

The following document was sent to me by one of our class members, Gary Massanek. I found this letter to the Provincial Congress to be especially interesting. It was written by the British General Thomas Gage, in command of Boston. Note the date of 1774. What was going on in Massachusetts at that time? And in the colonies in general? What is the nature of the letter? And what is its tone?

GENTLEMEN: The previous menaces daily thrown out, and the unusual warlike preparations throughout the country, made it an act of duty in me to pursue the measures I have taken in constructing what you call a fortress, which, unless annoyed, will annoy nobody.

It is surely highly exasperating, as well as ungenerous, even to hint that the lives, liberties, or properties of any persons, except avowed enemies, are in danger from Britons; Britain can never harbor the black design of wantonly destroying, or enslaving, any people on earth.

And notwithstanding the enmity shewn the king's troops, by withholding from them almost every necessary for their preservation, they have not as yet discovered the resentment which might instantly be expected to arise from such hostile treatment.

No person can be more solicitous than myself to procure harmony between Great Britain and her colonies, and I ardently wish to contribute to the completion of a work so salutary to both countries.

But an open and avowed disobedience to all her authority, is only bidding defiance to the mother country, and gives little hopes of bringing a spirited nation to that favorable disposition, which a more decent and dutiful conduct might effect.

Whilst you complain of acts of parliament that make alterations in your charter, and put you in some degree on the same footing many other provinces, you will not forget that by your assembling, you are yourselves subverting that charter, and now acting in ||direct|| violation of your own constitution.

It is my duty, therefore, however irregular your application is, to warn you of the rock you are upon, and to require you to desist from such illegal and unconstitutional proceedings.

PROVINCE HOUSE, October 17, 1774. (page 21)

From The journals of each provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775, and of the committee of safety. <https://archive.org/details/journalsofeachprma00mass/page/655/model/1up?q=Tyn>

General Gage is responding to the provincial Congress, which because of the Massachusetts Government act, is now technically illegal.

- The Congress has spent several weeks passing “resolves” creating non-consumption of East India Company tea.
- It has been making plans to collect munitions, especially gunpowder.
- It has been developing plans for safety and, if necessary, direct resistance.
- It has been developing plans for the anticipated arrival of many more troops.
- It had been creating Committees of Correspondence and Committees of Observation to enforce the economic boycott.

As a bit of aside, the footnotes are often the most intriguing part of the document because they tell what’s happening to ordinary citizens, who are already suffering the consequences of the divisions between those with patriot impulses and those who see themselves as loyalists. 1774 was a fraught time.