

Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania

John Dickinson, a Philadelphia lawyer and wealthy landowner, wrote twelve "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania: to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies". They began to appear in the Pennsylvania Chronicle and Universal Advertiser under the simple pseudonym 'a Farmer.'

Using constitutional argument mixed with political economy, Dickinson sought to persuade everyone, on either side of the Atlantic, of the unconstitutionality of ignoring the rights of Englishmen in the Colonies.

Letter One (December 2, 1767) introduced the fictional farmer and then launched into a warning to the colonies that without unity of resistance to such efforts, all may fall separately.

Letter Two (December 7, 1767) took to task the Revenue Act as unconstitutional. It argued for free trade and the end of taxes on goods that the colonies are not allowed to manufacture and must import from the homeland.

Letter Three (December 14, 1767) appealed strongly for a peaceful and dignified settlement of arguments between colonies and Crown, and displayed his respect for order which marked all of his opinion in years to come.

Letter Four (December 21, 1767) discussed taxes and the right to representation before any taxes - internal or external - were to be levied.

Letter Five (December 28, 1767) asked why there was this sudden departure from the traditional since taxes were now being passed for the sole task of raising revenue from the colonies. "The Farmer" blamed those who had proposed them for alienating the affections of the Kings' subjects.

Letter Six (January 4, 1768) remarked upon the ways that "all artful rulers" extend their power unconstitutionally and warned the colonies to be ever vigilant of what future actions from the Parliament might mean.

Letter Seven (January 11, 1768) reiterated that although taxes may be small and the burden tolerable in business terms, the precedent is the fatal danger that makes the colonists slaves.

Letter Eight (January 18, 1768) reinforced the unconstitutionality of taxation without representation, especially concerning the way that the government spends the money raised, in ways not helpful, or even dangerous, to those who pay them.

Letter Nine (January 25, 1768) lectured colonists on the vital need for local representation and established assemblies.

Letter Ten (February 1, 1768) was another warning against the dangers of the hostile atmosphere in the British Parliament and the progression of tyranny, after precedent has been set and allowed to stand.

Letter Eleven (February 8, 1768) again dealt with precedent and said that new unconstitutional designs of government must be recognized and halted, before they become entrenched.

Letter Twelve (February 15, 1768) ended the series with the common sense argument that all colonies and legislatures must be united in opposition to all attempts to install unconstitutional precedent, even though all interests may not be served.

The letters were later published in pamphlets, reprinted in colonial newspapers, and read widely in the colonies and Britain. There is little doubt that the flood of petitions and calls for boycotts up and down the colonies owed much to these letters. Perhaps most importantly, the concept of unity started to take root.

The eventual result was the calling of the Continental Congress and the unity of purpose that John Dickinson had advocated, but not in the directions that he had argued in his letters and would continue to argue at the Congress.

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