

“a crack-brained zealot for democracy” A Loyalist Rebuttal to *Common Sense*, 1776

Rev. Charles Inglis

*The Deceiver Unmasked; Or, Loyalty and Interest United:
In Answer to a Pamphlet Entitled Common Sense*

_____ Preface; Answer to Section III. EXCERPTS

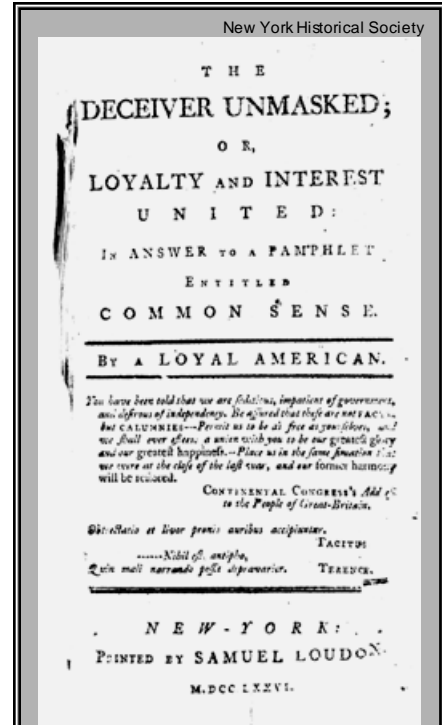
Horrified by Thomas Paine’s pro-revolution *Common Sense*—widely read and reprinted after its initial appearance in January 1776—several Loyalists published immediate rebuttals. The most disturbing to the Patriots, perhaps, was that penned a month later by Rev. Charles Inglis, a British-born Anglican clergyman whose congregation at Trinity Church in New York City was largely Loyalist. Soon after *The Deceiver Unmasked* was advertised in a city newspaper, Sons of Liberty broke into the printer’s office and destroyed all copies of the provocatively named pamphlet. Inglis published new copies and later in the year released his work under the title *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated*. Presented here are excerpts from the Preface and his rebuttal to Part III of *Common Sense* (“Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs”).

P R E F A C E

The following pages contain an answer to one of the most artful, insidious, and pernicious pamphlets I have ever met with. It is addressed to the passions of the populace at a time when their passions are much inflamed. At such junctures, cool reason and judgment are too apt to stop. The mind is easily imposed on, and the most violent measures will, *therefore*, be thought the most salutary [beneficial]. Positive assertions will pass for demonstration [proof] with many, rage for sincerity, and the most glaring absurdities and falsehoods will be swallowed.

The author of COMMON SENSE has availed himself of all those advantages. Under the mask of friendship to America, in the present calamitous situation of affairs, he gives vent to his own private resentment and ambition, and recommends a scheme which must infallibly prove ruinous. He proposes that we should renounce our allegiance to our sovereign [king], break off all connection with Great Britain, and set up an independent empire of the republican kind. Sensible that such a proposal must, even at this time, be shocking to the ears of Americas, he insinuates that the novelty of his sentiments is the only obstacle to their success—that “perhaps they are not yet sufficiently fashionable to procure them general favor . . .”

I find no *Common Sense* in this pamphlet, but much *uncommon* frenzy. It is an outrageous insult on the common sense of Americans, an insidious attempt to poison their minds and seduce them from their loyalty and truest interest. The principles of government laid down in it are not only false but such as scarcely ever entered the head of a crazy politician. Even Hobbes¹ would blush to own the author for a disciple. He unites the violence of a republican² with all the folly of a fanatic. . . . I think it a duty which I owe to God, to my King and country, to counteract in this manner the poison it contains. . . .



Rev. Charles Inglis, 1810
oil portrait by Robert Field

“I find no *Common Sense* in this pamphlet, but much *uncommon* frenzy.”

¹ Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), English political philosopher who argued for strong central government against which rebellion was justifiable only in response to grievous tyranny and abuse.

² Republican, i.e., a proponent of a republic as a nation’s form of government.

ANSWER to SECTION III.

(*Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs*)

...

In the section before me [III], this Gentleman unfolds his grand scheme of a revolt from the crown of England and setting up an independent republic in America. He leaves no method untried, which the most experienced practitioner in the art of deceiving could invent to persuade any people to a measure which was against their inclinations and interest, that was both disagreeable and destructive. He unsays in one place what he had said in another if it happens to serve the present purpose. He cants and whines; he tries wit, raillery, and declamation by turns. But his main attack is upon the passions of his readers, especially their pity and resentment — the latter of which is too apt to be predominant in mankind. As for himself, he seems to be everywhere transported with rage — a rage that knows no limits and hurries him along like an impetuous torrent. Everything that falls not in with his own scheme, or that he happens to dislike, is represented in the most aggravated light and with the most distorted features. Such a malignant spirit I have seldom met with in any composition. As often as I look into this section, I cannot forbear imaging to myself a guilty culprit, fresh reeking from the lashes of indignant justice, and raging against the hand that inflicted them. Yet I cannot persuade myself that such fire and fury are genuine marks of patriotism. On the contrary, they rather indicate that some mortifying disappointment is rankling at heart, that some tempting object of ambition is in view, or probably both. I always adopt the amiable Bishop Berkeley's maxim in such cases — "I see a man rage, rail and rave, I suspect his patriotism." . . .

"I cannot persuade myself that such fire and fury are genuine marks of patriotism."

. . . My most ardent wish — next to future happiness — is to see tranquility restored to America — our liberties, property, and trade settled on a firm, generous, and constitutional plan, so that neither the former should be invaded nor the latter impolitically or unjustly restrained; that in consequence of this a perfect reconciliation with Great Britain were effected, a union formed by which both countries, supporting and supported by each other, might rise to eminence and glory and be the admiration of mankind till time shall be no more. . . .

I think it no difficult matter to point out many advantages which will certainly attend our reconciliation and connection with Great Britain on a firm constitutional plan. I shall select a few of these; and that their importance may be more clearly discerned, I shall afterwards point out some of the evils which inevitably must attend our separating from Britain and declaring for independency. On each article I shall study brevity.

1. By a reconciliation with Britain, a period [end] would be put to the present calamitous war by which so many lives have been lost, and so many more must be lost if it continues. This alone is an advantage devoutly to be wished for. This author says — "The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, 'Tis time to part.'" I think they cry just the reverse. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries — It is time to be reconciled. It is time to lay aside those animosities which have pushed on Britons to shed the blood of Britons. It is high time that those who are connected by the endearing ties of religion, kindred and country should resume their former friendship and be united in the bond of mutual affection, as their interests are inseparably united.
2. By a Reconciliation with Great Britain, peace — that fairest offspring and gift of Heaven — will be restored. In one respect, peace is like health: we do not sufficiently know its value but by its absence. What uneasiness and anxiety, what evils has this short interruption of peace with the parent state brought on the whole British empire! Let every man only consult his feelings — I except my antagonist³ — and it will require no great force of rhetoric to convince him that a removal of those evils and a restoration of peace would be a singular advantage and blessing.

³ I.e., every man but Paine.

3. Agriculture, commerce, and industry would resume their wonted vigor. At present, they languish and droop, both here and in Britain, and must continue to do so while this unhappy contest remains unsettled.
4. By a connection with Great Britain, our trade would still have the protection of the greatest naval power in the world. England has the advantage in this respect of every other state, whether of ancient or modern times. Her insular situation, her nurseries [training] for seamen, the superiority of those seamen above others — these circumstances, to mention no other, combine to make her the first maritime power in the universe. Such exactly is the power whose protection we want for our commerce. To suppose, with our author, that we should have no war were we to revolt from England is too absurd to deserve a confutation. I could just as soon set about refuting the reveries of some brain-sick enthusiast. Past experience shows that Britain is able to defend our commerce and our coasts, and we have no reason to doubt of her being able to do so for the future.
5. The protection of our trade, while connected with Britain, will not cost a fiftieth part of what it must cost were we ourselves to raise a naval force sufficient for the purpose.
6. Whilst connected with Great Britain, we have a bounty on almost every article of exportation, and we may be better supplied with goods by her than we could elsewhere. What our author says is true — “that our imported goods must be paid for, buy them where we will” — but we may buy them dearer [at more cost] and of worse quality in one place than another. The manufactures of Great Britain confessedly surpass any in the world — particularly those in every kind of metal which we want [lack] most, and no country can afford linens and woollens of equal quality cheaper.
7. When a Reconciliation is effected, and things return into the old channel, a few years of peace will restore everything to its pristine state. Emigrants will flow in as usual from the different parts of Europe. Population will advance with the same rapid progress as formerly, and our lands will rise in value.

These advantages are not imaginary but real. They are such as we have already experienced; and such as we may derive from a connection with Great Britain for ages to come. Each of these might easily be enlarged on and others added to them; but I only mean to suggest a few hints to the reader.

“Suppose we were to revolt from Great Britain, declare ourselves independent, and set up a Republic of our own — what would the consequences be? I stand aghast at the prospect — my blood runs chill when I think of the calamities, the complicated evils that must ensue, and may be clearly foreseen.”

Let us now, if you please, take a view of the other side of the question. Suppose we were to revolt from Great Britain, declare ourselves independent, and set up a Republic of our own — what would the consequences be? I stand aghast at the prospect — my blood runs chill when I think of the calamities, the complicated evils that must ensue, and may be clearly foreseen. It is impossible for any man to foresee them all.

1. All our property throughout the continent would be unhinged. The greatest confusion and most violent convulsions would take place. It would not be here as it was in England at the Revolution in 1688. That revolution was not brought about by a defeasance⁴ or disannulling the right of succession. James II, by abdicating the throne, left it vacant for the next in succession; accordingly his eldest daughter and her husband stepped in. Every other matter went on in the usual regular way, and the constitution,⁵ instead of being dissolved, was strengthened. But in case of our revolt, the old constitution would be totally subverted. The common bond that tied us together, and by which our property was secured, would be snapped asunder. It is not to be doubted but our Congress would endeavor to apply some remedy for those evils; but with all deference to that respectable body, I do

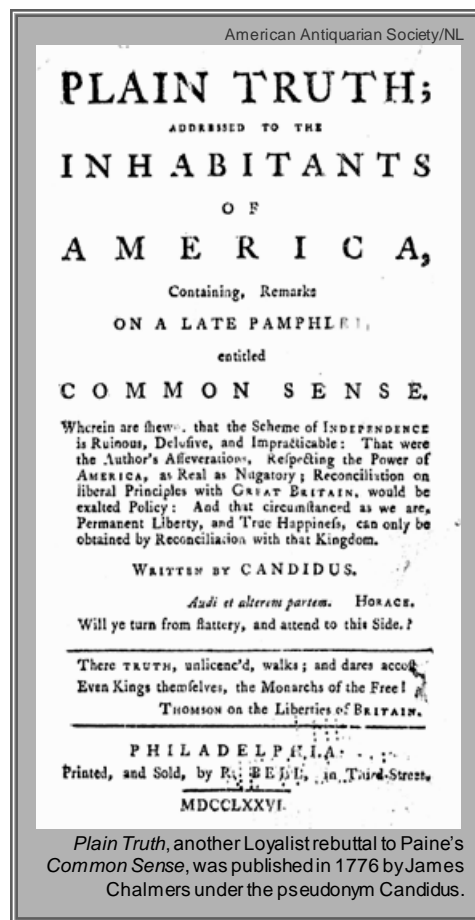
⁴ Defeasance: annulment, forfeiture.

⁵ English constitution of 1688.

not apprehend that any remedy in their power would be adequate, at least for some time. I do not choose to be more explicit; but I am able to support my opinion.

2. What a horrid situation would thousands be reduced to who have taken the oath of allegiance to the King: yet contrary to their oath, as well as inclination, must be compelled to renounce that allegiance or abandon all their property in America! How many thousands more would be reduced to a similar situation; who, although they took not that oath, yet would think it inconsistent with their duty and a good conscience to renounce their sovereign. I dare say these will appear trifling difficulties to our author; but whatever he may think, there are thousands and thousands who would sooner lose all they had in the world, nay life itself, than thus wound their conscience.
3. By a declaration for independency, every avenue to an accommodation with Great Britain would be closed. The sword only could then decide the quarrel, and the sword would not be sheathed till one had conquered the other. The importance of these colonies to Britain need not be enlarged on; it is a thing so universally known. The greater their importance is to her, so much the more obstinate will her struggle be not to lose them. The independency of America would, in the end, deprive her of the West Indies, shake her empire to the foundation, and reduce her to a state of the most mortifying insignificance. Great Britain therefore must, for her own preservation, risk every thing, and exert her whole strength to prevent such an event from taking place. This being the case —
4. Devastation and ruin must mark the progress of this war along the sea coast of America. Hitherto, Britain has not exerted her power. Her number of troops and ships of war here at present is very little more than she judged expedient in time of peace — the former does not amount to 12,000 men — nor the latter to 40 ships, including frigates. Both she, and the colonies, hoped for and expected an accommodation. Neither of them has lost sight of that desirable object. The seas have been open to our ships, and although some skirmishes have unfortunately happened, yet a ray of hope still cheered both sides that peace was not distant. But as soon as we declare for independency, every prospect of this kind must vanish. Ruthless war, with all its aggravated horrors, will ravage our once happy land — our seacoasts and ports will be ruined, and our ships taken. Torrents of blood will be spilt, and thousands reduced to beggary and wretchedness.

This melancholy contest would last till one side conquered. Supposing Britain to be victorious; however high my opinion is of British generosity, I should be exceedingly sorry to receive terms from her in the haughty tone of a conqueror. Or supposing such a failure of her manufactures, commerce, and strength that victory should incline to the side of America; yet who can say in that case what extremities her sense of resentment and self-preservation will drive Great Britain to? For my part, I should not in the least be surprised if, on such a prospect as the independency of America, she would parcel out this continent to the different European powers. Canada might be restored to France, Florida to Spain, with additions to each. Other states also might come in for a portion. Let no man think this chimerical or improbable. The independency of America would be so fatal to Britain that she would leave nothing in her power undone to prevent it. I believe as firmly as I do my own existence that, if every other method failed, she would try some such expedient as this to disconcert



our scheme of independency; and let any man figure to himself the situation of these British colonies if only Canada were restored to France!

5. But supposing once more that we were able to cut off every regiment that Britain can spare or hire, and to destroy every ship she can send — that we could beat off any other European power that would presume to intrude upon this continent: Yet, a republican form of government would neither suit the genius of the people nor the extent of America.

In nothing is the wisdom of a legislator more conspicuous than in adapting his government to the genius, manners, disposition and other circumstances of the people with whom he is concerned. If this important point is overlooked, confusion will ensue. His system will sink into neglect and ruin. Whatever check or barriers may be interposed, nature will always surmount them and finally prevail. It was chiefly by attention to this circumstance that Lycurgus and Solon⁶ were so much celebrated and that their respective republics rose afterwards to such eminence and acquired such stability.

The Americans are properly Britons. They have the manners, habits, and ideas of Britons, and have been accustomed to a similar form of government. But Britons never could bear the extremes either of monarchy or republicanism. Some of their kings have aimed at despotism but always failed. Repeated efforts have been made towards democracy, and they equally failed. Once indeed republicanism triumphed over the constitution; the despotism of one person⁷ ensued: both were finally expelled. The inhabitants of Great Britain were quite anxious for the restoration of royalty in 1660, as they were for its expulsion in 1642 and for some succeeding years. If we may judge of future events by past transactions in similar circumstances, this would most probably be the case if America were a republican form of government adopted in our present ferment. After much blood was shed, those confusions would terminate in the despotism of some one successful adventurer; and should the Americans be so fortunate as to emancipate themselves from that thralldom, perhaps the whole would end in a limited monarchy after shedding as much more blood. Limited monarchy is the form of government which is most favorable to liberty — which is best adapted to the genius and temper of Britons; although here and there among us a crack-brained zealot for democracy or absolute monarchy may be sometimes found.

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Besides the unsuitableness of the republican form to the genius of the people, America is too extensive for it. That form may do well enough for a single city, or small territory; but would be utterly improper for such a continent as this. America is too unwieldy for the feeble, dilatory administration of democracy. Rome had the most extensive dominions of any ancient republic. But it should be remembered that, very soon after the spirit of conquest carried the Romans beyond the limits that were proportioned to their constitution, they fell under a despotic yoke. A very few years had elapsed from the time of their conquering Greece and first entering Asia, till the battle of Pharsalia where Julius Caesar put an end to the liberties of his country. . . .

6. In fine [summary]. Let us for a moment imagine that an American republic is formed, every obstacle having been surmounted, yet a very serious article still remains to be inquired into, viz. [namely], the expense necessary to support it. It behooves those who have any property to think of this part of the business. As for our author, it is more than probable he has nothing to lose and, like others in the same predicament, is willing to trust to the chapter of accidents and chances for something in the

⁶ In ancient Greece, the creators of the Spartan and Athenian legal systems.

⁷ Oliver Cromwell, who established a brief republic in England in the mid 1650s, after the execution of King Charles I, but exercised tyrannical authority.

scramble. He cannot lose, but may possible gain. His own maxim is certainly true — “The more men have to lose, the less willing are they to venture,” and vice versa, say I. . . .

For my part, I look upon this pamphlet to be the most injurious in every respect to America of any that has appeared since these troubles began. The Continental Congress, the several Provincial Congresses and Assemblies, have all unanimously and in the strongest terms disclaimed every idea of independency. They have repeatedly declared their abhorrence of such a step. They have as often declared their firm attachment to our sovereign and the parent state. They have declared that placing them in the same situation that they were at the close of the last war⁸ was their only object; that when this was done, by repealing the obnoxious acts, our former harmony and friendship would be restored. I appeal to the reader whether all this has not been done from one end of the continent to the other. . . .

. . . The welfare of America is what I wish for above any earthly thing. I am fully, firmly, and conscientiously persuaded that in a reconciliation and union with Great Britain, on constitutional principles, the welfare of America is only to be found. I am fully, firmly, and conscientiously persuaded that our author’s scheme of independence and republicanism is big with ruin — with inevitable ruin to America. Against this scheme, therefore, as an honest man, as a friend to human nature, I must and will bear testimony. . . .

The author of *Common Sense* is a violent stickler for democracy or republicanism only — every other species of government is reprobated [condemned] by him as tyrannical. I plead for that constitution which has been formed by the wisdom of ages — is the admiration of mankind — is best adapted to the genius of Britons, and is most friendly to liberty. . . .

America is far from being yet in a desperate situation. I am confident she may obtain honorable and advantageous terms from Great Britain. A few years of peace will soon retrieve all her losses. She will rapidly advance to a state of maturity whereby she may not only repay the parent state amply for all past benefits; but also lay it under the greatest obligations. America, till very lately, has been the happiest country in the universe. Blest with all that Nature could bestow with the profusest bounty, she enjoyed, besides, more liberty, greater privileges than any other land. How painful is it to reflect on these things and to look forward to the gloomy prospects now before us! But it is not too late to hope that matters may mend. By prudent management, her former happiness may again return, and continue to increase for ages to come, in a union with the parent state.

However distant humanity may wish the period, yet, in the rotation of human affairs, a period may arrive, when (both countries being prepared for it) some terrible disaster, some dreadful convulsion in Great Britain, may transfer the seat of empire to this western hemisphere— where the British constitution, like the Phoenix from its parent’s ashes, shall rise with youthful vigor and shine with redoubled splendor.

But if America should now mistake her real interest — if her sons, infatuated with romantic notions of conquest and empire ere things are ripe, should adopt this republican’s scheme, they will infallibly destroy this smiling prospect. They will dismember this happy country — make it a scene of blood and slaughter, and entail wretchedness and misery on millions yet unborn.

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⁸ French and Indian War (1754-1763).