

PETITION

Freeholders of the County of Middlesex to George III

1769

We, Your Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the Freeholders of the County of Middlesex, beg leave, with all affectionate submission and humility, to throw ourselves at your royal feet and humbly to implore your paternal attention to those grievances of which this county and the whole nation complain, and those fearful apprehensions with which the whole British Empire is most justly alarmed.

With great grief and sorrow we have long beheld the endeavours of certain evil-minded persons who attempt to infuse into your royal mind notions and opinions of the most dangerous and pernicious tendency, and who promote and counsel such measures as cannot fail to destroy that harmony and confidence which should ever subsist between a just and virtuous prince and a free and loyal people.

For this disaffected purpose they have introduced into every part of the administration of our happy legal constitution a certain unlimited and indefinite discretionary power, to prevent which is the sole aim of all our laws, and was the sole cause of all those disturbances and revolutions which formerly distracted this unhappy country; for our ancestors, by their own fatal experience, well knew that in a state where discretion begins, law, liberty, and safety end. Under the pretence of this discretion, or, as it was formerly and has been lately called, Law of State, we have seen.

- English subjects, and even a member of the British legislature, arrested by virtue of a general warrant issued by a Secretary of State, contrary to the law of the land.
- Their houses rifled and plundered, their papers seized, and used as evidence upon trial.
- Their bodies committed to close imprisonment.
- The *habeas corpus* eluded.
- Trial by jury discountenanced, and the first law officer of the crown publicly insinuating that juries are not to be trusted.
- Printers punished by the ministry in the supreme court without a trial by their equals, without any trial at all.
- The remedy of the law for false imprisonment debarred and defeated.
- The plaintiff and his attorney, for their appeal to the law of the land, punished by expenses and imprisonment, and made, by forced engagements, to desist from their legal claim.
- A writing determined to be a libel by a court where it was not cognizable in the first instance; contrary to law, because all appeal is thereby cut off, and inferior courts and juries influenced by such pre-determination.
- A person condemned in the said courts as the author of the supposed libel, unheard, without defence or trial.
- Unjust treatment of petitions, by selecting only such parts as might be wrested to criminate the petitioner, and refusing to hear those which might procure him redress.
- The thanks of one branch of the legislature proposed by a minister to be given to an acknowledged offender for his offence, with the declared intention of screening him from the law.
- Attachments wrested from their original intent of removing obstructions to the proceedings of law, to punish by sentence of arbitrary fine and imprisonment, without trial or appeal, supposed offences committed out of court.
- Perpetual imprisonment of an Englishman without trial, conviction, or sentence by the same mode of attachment, wherein the same person is at once party, accuser, judge, and jury.
- Instead of the ancient and legal civil police, the military introduced at every opportunity, unnecessarily and unlawfully patrolling the streets, to the alarm and terror of the inhabitants.
- The lives of many of Your Majesty's innocent subjects destroyed by military execution.
- Such military execution solemnly adjudged to be legal.
- Murder abetted, encouraged, and rewarded.
- The civil magistracy rendered contemptible by the appointment of improper and incapable persons.
- The civil magistrates tampered with by administration, and neglecting and refusing to discharge their duty.
- Mobs and riots hired and raised by the ministry, in order to justify and recommend their own illegal proceedings, and to prejudice Your Majesty's mind by false insinuations against the loyalty of Your Majesty's subjects.
- The freedom of election violated by corrupt and undue influence, by unpunished violence and murder.
- The just verdicts of juries and the opinion of the judges overruled by false representations to Your Majesty; and the determinations of the law set aside, by new, unprecedented, and dangerous means; thereby leaving the

guilty without restraint, and the injured without redress, and the lives of Your Majesty's subjects at the mercy of every ruffian protected by administration.

- Obsolete and vexatious claims of the crown set on foot for partial and election purposes.
- Partial attacks on the liberty of the press, the most daring and pernicious libels against the constitution and against the liberty of the subject being allowed to pass unnoticed, whilst the slightest libel against a minister is punished with the utmost rigour.
- Wicked attempts to increase and establish a standing army, by endeavouring to vest in the crown an unlimited power over the militia, which, should they succeed, must, sooner or later, subvert the constitution, by augmenting the power of administration in proportion to their delinquency.
- Repeated endeavours to diminish the importance of Members of Parliament individually, in order to render them more dependent on administration collectively. Even threats having been employed by ministers to suppress the freedom of debate; and the wrath of parliament denounced against measures authorized by the law of the land.
- Resolutions of one branch of the legislature set up as the law of the land, being a direct usurpation of the rights of the two other branches, and therefore a manifest infringement of the constitution.
- Public money shamefully squandered and unaccounted for, and all inquiry into the cause of arrears in the civil list prevented by the ministry.
- Inquiry into a paymaster's public accounts stopped in the exchequer, though the sums accounted for by that paymaster amount to above forty millions sterling.
- Public loans perverted to private ministerial purposes.
- Prostitution of public honours and rewards to men who can neither plead public virtue nor services.
- Irreligion and immorality, so eminently discountenanced by Your Majesty's royal example, encouraged by administration, both by example and precept.
- The same discretion has been extended by the same evil counselors to Your Majesty's dominions in America, and has produced to our suffering fellow-subjects in that part of the world grievances and apprehensions similar to those which we complain of at home.

Such are the grievances and apprehensions which have long discontented and disturbed the greatest and best part of Your Majesty's loyal subjects. Unwilling, however, to interrupt your royal repose, though ready to lay down our lives and fortunes for Your Majesty's service, and for the constitution as by law established, we have waited patiently, expecting a constitutional remedy by the means of our own representatives, but our legal and free choice having been repeatedly rejected, and the right of election now finally taken from us by the unprecedented seating of a candidate who was never chosen by the county, and who, even to become a candidate, was obliged fraudulently to vacate his seat in Parliament under the pretence of an insignificant place, invited thereto by the prior declaration of a minister, that whoever opposed our choice, though but with four votes, should be declared member for the county. We see ourselves, by this last act, deprived even of the franchises of Englishmen, reduced to the most abject state of slavery, and left without hopes or means of redress but from Your Majesty or God.

Deign then, most gracious Sovereign, to listen to the prayer of the most faithful of Your Majesty's subjects; and to banish from your royal favour, trust, and confidence forever those evil and pernicious counselors who have endeavoured to alienate the affection of Your Majesty's most sincere and dutiful subjects, and whose suggestions tend to deprive your people of their dearest and most essential rights, and who have traitorously dared to depart from the spirit and letter of those laws which have secured the crown of these realms to the House of Brunswick, in which we make our most earnest prayers to God that it may continue untarnished to the latest posterity.