council of the nation is necessary. In this case, the major must rule the minor. After many more centuries shall have rolled away, long after we, who are now bustling upon the stage of life, shall have been received to the bosom of mother earth, and our names are forgotten; the colonies may be so far increased as to have the balance of wealth, numbers, and power in their favour. The good of the empire may then make it necessary to fix the seat of government here; and some future George, equally the friend of mankind with him who now sways the British scepter, may cross the Atlantic, and rule Great Britain by an American parliament.

MASSACHUSETTENSIS.

January 9, 1775.