

## Letter from Jesse Root to Governour Trumbull

Hartford, October 27, 1776.

PLEASE YOUR HONOUR: The **power of this Committee, by act of Assembly, extends only to prisoners of war, to provide for them, and to treat them with humanity, according to their rank, &c., and the Committee met with little difficulty in ordering the prisoners, except with Governour *Skeen* and Captain *McKay*, until the late successes of the *British* arms, which has elated the prisoners and Tories, and some of them, in consequence thereof, are grown saucy and troublesome.** Not to punish this insolence will be imputed to timidity, and improved to dishearten our own people; and to make orders for their punishment without executing them is worse than nothing; and the Committee must execute their own orders themselves, unless they can persuade somebody to do it for them, or suffer the mortification of seeing them despised, for **they are not invested with power to command any civil or military assistance.** Martial law is almost the only law they are acquainted with, and a military force what they most dread. I am desired by the Committee to represent to your Honour, in their name, that some further regulations are necessary, and that the Committee have power to command assistance, to order a guard at the gaol, or over any of the prisoners when needed, and to punish such guard for neglect on duty, &c., &c., &c. There is now a guard kept at the gaol, but we are obliged to beg and plead to get them; and behave as they will, we have no power to punish them. The Tories of our own State are busy at the gaol with the prisoners, and of such we have no power more than other individuals, &c.

**What further regulations and powers are necessary and safe to be made and given to this Committee is humbly submitted to the wisdom of your Honour** to prescribe and grant, by your Honour's most obedient, humble servant,

JESSE ROOT,

*In behalf of the Committee.*

Source: *Letter from Jesse Root to Governour Trumbull: The Committee desires further powers, for the punishment and suppression of Tories.*  
American Archives Series 5, Volume 2, Page 1267

**Questions: Letter from Jesse Root to Governour Trumbull**

1. How does “this committee” feel about the extent of their power?
2. Do they have enough or too little?
3. Where does this committee say they are receiving their power?
4. Does the letter say from where the War Office’s authority originates? If so, from where?

# Letter from Richard Peters to Maryland Council of Safety

War Office, October 26, 1776.

GENTLEMEN: I am directed by the Board of War, in answer to your letter of the 18th instant, to inform, you that it is their opinion, and they request you will direct, that the Rifle company you mention in your letter, be immediately marched to *Philadelphia*. If clothes cannot be provided for them where they are, which would be much the best, as clothing of all sorts is extremely difficult to be had at *Philadelphia*, and blankets are not to be procured at any rate, they might be armed and accoutred, but might lie here a very considerable time before clothes and blankets could be furnished. You'll therefore be pleased to endeavour at supplying them with blankets and whatever other necessaries can be had your way, as this Stale is drained of all articles required by the army. If muskets were given them instead of rifles, the service would be more benefitted, as there is a superabundance of riflemen in the army. **Were it in authority of the Congress to supply muskets, they would speedily reduce the number of rifles, and replace them with the former, as they are more easily kept in order, can be fired oftener, and have the advantage of bayonets.**

I have the honour to be your very obedient servant,

RICHARD PETERS, *Secretary*.

To the honourable Council of Safety of *Maryland*.

Source: [\*Letter from Richard Peters to Maryland Council of Safety: Were it in the power of Congress to supply muskets they would speedily reduce the number of rifles.\*](#) American Archives Series 5, Volume 2, Page 1247

1. How does the War Office feel about the extent of their authority?
2. Do they have enough or too little?
3. What would the War Office do if they had more authority?
4. Does the letter say from where the War Office's authority originates? If so, from where?

## Extract of a Letter from John Jay to Gouverneur Morris

**Had I been vested with absolute power in this State, I have often said and still think that I would last spring have desolated all *Long-Island, Staten-Island*, the City and County of *New-York*, and all that part of the County of *West Chester* which lies below the mountains. I would then have stationed the main body of the army in the mountains on the east, and eight or ten thousand men in the highlands, on the west side of the river. I would have directed the river at *Fort Montgomery*, which is nearly at the southern extremity of the mountains, to be so shallowed as to afford only depth sufficient for an *Albany* sloop, and all the southern passes and defiles in the mountains to be strongly fortified.** Nor do I think the shallowing of the river a romantick scheme. Rocky mountains rise immediately from the shores. The breadth is not very great, though the depth is. But what cannot eight or ten thousand men well worked effect? According to this plan of defence the State would be absolutely impregnable against all the world on the sea side, and would have nothing to fear except from the way of the lake. Should the enemy gain the river, even below the mountains, I think I foresee that a retreat would become necessary, and I can't forbear wishing that a desire of saving a few acres may not lead us into difficulty.

Source: *Extract of a letter from John Jay to Gouverneur Morris: Plan of defence he would have pursued had he been vested with absolute power.*  
American Archives Series 5, Volume 2, Page 0921

1. How does John Jay feel about the extent of his power?
2. In his opinion, does he have enough or too little?
3. When John Jay says he wants absolute power, why does this seem to contradict the values which are so central to the American Revolution?
4. As the President of the Continental Congress, do you think John Jay should have expressed a wish like this?

**Letter from General Washington to General Schuyler: Cannot send a supply of nails; has no power to give directions in respect to building barracks in Schenectady**

Head-Quarters, Harlem Heights, September 27, 1776.

DEAR SIR: I yesterday received your favour of the 23d instant. The nails wanted by General *Gates* cannot be sent from hence, our own demands being great and pressing, and supplies but small.

**In respect to building barracks in the town *Schenectady*, if they are necessary I suppose it must be done; however, I do not apprehend I have any power to give directions in the case, nor do I mean to do it. You had better mention the matter to Congress, and have their opinion and determination upon it.**

A paper, of which the enclosed is a copy, came to my hands yesterday morning. This account makes the enemy's force in *Canada* greater than what we supposed it to be; their naval force on the lakes to surpass any thing we had an idea of. The person who communicated it is not known; he, however, I believe, is among those sent from *Canada* by General *Carleton*, and who have lately arrived at *New-York*. I am in hopes it is a good deal exaggerated.

I am, dear sir, your most obedient servant,

GO. WASHINGTON.

To Hon. Major-General *Schuyler*, Northern Department.

Source: *Letter from General Washington to General Schuyler: Cannot send a supply of nails, has no power to give directions in respect to building barracks in Schenectady.* American Archives Series 5, Volume 2, Page 0567

1. How does General Washington feel about the extent of his power?
2. Do he have enough or too little power?
3. Does the letter say from where General Washington's authority originates? If so, from where?
4. What is Washington's advice to his fellow general?

## Arthur Lee to C. W. F. Dumas

London, November 15th, 1776.

DEAR SIR: The indispensable business of my profession has hitherto prevented me from complying, as I wished, with the desire of your very obliging favours.

**You will have seen, by the proceedings of Parliament, how decided the King is in prosecuting the *American* war. For, in truth, he alone is Minister, and his will governs with absolute sway. At the same time the powers which he has given to Lord *Howe* appear, from his declaration in *America*, to be most ample.** That, however, I rather attribute to what is deemed the art of government, than to any pacifick or redressing intention. We can never forget the perfidy of making Lord *Botetourt* declare to the Assembly, that the revenue acts should be repealed, when in fact no such thing was intended or done; **and the Secretary of State being ordered to tell the agents of Congress that his Majesty had received their petition very graciously, and from the importance of it would lay it before his two Houses of Parliament,** when, at the same time, the same Secretary wrote, by his Majesty's commands, to all the Governours of *America*, **denominating that very Congress an illegal meeting, their grievances pretended, and ordering them to prevent their meeting again.** These facts are too decisive to leave a doubt of the credit that is due to the promises of this Court, and, at this very time, they are abusing the *Howes* for negotiating; the language of Court being, "We sent them to use their hands, and they are employing their heads."

The *Rockingham* part of the Opposition are determined upon seceding from Parliament, in which Lord *Shelburne*, Lord *Camden*, and the Duke of *Grafton* refuse to accompany them for two reasons: 1st, Because the feelings of the publick are not high enough for so decisive a measure; and, 2dly, Because the others will not agree to make the great fundamental abuse of the Constitution, as well as the temporary misconduct of Government, the groundwork of that secession. In a word, because they will not declare that the object of the measure is to obtain the abolition of corruption, and not merely the change of those who minister it. This schism will, however, reduce opposition so as to leave the Court at perfect ease from that quarter...

ARTHUR LEE.

Source: *Letter from Arthur Lee to C. W. F. Dumas: The King is decided in prosecuting the American war, he alone is Minister, and his will govern with absolute sway, the powers given to Lord Howe, are rather to be attributed to the art of Government than to any specific intention.* American Archives Series 5, Volume 3, Page 0692

1. How does Arthur Lee feel about the king's power?
2. From the letter's tone does Mr. Lee feel that the king has too much or too little power?
3. How do Mr. Lee and the king feel about the authority of the Continental Congress?

## To the Assembly of Pennsylvania

**Would it not conduce to the immediate safety of the State of *Pennsylvania*, if a Dictator were appointed for three or six months, with full powers to exert the strength of the State in any way he should think proper against our enemies?**

Has not the want of a suitable person, entrusted with such powers in time of war, ended in the ruin of several of the most flourishing Republicks of antiquity?

Are not the present ravages of the enemy in the States of *New-York* and *New-Jersey* owing to the want of suitable persons entrusted with absolute power to compel every individual of those States to concur in repelling the common enemy?

**Does not the languor with which all the Legislatures in *America* move in the present alarming exigency of our affairs fully demonstrate that placing so little power in the hands of the executive branch of Government, is a most essential and fundamental fault in all our new Constitutions?**

A CITIZEN.

Philadelphia, December 7, 1776.

Sources: [\*A Citizen of the Assembly of Pennsylvania: Suggests the appointment of a Dictator for three or six months, with full powers to exert the strength of the State in any way he should think proper against the enemy.\*](#) American Archives Series 5, Volume 3, Page 1107

1. How does the anonymous writer feel about the extent of the executive branch's power?
2. Do the executive branch have too much or too little power?
3. Does the letter say from where the executive's authority originates? If so, from where?
4. Do you believe the author of this letter agrees with many of the Enlightenment ideas and values, such as separation of powers, civil liberties, or natural rights?