

## 32. Samuel Seabury's Argument against Independence (1775)

*Source: Samuel Seabury, An Alarm to the Legislature of the Province of New York (New York, 1775), pp. 2–5.*

A native of Connecticut, graduate of Yale College, and Anglican minister, Samuel Seabury was a devoted Loyalist who in 1774 and 1775 published several pamphlets opposing the revolutionary movement. After being briefly jailed for his views, he took refuge in New York City when it was under British occupation during the War of Independence. Unlike many Loyalists, Seabury remained in the United States after the war and became the new nation's first Episcopal bishop.

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WHEN YOU REFLECT upon the present confused and distressed state of this, and the other colonies, I am persuaded, that you will think no apology necessary for the liberty I have taken, of addressing you on that subject. The unhappy contention we have entered into with our parent state, would inevitably be attended with many disagreeable circumstances, with many and great inconveniences to us, even were it conducted on our part, with propriety and moderation. What then must be the case, when all proper and moderate measures are rejected? When not even the appearance of decency is regarded? When nothing seems to be consulted, but how to perplex, irritate, and affront, the British Ministry, Parliament, Nation and King? When every scheme that tends to peace, is branded with ignominy; as being the machination of slavery! When nothing is called FREEDOM but SEDITION! Nothing LIBERTY but REBELLION!

I will not presume to encroach so far upon your time, as to attempt to point out the causes of our unnatural contention with Great Britain. You are well acquainted with them.—Nor will I attempt to trace out the progress of that infatuation, which hath so deeply, so miserably, infected the Colonies. You must have observed its rise, and noted

its rapid growth. But I intreat your patience and candour, while I make some observations on the conduct of the Colonies in general, and of this Colony in particular, in the present dispute with our mother country: By which it will appear, that most, if not all the measures that have been adopted, have been illegal in their beginning, tyrannical in their operation,—and that they must be ineffectual in the event.

It is the happiness of the British Government, and of all the British Colonies, that the people have a right to share in the legislature. This right they exercise by choosing representatives; and thereby constituting one branch of the legislative authority. But when they have chosen their representatives, that right, which was before diffused through the whole people, centers in their Representatives alone; and can legally be exercised by none but them. They become the guardians of the lives, the liberties, the rights and properties, of the people: And as they are under the most sacred obligations to discharge their trust with prudence and fidelity, so the people are under the strongest obligations to treat them with honour and respect; and to look to them for redress of all those grievances that they can justly complain of.

But in the present dispute with Great Britain, the representatives of the people have not only been utterly disregarded, but their dignity has been trampled upon, and their authority contravened. A Committee, chosen in a tumultuous, illegal manner, usurped the most despotic authority over the province. They entered into contracts, compacts, combinations, treaties of alliance, with the other colonies, without any power from the legislature of the province. They agreed with the other Colonies to send Delegates to meet in convention at Philadelphia, to determine upon the rights and liberties of the good people of this province, unsupported by any Law. . . .

The state to which the Grand Congress, and the subordinate Committees, have reduced the colonies, is really deplorable. They have introduced a system of the most oppressive tyranny that can possibly be imagined;—a tyranny, not only over the actions, but over the words, thoughts, and minds, of the good people of this province.

People have been threatened with the vengeance of a mob, for speaking in support of order and good government. Every method has been used to intimidate the printers from publishing any thing, which tended to peace, or seemed in favour of government; while the most detestable libels against the King, the British parliament, and Ministry, have been eagerly read, and extravagantly commended, as the matchless productions of some heaven-born genius, glowing with the pure flame of civil liberty. . . .

Behold, Gentlemen, behold the wretched state to which we are reduced! A foreign power is brought in to govern this province. Laws made at Philadelphia, by factious men from New-England, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, are imposed upon us by the most imperious menaces. Money is levied upon us without the consent of our representatives: which very money, under color of relieving the poor people of Boston, it is too probable will be employed to raise an army against the King. Mobs and riots are encouraged, in order to force submission to the tyranny of the Congress.

## Questions

1. Why does Seabury believe the Continental Congress and local committees are undermining Americans' liberties?
2. How does Seabury differ from advocates of independence in his understanding of freedom?