NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Thomas Paine's Response to Lord North's Speech on the British Peace Proposals

Thomas Paine, whose book Common Sense proposed the formation of a "declaration for independence" and stirred thousands to the cause of independence in 1776, supported the cause throughout the war effort with his American Crisis series of pamphlets and numerous newspaper publications. The newspapers played a crucial role in the American Revolution by supplying a war of words, which kept the colonists focused on their goal of independence. The printers had become active participants early in the war partially due to their anger at the British Stamp Act, which taxed newspapers.1 Writers, using multiple pseudonyms to mask their identities and produce an appearance of greater numbers, produced poems, essays, and letters for the newspapers to combat loyalists as well as the pernicious effects of fear and ignorance among the colonists.2

Paine's use of pseudonyms kept some of his newspaper contributions from being identified for many years. In 1951 A. Owen Aldridge identified a number of pieces, including an article written by Paine in York, Pennsylvania, on June 10, 1778, and published in the Pennsylvania Gazette on June 13, 1778, signed "Common Sense," which had not been included in the published canon of Paine's writings.3 Similarly, it appears that Paine contributed a letter and associated commentary in the April 25, 1778, "Postscript" edition of the Pennsylvania Packet, published in Lancaster, which has also been overlooked. Addressed to "R. L." and signed "T. P.,” there is ample

1 Philip Davidson, Propaganda and the American Revolution 1763-1783 (Chapel Hill, 1941), 226.
2 Davidson, Propaganda, 241-42.

THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY
Vol. CXXI, No. 4 (October 1997)
evidence to suggest that T. P. is Thomas Paine. The identity of R. L. is somewhat problematic.

As the British overtook Philadelphia in September 1777, the Continental Congress moved west, first to Lancaster, where the Pennsylvania Assembly had settled, then across the Susquehanna River to York, where the Continental Congress met from September 30, 1777, to June 27, 1778. Thomas Paine was in York and Lancaster from February through June 1778, serving as the secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Continental Congress. The Committee for Foreign Affairs worked with the American commissioners, Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee, to secure aid from French king Louis XVI. The victory of Gen. Horatio Gates over Gen. John Burgoyne at Saratoga in the fall of 1777 gave the French enough confidence in the American effort that they negotiated two treaties with the American commissioners: a treaty of alliance and a treaty of amity and commerce. The treaties were signed on February 6, 1778, and arrived in York on May 2, 1778.

Paine had been hired by the Pennsylvania Executive Council to travel with Gen. George Washington and gather intelligence during the fall of 1777. Paine joined the troops during the Battle of Germantown and was at Valley Forge when they assembled their “huts.” During late December and most of January, Paine stayed with the family of his friend Col. Joseph Kirkbride near Bordentown, New Jersey. Paine then traveled to camp at Valley Forge, where he stayed until February 9. Paine traveled towards York with Francis Hopkinson and John Wharton, but then backtracked to Lancaster, probably due to the ice-blocked Susquehanna River, arriving on February 12, according to Christopher Marshall, another Philadelphian who was staying in Lancaster and who recorded his contact with Paine.

Marshall's diary entries suggest that Paine stayed with him until February 17, when Paine traveled to York with James Smith, York's signer of the

---

6 Ibid., 486.
8 Christopher Marshall, Diary, 1773-93, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Feb. 12, 13, 1778.
Declaration of Independence.  

Upon his return to Lancaster, Paine stayed with the William Henry family for the next few months, traveling a number of times to York on congressional business. Paine's stay with the Henry family was recounted by William Henry's son, John Joseph Henry. This account, written after the publication of Paine's *Age of Reason* and clearly influenced by a religious animus towards Paine, suggested that he was relatively idle during this time. Marshall places Paine back in Lancaster on March 8 and 9. Paine was also in York during March, however, since the first part of *American Crisis No. 5* was datelined "York Town," March 18, 1778. The second part was datelined Lancaster, March 21, 1778.

From Lancaster, Paine wrote to Henry Laurens, president of Congress, on April 11, regarding the trial in Lancaster of men accused of counterfeiting Continental money. Marshall places Paine in Lancaster on April 17. However, Paine probably traveled to York before April 22, 1778, because this day had been declared an official day of fasting and prayer by the Continental Congress. He may have traveled to York with William Henry, who was mentioned in the diary of the Moravian congregation in York on April 22. Paine wrote two letters to Benjamin Franklin on May 16 and a letter to George Washington on June 5, all from York.

After the British received word of their defeat at Saratoga and the French treaties with the United States, Lord North delivered a speech on two proposed acts of Parliament on February 17, 1778. The first act proposed suspending taxation, the second proposed creating a peace commission to sign treaties with the colonists. The British, thinking that the colonists might

---

9 Marshall, Diary, Feb. 14, 15, 16, 17, 1778. Smith allowed his law office to be used by the Board of War and the Committee for Foreign Affairs.


11 Marshall, Diary, March 8, 9, 1778.


13 Ibid., 176.


15 Marshall, Diary, April 17, 1778.

16 *Diary of First Moravian Church, York, April 22, 1778.* Henry was appointed superintendent of arms and military accouterments on April 12 by the Continental Congress. See Worthington C. Ford, *Journals of the Continental Congress* (34 vols., Washington, 1904-37), 10:380-81.


pressure Congress into a peace agreement before the arrival of the French treaties, circulated the peace proposals through some Philadelphia newspapers in April. George Washington sent word of the British peace proposals to Congress via letter on April 18, 1778.  

Members of the Continental Congress were concerned that the peace proposals would appeal to many colonists who had just suffered a long, hard winter, including the loss of many troops at Valley Forge. Samuel Chase wrote to Thomas Johnson on April 20, 1778: “The manifest Intention is to amuse Us with a Prospect of Peace & to relax our Preparations. I hope my Countrymen will have too much good Sense to be deceived. I think it would be advisable immediately to publish this Attempt, but I hope it will be attended with some Remarks to expose its Design, & remove the baneful Effects it may have on the credulous & weak among the People. Mr. Paca has Leisure—it ought not to be attempted to be suppressed.” 

John Henry wrote to Thomas Johnson on April 20: “I dread the impressions it will make upon the minds of many of our people. If it should, and I have no doubt of it, make its appearance in the form of a Law, it will prove more dangerous to our cause than ten thousand of their best troops.” 

Henry Laurens wrote to George Clinton on April 20: “I need not trouble Your Excellency with my sentiments on this attempt nor on the proper means for exposing it to complete contempt & ridicule.” Laurens also wrote to James Duane on April 20: “your Morris & our Drayton have it in hand. I make no doubt but that we shall return it decently tarred & feathered.” Charles Carroll of Carrollton wrote to Thomas Johnson on April 21: “I wish you would employ some ingenious writer to combat & expose the perfidiousness of our Enemies.” The Virginia delegates Francis Lightfoot Lee, John Banister, and T. Adams wrote to Patrick Henry on April 21: “We have only to observe that it may mislead the ignorant, & alienate the Minds of the wavering unless it is made public, & with its Publication such Strictures are
made upon the probable Effects of it as may contribute to place the Subject in its true Light before the People.”

There was evidence that some colonists, including leaders like James Wilson, would be disposed towards peace proposals. Samuel Huntington even proposed a “Friendly and commercial perpetual alliance with Great Britain.” It was clear that the British peace proposals threatened to further divide the colonists, who had clearly been divided over Washington’s strategy at Valley Forge. A number of colonists formed what was later called the “Conway Cabal,” a plot to replace commander in chief George Washington, who had lost Philadelphia, with General Gates, who had been victorious at Saratoga. Even Paine’s friend Benjamin Rush, who had talked Paine into writing Common Sense, who had signed the Declaration of Independence, and who was a military physician, sent an unsigned letter from York during January of 1778 to Patrick Henry criticizing Washington’s leadership.

The congressional committee, formed on April 20 and charged with studying and reporting on the peace proposals, was made up of Gouverneur Morris, William Henry Drayton, and Francis Dana. Their report, which was addressed by Congress on April 22, asserted that anyone other than Congress who entered into an agreement with the British commissioners would be considered an enemy of the United States and that Congress would enter into a peace agreement with Britain only after the British withdrew their ships and army or declared America independent. The report also declared that “the said bills are intended to operate upon the hopes and fears of the good people of these states, so as to create divisions among them, and a defection from the common cause, now, by the blessing of Divine Providence, drawing near to a favorable issue.”

Lord North’s speech and Congress’s response were printed in the Pennsylvania Gazette on April 24, 1778. The Gazette was published by Hall and Sellers, who had been requested on October 17, 1777, by the Continental Congress’s Committee of Intelligence to move their printing operations

25 Ibid., 9:466.
26 Einhorn, “The Reception,” 194.
28 David Freeman Hawke, U.S. Colonial History: Readings and Documents (New York, 1966), 483-84. Patrick Henry sent the letter to Washington, who identified the handwriting as Rush’s.
30 Ibid., 10:378.
to York to print official congressional intelligence.\textsuperscript{31} Hall and Sellers also printed paper money, congressional proclamations, and the Articles of Confederation. John Dunlap, another Philadelphia printer, also moved his printing operations to Lancaster from September 1777 to July 1778. In Lancaster, Dunlap published his newspaper, the \textit{Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser}, as well as Paine's \textit{American Crisis No. 5}, an almanac, and the Articles of Confederation.

The \textit{Pennsylvania Packet} "Postscript" dated April 25, 1778, was devoted to Lord North's speech; it contains commentary, Lord North's speech, an anonymous article entitled "The Independent Whig No. 1" by A. B., the letter from T. P. to R. L., and, finally, Congress's response to the proposals.\textsuperscript{32}

Just before and after the transcript of Lord North's speech in the "Postscript" are paragraphs that appear to be editorial commentary written by Paine designed to frame the speech in the ridicule desired by members of Congress.

The preface paragraph states:

The following is the Speech of Lord North, in the British House of Commons, February 17th, 1778. The public curiosity for knowing what effects our manly and virtuous fortitude, perseverance and victories, have produced in the \textit{Councils} of our enemies (for we are sure they have produced none in their \textit{hearts}) must, at this time, be very great; we have, therefore, with the utmost expedition, published the Speech, entire. A full and candid examination of the several parts and matters therein, will be published in the Crisis, No. 6, which is preparing for the press. All the remarks we shall at present make, are, that our unprincipled enemies are at last sunk in that pit of despair, which, sooner or later, will infallibly be the portion of wicked men, and all those who associate with them. Our firmness in Council and in the field, our successes at home and abroad, the importance in which we are considered, and the respect with which we are treated, by the other European powers, have made those guilty enemies of ours to tremble, who now, finding they must be plunged into a European, as well as an American war, are meanly endeavouring to seduce us into a share of that destruction which they have brought upon themselves.


\textsuperscript{32} "A. B." may have been Francis Hopkinson, who traveled towards York with Paine and who had authored numerous pieces under the initials "A. B." for the \textit{Pennsylvania Magazine} when Paine was editor in 1775. See David Freeman Hawke, \textit{Paine} (New York, 1974), 29.
Several aspects of this preface point to Paine's authorship. First there is a reference to the subject matter of "Crisis, No. 6" (probably known only to Paine, since it was not published until fall 1778), along with a statement suggesting that the preface "remarks" are a sampling of "Crisis, No. 6." Second, the terminology is too colloquial to be that of printer John Dunlap, who would most likely have used the full title with roman numerals ("The American Crisis Number VI"), particularly since Dunlap printed *The American Crisis Number V* and advertised it as such in his newspaper. Paine used the colloquial "Crisis, No. 6" in the postscript to an article he wrote in York and published on June 10, 1778, in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. In that postscript, Paine again promised that "Crisis, No. 6" was forthcoming: "N. B. The CRISIS, No. 6, which is ready for the press, will be published as soon as possible. It has been delayed in order to take in a larger compass of affairs than was at first intended. The author cannot promise the exact time, as it is lengthy and the printers very busy. Such News-papers as choose to publish the above remarks are desired to insert this note. C. S." 33 C. S. refers to Paine's pseudonym "Common Sense."

There is also a similarity of expression between the preface and *American Crisis No. 5*. In the latter, Paine wrote: "To the fiercer vices of former ages they have added the dregs and scummings of the most finished rascality and are so completely sunk in serpentine deceit, that there is not left among them one generous enemy." 34 Paine also wrote: "Never did a nation invite destruction upon itself with the eagerness and the ignorance with which Britain has done." 35 Those statements from *American Crisis No. 5* are similar to: "All the remarks we shall at present make, are, that our unprincipled enemies are at last sunk in that pit of despair, which, sooner or later, will infallibly be the portion of wicked men, and all those who associate with them" and "are meanly endeavouring to seduce us into a share of that destruction which they have brought upon themselves" from the preface. There is clearly a continuum of thought and expression between Paine's *American Crisis No. 5* and the Packet "Postscript" comments.

Lord North's speech is followed by this commentary:

---

34 Ibid., 163.
35 Ibid.
This, gentle Reader, is the famous Lord North, who declared \textit{He would not treat till he had America at his feet}.—However, so far as a sense of their own wretched situation may make them anxious for putting an end to the war, we ought to be thankful to the great disposer of events, for so mercifully humbling and casting them down, and as to their silly and contemptible nonsense about Acts of Parliament, pardons, Governors, and the equally absurd jargon of America \textit{conquering herself} by rescinding her Independence, in order to be \textit{taken care of by those who cannot take care of themselves}, must all be imputed to that ignorance of mankind, that corruption of heart, that frantic system of politics, which have made Britain wretched, and set her up as a laughing stock for the rest of Europe. A good army in the field, will make the Commissioners, when they come, have very different ideas to what they may at first set out with. Britain may be thankful for peace with America at any rate, for without it, Britain must be ruined.

These comments echo the following statement Paine made in \textit{American Crisis No. 5}: \textit{“how abominably absurd is the idea of being hereafter governed by a set of men who have been guilty of forgery, perjury, treachery, theft, and every species of villainy which the lowest wretches on earth could practice or invent.”} 36

Paine’s authorship of the R. L. letter is supported by several pieces of evidence. First, Paine used his initials “T. P.” to sign at least two other publications. In the February 4, 1779, \textit{Pennsylvania Packet}, Paine used his initials “T. P.” in a note about someone stealing his pseudonym “Common Sense.” 37 He also used his initials to sign at least one other publication later in his life. 38 Paine’s initials provided a more personal signature than his pseudonyms like “Common Sense.” He used T. P. in the postscript of his letter to Henry Laurens, April 11, 1778. 39

The writing style of the letter closely follows the commentary surrounding the speech and again mirrors \textit{American Crisis No. 5}, poking fun at Lord North in the same manner that Paine had poked fun at General Howe. The style of this writing is also similar to Paine’s “Forester Letters,” particularly “Forester Letter 2,” in which Paine had ridiculed and poked fun at “Cato,”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item Hawke, \textit{Paine}, 373.
\item Philip Foner, \textit{Complete Writings}, 2:1143-53.
\end{itemize}
who had criticized Paine's book *Common Sense* in the newspapers in 1776. Paine wrote: "All the havoc and desolation of unnatural war; the destruction of thousands; the burning and depopulating of towns and cities; the ruin and separation of friends and families, are just sufficient to extort from Cato, this one callous confession. . . . Perhaps when we recollect the long and unabated cruelty of the British Court toward us, and remember the many prayers which we have put up both to them and for them, that the following piece of declamation of Cato can hardly be equalled [sic], either for absurdity or insanity." These statements are similar in style and content to the following statements from the "R. L." letter:

When we reflect on the cruel outrages, the unprovoked insults, the burnings and devastations we have suffered from these vindictive enemies; when we look towards our captiv’d cities and think on our slaughter’d brethren, then shall we [be] able to judge of the propriety of his Lordship's assersion and see the grounds he has for supposing there is still so much affection left in America towards Great Britain. After exerting the plenitude of his power to do us every possible injury, and finding he cannot torture us to his purpose, he then insolently appeals to our affections—yes, my Lord! affections and prejudices for Great Britain we once had, and strong ones too, but you have effectually erased them, beyond the possibility of restoration. Our confidence in the clemency and justice of the British Court is levelled with the earth, and who shall build it up again?

The phrase "When we reflect on the cruel outrages" is similar to phraseology used in a number of works that have been attributed to Thomas Paine, including "A Serious Thought," which began with the phrase "When I reflect on the horrid cruelties exercised by Britain"; "Reflection on Titles,"

---


which began with the phrase "When I reflect on the pompous titles bestowed on unworthy men, I feel an indignity that instructs me to despise the absurdity"; and the preface to the Pennsylvania Antislavery Bill of 1780, which began with the phrase "When we contemplate our abhorrence of that condition, to which the arms and tyranny of Great Britain were exerted."  

The letter and commentary also contain characteristic words which Paine used in many of his early writings such as "manly," "sunk," "wretched," and "absurd," which probably helped to broaden his appeal to the common colonist. Thomas Jefferson, when describing Paine's writing style, wrote: "No writer has exceeded Paine in ease and familiarity of style, in perspicuity of expression, happiness of elucidation and in simple and unassuming language."  

Paine, though self-educated in many subjects, never attended college and avoided the Latin phrases and stilted legalistic style that characterized many of the college-educated writers of the period. Also consistent with Paine's authorship is the statement in which "T. P." lauds the "prudence" of Washington's "defensive" strategy of camping at Valley Forge, which had come under criticism from those involved in the Conway Cabal. In a letter sent to George Washington from Philadelphia on January 31, 1779 (in which Paine at one point referred to Richard Henry Lee as Col. R. Lee, leaving out the "H"), Paine wrote: "... I likewise take the liberty of mentioning to you that at the time some discontents from the army and the country last winter were doing you great injustice, I published the fifth No. of the Crisis. I hoped that by bringing your former services in view to shame them out, or at least to convince them of their error."  

In a letter published in 1802 "To the Citizens of the United States," Paine wrote: "When a party was forming, in the latter end of 1777, and beginning of 1778, of which John Adams was one, to remove Mr. Washington from the command of the army on the complaint that he did nothing, I wrote the fifth number of the Crisis, and published it at Lancaster (Congress then being at York Town, in Pennsylvania), to ward off that mediated blow."  

Although there are clearly multiple lines of evidence which point to Paine's authorship of the letter, the letter does little to clarify the identity of the addressee, "R. L." It is clear from the content of the letter that Paine

---

expected communication from "R. L." in the near future. The letter could be a reprint of a letter from Thomas Paine to a friend with the initials "R. L." (Robert Lockhart, perhaps) in Lancaster, since letters were often reprinted in the newspapers at this time for their propaganda value. There were only two individuals with the initials "R. L." with whom Paine corresponded in his documented letters: Robert R. Livingston, who was chancellor of New York at the time, and Richard Henry Lee, a member of the Continental Congress from Virginia. Neither individual was in Lancaster during April 1778, however.

Although Paine no doubt had some contact with Robert R. Livingston when Livingston was a member of the Continental Congress from 1775 to 1777 and served on the committee charged with formulating the Declaration of Independence, there is no evidence of correspondence with Livingston until 1782 when Paine apparently sent a letter to Livingston, then secretary of Foreign Affairs, outlining Paine's plan for "consolidating the States into a Federal Government." Paine became involved in a plan with Robert R. Livingston, George Washington, Gouverneur Morris, and Robert Morris around that time to write in support of strengthening the national government, with Robert R. Livingston providing the information to Paine.

There is no evidence that Paine and Robert R. Livingston communicated with each other in 1778, though there is evidence that Livingston may have received the April 29, 1778, edition of the Pennsylvania Packet. On May 3, 1778, Gouverneur Morris forwarded Livingston the Pennsylvania Gazette from York and promised he would try to find a copy of the "Lancaster Gazette" with the latest news. Morris did not mention the "R. L." letter.

Richard Henry Lee is the more likely candidate for "R. L." He had been close to Paine since Lee first made the motion for the formation of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Lee was also a member of the Committee for Foreign Affairs for which Paine was secretary. Paine wrote to Lee on October 30, 1777, when Lee was in York with Congress and Paine was with the army around Philadelphia. In his letter, Paine discussed fighting at "Grey's Ferry," General Burgoyne's surrender, and the need for a military

---

46 Davidson, Propaganda, 238-39.
47 Philip Foner, Complete Writings, 2:692.
However, Lee was in Virginia from the beginning of December 1777 through the end of April 1778, first due to an illness, then to tend to an ill brother who died in April. Lee mentioned looking forward to hearing from "Common Sense" in January of 1778. Lee did not return to Congress until May 1, 1778.

Possibly Paine used the letter in the newspaper to communicate with Richard Henry Lee, as well as to support the cause. In March 1778 the Committee for Foreign Affairs had requested that John Dunlap forward copies of the newspaper to them regularly. Paine may have reasoned that Richard Henry Lee would obtain a copy of the Pennsylvania Packet at some point. Lee, who had written to Hall and Sellers from his position on the Committee of Intelligence requesting them to move their print shop to York, later expressed a preference for the Pennsylvania Packet in July of 1778, when he started a subscription to the Packet, rather than the Gazette, for his brother, Francis Lightfoot Lee.

Paine probably wrote the "R. L." letter while in York because the letter points out that the speech had been sent to Lancaster. Because the timeline is so short, the letter having been written on the twenty-fourth and the "Postscript" printed on the twenty-fifth, it is likely that Paine traveled with the letter to Lancaster on the twenty-fourth and contributed the additional editorial commentary at Dunlap’s print shop. The commentary, unlike the letter, clearly acknowledges the presence of the speech in Lancaster.

Looking broadly at content, the beginning of Paine’s letter is a sarcastic analysis of the flaws in Lord North’s arguments and the British position in general. The end of the "R. L." letter is a small motivational piece meant to rally the colonists around the cause and remind them of the "barrier" of independence that had been raised and the consequences of backing down that late in the effort. Paine, by effectively pointing out the weaknesses in Lord North’s position, turns Lord North’s speech into a symbol of American strength.

Paine’s letter was an opening salvo in a public relations campaign waged by many writers in the newspapers in the ensuing months to keep the minds

50 Philip Foner, Complete Writings, 2:1138-40.
51 Ballagh, Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:373, 376, 381, 398, 403.
52 Ford, Journals of the Continental Congress, 10:413.
54 Ballagh, Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:421.
of the colonists focused on independence. Many others, including New Jersey governor William Livingston, responded to the call for critical analysis by composing numerous letters for publication in the newspapers to combat the effect of the British peace proposals. It has been asserted that the propaganda campaign may have been more important than the French treaties in keeping minds focused on independence.

Once back in Philadelphia in July, Paine continued to attack the British peace commissioners. He contributed a sarcastic poem in the July 28, 1778, *Pennsylvania Packet* dedicated to British commissioner George Johnstone, who was accused of attempting to bribe members of Congress. In the fall of 1778, Paine finally finished *American Crisis No. 6*, dedicated to the Earl of Carlisle, General Clinton, and William Eden, members of the British peace commission. Paine also devoted a number of comments in *American Crisis No. 7* to the peace commission, including the following statement to the British ministry: "You, gentlemen, have studied the ruin of your country, from which it is not within your abilities to rescue her. Your attempts to recover are as ridiculous as your plans which involved her are detestable. The Commissioners being about to depart will probably bring you this, and with it my sixth number to them; and in so doing they carry back more *Common Sense* than they brought, and you likewise will have more than when you sent them." Carlisle and Eden left November 27, 1778.

During this turning point of the Revolution, when things were in turmoil and people were displaced, Paine used his pen to keep the colonists from falling victim to the British peace proposals. Paine later discussed the rejection of the peace proposals in his *Letter Addressed to the Abbé Raynal*, written in 1782 to correct some misperceptions Abbé Guillaume Raynal had published in France in his book *The Revolution of America*. Paine had mentioned his desire to work on a "History of the American Revolution" as early as 1778 in his letters to Benjamin Franklin from York on May 16. Paine also left the clerkship of the Pennsylvania Assembly in the fall of 1780.

---

55 Einhorn, "The Reception," 196-98.
56 Ibid., 195.
59 Einhorn, "The Reception," 213.
60 Philip Foner, *Complete Writings*, 2:232-34.
to pursue his history.\textsuperscript{62} Paine mentioned the history project in a letter to a committee of Congress in 1783, though his \textit{Letter Addressed to the Abbé Raynal} was as close as he came to compiling a history, however.\textsuperscript{63}

In his \textit{Letter Addressed to the Abbé Raynal}, Paine argued at length against Raynal's assertion that the rejection of the British peace proposals came after knowledge of the French treaties. Paine pointed out that he oversaw the correspondence of the Committee for Foreign Affairs and that no official news of the treaties had arrived in York before May 2, 1778.\textsuperscript{64} Although there was optimism that a treaty was in progress, Paine felt that Congress's rejection of the peace proposals demonstrated resolve in the face of adversity and uncertainty. Paine's contribution to the Lancaster \textit{Pennsylvania Packet} "Postscript" attempted to amplify that resolve.

\begin{quote}
\textit{To R——— L———, Esq,}
SIR,
The present subject of conversation here is Lord North's famous speech on his introducing the drafts of two Bills to the House of Commons, which he proposes to have passed into Acts of Parliament. You will doubtless soon have this speech published at Lancaster, as I understand a copy of it has been sent there for that purpose. Give me leave to make a few observations on his Lordship's address, such as naturally occurred to me on perusing it. I shall be glad to know from you hereafter whether you think my sentiments on this occasion just or not.

His Lordship begins with saying, \textit{At the opening of the present session, I told the House that in my opinion terms might be made with the Colonies short of unconditional submission, and that the time of making them was the moment of victory.} If the intended terms were such as might in honor be offered and in justice ought to be accepted, why was victory necessary for their introduction? Would it not have been more reputable, more humane and glorious to have put a stop to the effusion of blood by a candid proposal of these
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{62} Dunlap, \textit{Journals of the House of Representatives}, 527.

\textsuperscript{63} Philip Foner, \textit{Complete Writings}, 2:1239-42.

\textsuperscript{64} There were unofficial reports of work on a treaty. Christopher Marshall's diary outlines an unofficial report of a French treaty of commerce and a declaration by France of our independence as early as March 29. The April 1 and 8 editions of the \textit{Pennsylvania Packet} reprinted portions of letters which also suggested work on a treaty in France. Lancaster \textit{Pennsylvania Packet}, April 1, 8, 1778.
terms, than to have reserved them for that ideal moment which hath never arrived? After all, may it not be asked, what terms could possibly have been proposed more advantageous to Great Britain than those which were repeatedly petitioned for at and before the commencement of this cruel war?

—His Lordship says, that he hoped Gen. Howe's victories would prove decisive: That, he was ignorant of Burgoyne's fate, and therefore waited the issue of the campaign: That when he found himself disappointed in the one, and heard the fate catastrophe [sic] of the other, he was convinced that the wish'd for moment, viz. the moment of victory, was past—if that can properly be said to have past which never arrived—and therefore turned his views to the raising new levies and a new force; and laid aside all thoughts of the proposed terms. One would suppose that these events ought to have hastened and not retarded his Lordship's proposed terms. And we have reason to think they have operated in that way. Had not Gen. Howe's success fallen far short of his expectations, and Burgoyne's defeat thrown a damp on his hopes, we should never have heard of his Lordship's intentions to propose terms short of unconditional submission. Be his intentions what they may, we have certainly not been bettered by them—Our sufferings have been as great as if this goodness had never taken a secret stand in his Lordship's breast.

He goes on to say—The forces of Washington are not sufficient to make him quit his defensive plan. This is thrown out as a stigma upon the strength of this country—and yet he immediately after says, that the resistance of America is greater, and the war has lasted longer than was apprehended. But his Lordship does not chuse to mention, that it is altogether owing to the prudence of General Washington in making the war defensive, that he has been able to stand his ground against the exerted force of Britain, and at last compel his Lordship to make this humiliating speech. What he can mean by expatiating on the superiority of the British forces in America, and declaring they are able to compel us to accept of reasonable terms, I am at a loss to determine. If they are so superior, why have they not succeeded? If the terms to be proposed were indeed reasonable, why was compulsion necessary? But his Lordship takes it for granted that his terms would have been rejected by us; and with reason, having only calculated them for the moment of victory. But on a review of circumstances, he now concludes that it is better to offer a concession than continue the war. Had this concession been made three years ago, he would probably have saved to his country millions of money and thousands of men; but however gladly we might have listened to terms
before the sword was drawn, and so prevented the desolation of our country, we shall hardly be induced to give up the advantages we have gained, for proposals unsatisfactory, insecure, and altogether delusive—His Lordship offers to the consideration of the House three propositions, viz. to continue the war with vigour; recal the troops from America; or to offer terms of reconciliation. As to the first, he acknowledges it cannot be done to effect; or that if it could, the advantage gained by a compleat conquest would not equal the expence. Had his Lordship made this discovery somewhat earlier, he would have merited the thanks of his country; but like the chimerical pursuits of the philosopher's stone, he has ruined his patron and then acknowledges that he was mistaken in his principles. As to the second proposition, he says it is subscribing to the independency of America, and reasons no further upon it: But enlarges on the third, viz. the offering terms of reconciliation.—He now wishes for an open conference with America, and thinks there is so much affection still left in that country towards Great-Britain, that barely to enter on a discussion is more than half the business.—When we reflect on the cruel outrages, the unprovoked insults, the burnings and devastations we have suffered from these vindictive enemies; when we look towards our captiv'd cities and think on our slaughtered brethren, then shall we [be] able to judge of the propriety of his Lordship's assertion and see the grounds he has for supposing there is still so much affection left in America towards Great Britain. After exerting the plenitude of his power to do us every possible injury, and finding he cannot torture us to his purpose, he then insolently appeals to our affections—Yes, my Lord! affections and prejudices for Great Britain we once had, and strong ones too, but you have effectually erased them, beyond the possibility of restoration. Our confidence in the clemency and justice of the British Court is levelled with the earth, and who shall build it up again? But his Lordship proceeds to set forth the necessity of appointing Commissioners to treat with America, and is for investing them with very extensive, almost unlimited powers—they may treat with Congress, with rebels, with men in arms, with General Assemblies, or with any persons whatever, authorised to treat with them. I remember that when the attempt towards a treaty on Staten Island failed, the friends of government, as they are called, assigned this as a sufficient reason, that Congress had sent some of their own members for the purpose, and therefore it would be absurd and impossible for his Majesty's Commissioners to treat with men in actual rebellion, however disposed they might be to reconciliation, and whatever good terms they might have to offer. But here we find that the thing is so far from being
impossible, that in the course of events it hath become highly expedient; and that all etiquette is to be laid aside, because the time for that is past. Amongst other powers to be delegated to these proposed Commissioners, we are told, they may grant general or particular pardons. How ill suited is such language to the present era—Pardon is the remission of punishment by those who have the power of inflicting it. Had the moment of victory his Lordship mentions arrived, his Master or his Commissioners might then have granted pardons innumerable; but to talk of pardoning a People, a Nation, with whom he proposes to treat, is a downright solecism. To treat is to propose terms, which the party treated with may either accept or reject at pleasure—but to pardon, supposes the party so subjected as to be thankful for any terms, nay even to owe their lives to the mercy of those who so graciously offer the pardon. How absurd would it be for his Majesty's Commissioners to address the Delegates of America at their first interview in this manner—Gentlemen, before we proceed to business, it would be very proper you should receive the King's most gracious pardon for the horrid rebellions and atrocious offences you have committed. These Commissioners are also to have power to suspend offensive Acts of Parliament—Formerly they could only engage that such Acts should be revised; now they may suspend them—The difference is but small in reality, and of no consequence to us—less now than ever—if they could even repeal them it would be no security to our happiness, since the same or a subsequent Parliament might renew them again, and most certainly would, when a more convenient opportunity offered. His Lordship thinks it a matter of convenience also that these Commissioners should appoint Governors in the several Provinces—This, and the granting of pardons, are much of a piece; when we are reduced to the necessity of accepting the one, we shall probably submit to the other—but we have reason to hope that day is far distant; and, if we may judge from the tenor of his Lordship's speech, he is of the same opinion.

We are next told that the Colonies must give up their claim of independency; but then they are to be induced to do it by offers of a valuable consideration—And what is this valuable consideration?—An act of Parliament declaring a cessation of the exercise of taxation. Not a renunciation of the right. We are here on the same ground we were at the repeal of the Stamp-act, which was attended with a declaration of their right to tax when and how they pleased, but that from motives of expediency they had agreed to a suspension or cessation of that right. Cessation and suspension are words altogether delusive,
and fall far short of that security we claim.—In short, we find no inducement offered for the rescinding Independency, but what was offered in his Lordship’s former conciliatory resolution, and rejected by us prior to the declaration of Independency.—He loudly complains that that conciliatory resolution was misunderstood by Congress. If a proposition so important in its consequences was capable of being misunderstood, this alone would be a sufficient reason for our rejecting it, situated as we were. For if we could draw inferences from it not intended, before it became final, his Lordship might draw the same inferences after it had been confirmed; and of the two meanings of which it was capable, chuse that which suited him best—Propositions of this kind ought never to be equivocal, or liable to be misunderstood by either party. His Lordship declares that he was never for enforcing taxation on America, and acknowledges that the war has already cost the nation more than any revenue which could have been raised by Parliament from America. Wherefore then has the war been pushed with such unremitting vigor; and why this expence of blood and treasure? He tells us, the contest was for supremacy. He knows better. At the beginning of this war, America had no ideas of supremacy—no thoughts of Independency. When she laid her humble and earnest Petitions at the foot of the throne, she abhorred the idea—But the King and Parliament forced her into Independency—They declared her to be out of their protection—and, flushed with vain ideas at conquest, would not listen to reasonings, prayers, or complaints—They thought themselves sure of success—but they have not succeeded—and now expect we must forget all that is past, give up the Independency they find we are able to maintain, and go back with them—not to the moment of victory—but to that period when we were kneeling at the British throne, requesting to be put in the situation we were in the year 1763—and when the royal foot spurned us from his presence.

His Lordship very unfairly alleged, that our objections to the Tea-act arose from our fears, that the East-India Company would thereby be enabled to under-sell our smugglers. This insinuation deserves not a serious refutation—No one can be induced to believe that the interests of a few smugglers should set a whole continent in a flame, and determine America to a conduct whose consequences must prove of the most serious nature, and the final issue of which could not possibly be foreseen.

The remainder of his Lordship’s speech tends chiefly to exculpate his own conduct, and to account for his not offering reasonable terms to America at
such periods as it might be thought would have produced happy consequences. In order to this, he has recourse to his first reason, viz. that he waited for the moment of victory; but acknowledges that he is disappointed in his expectations: Nor does he seem to flatter himself with any hopes of its future arrival; not withstanding he expatiates rather pompously on the numbers and strength of the British army in America.

I pretend not to consider minutely the nature and consequences of this extraordinary speech: it will, no doubt, be strictly scrutinised [sic] by able hands. But I am of opinion [sic], that as the expence [sic] and sufferings of our injured country have been very great, we ought to watch with a jealous eye every seeming change of principles or conduct in our hitherto inveterate enemy, lest we should be induced by plausible appearances to relax in our defensive preparations, and they should obtain that supremacy over us by subtlety, which they have not been able to establish by the sword. We have all the reason in the world to believe that his Lordship's speech was not dictated by a love of us, or any regard to justice—necessity alone has induced him to propose these seeming offers of reconciliation. The same love, the same justice subsisted, or ought to have subsisted, years ago—nor has any new circumstances arisen that should encrease [sic] his regard for us, or his desire of promoting our interests. We have declared to all the world that, after using every reasonable means for reconciliation with these former friends, we found ourselves compelled to throw aside all confidence in their clemency, all submission to their power—We have publicly asserted our rights as a free people—we have appealed to God and the world for the rectitude of our intentions, and pledged every thing sacred for the support of that Independency, which, by the blessing of heaven, we have hitherto been enabled to maintain. Shall we then for any weak, delusive proposals of an insidious Minister, who has uniformly laboured for our ruin, resign the advantages we have so dearly bought, and render ourselves contemptible in the eyes of every warlike nation, and the scorn of impartial posterity. Independency is the barrier we have raised, nor can we recede from it with honour or security—that once broken down, we throw ourselves again under the hand of oppression, and the bloody steps we have trodden over by our miserable posterity. We have reason to derive great consolation from his Lordship's speech—we find he grows sick of the talk he has undertaken—Every sentence seems to declare that we are a free people, and that the mighty powers of Great-Britain are not able to enslave us—The offers he makes are in substance nothing—They reserve to Great-Britain all
the powers she ever wished to have over us, and only promise a *cessation* of the *exercise* of them—and no more. The effect this speech ought to have on all of us is this, to *animate our hopes*, *double our diligence*, and *encourage us to the full exertion of our vigor*.—In this situation we may with security wait events, be they what they may.

I am, Sir, &c.

T.—P.—

*April 24, 1778*

*Camp Hill, Pennsylvania*