

JUNIUS AND THE CITY

Mr. President I am mindful that upon this same day in March 24 years ago you addressed the association on the life and achievements of John Wilkes and your title was A Friend of Liberty. My title is different, but before it is possible to discuss the activities of Junius it is necessary to describe the background political situation which largely related to Wilkes and the freeholders of Middlesex. To that extent Mr. President I shall apply to you and to me one of the 37 pen-names used by Junius. We are each A Labourer in the Same Cause. A series of letters under pen-names began to appear in The Public Advertiser in April 1767; the first signed Junius appeared in November 1768 and related to Wilkes. There were in all some 270 letters mostly published in The Public Advertiser, but a few were private letters to Wilkes and to Mr. H.S. Woodfall who published the newspaper. They created a continuing sensation until they ceased early in 1772.

Junius's principal subject was the series of political events which flowed from the success of King George III in gaining domination over the policies and actions of his governments. He ascended the throne in 1760 on the death of his grandfather George II. He was aged 22 and much under the influence of his mother, the dowager Princess of Wales, who urged him "George, be a king". The early years of his reign were notable for arbitrary government and the popular resentment which it engendered. The historian J.R. Green wrote that in ten years the king reduced government to a shadow and turned the loyalty of his subjects to disaffection and in twenty he had forced the colonies of America into revolt and independence and brought England to the brink of ruin.

England had great territorial successes in the Seven Years' War against France and Spain, but the new king was keen to bring it to an end, free himself from Pitt and start to rule. The terms of the Treaty of Paris (1763) were much criticised and Wilkes, who was M.P. for Aylesbury, attacked it in number 45 of his publication The North Briton. His comments were moderate by our standards of political comment, but the government regarded it as a seditious libel on the king and Wilkes and 48 others were arrested under a General Warrant. Wilkes appealed and began his own legal action out of which there came the result that General Warrants, which did not have to name those to be arrested, were declared illegal and totally subversive of the liberty of the subject. The cry 'Wilkes and Liberty' began to be heard and the king's enmity made him a popular hero and an opponent of the king's corrupt control of the government and of the House

of Commons. Wilkes was wounded in a duel and went to France. He did not return to face the libel charge and in January 1764 he was expelled from parliament and declared an outlaw.

Wilkes returned from France in March 1768 and was a late, but unsuccessful candidate in the parliamentary election for the City so he promptly stood for the county of Middlesex and was elected. The king wrote to the prime minister (the Duke of Grafton) "I think it highly proper to apprise you that the exclusion of Mr. Wilkes appears to be very desirable and must be effected". Wilkes then surrendered to his outlawry which was declared void, but he was sentenced to 22 months' imprisonment on the earlier libel charges. Huge crowds demonstrated outside the King's Bench prison and in May 1768 soldiers were ordered to fire on them and killed 7 persons in what became known as the massacre of St. George's Fields. There was immense popular agitation and the City became enthusiastic for Wilkes so that in January 1769 he was elected Alderman for the Ward of Farringdon Without. Wilkes naturally attacked the government over the killings so in February 1769 he was again expelled from parliament. Two weeks later he was re-elected for Middlesex but the government declared the election null and void and also declared that Wilkes was incapable of being elected. On 16th March Wilkes was elected a third time and told his supporters that the privilege of electing their own representatives was the first principle of the constitution and the essence of that power which the people had reserved to themselves, but the government again declared the election null and void and appointed a new election for 13th April. Wilkes pointed out that the matter was no longer a merely personal struggle; the cause was now national and of the first magnitude. The government put forward their own candidate, an already sitting M.P. Colonel Luttrell, who polled 296 votes against Wilkes' 1143 votes. Wilkes was again rejected and Luttrell declared elected. Petitions from the Middlesex freeholders, the City, Southwark and Westminster were all dismissed by the House of Commons. Edmund Burke published 'Thoughts on the Present Discontents' a scathing examination of the misdeeds of the government and of the control exerted by the king through his faction known as King's Friends. Pitt strongly attacked the government over its persecution of Wilkes which he said had landed it in a position where ordinary inability never arrives and only first rate geniuses in incapacity can reach.

It was in this lamentable situation that the letters of Junius began to appear. They dealt at first with the unhappy trend of events affecting the relationship between the government and the American colonists, but as the government's persecution of Wilkes and its disregard of electors' rights

became more determined Junius attacked both the Prime Minister and the king. What so completely seized upon the general attention was the courage of the unknown writer and the power of his knowledge. It was apparent that unscrupulous ministers had now an enemy equally unscrupulous with the ability to expose the chicaneries of office. The letters were of penetrating severity and in his memoirs, published in 1815, Sir Nathaniel Wraxall said the avidity with which these publications were sought after and perused is difficult to believe. The unknown writer knew all that was done at Court, in parliament, in the War Office and in the Courts of Law and must have moved in the first ranks of society. The identity of Junius remained secret and has never been solved although the name of Sir Philip Francis has been conjectured more than any other.

A few days after the fourth Middlesex election Junius published a letter of the Duke of Grafton (Prime Minister) saying "Your patronage of Mr. Luttrell has been crowned with success. With this precedent before you, with the principles on which it was established and with a future House of Commons perhaps less virtuous than the present, every county in England under the auspices of the Treasury may be represented as completely as the county of Middlesex." He goes on to say "This measure my Lord is however attended by one consequence favourable to the people which I am persuaded you did not foresee. You have united this country against you on one grand constitutional point on the decision of which our existence as a free people absolutely depends. You have asserted, not in words but in fact, that representation in parliament does not depend on the choice of the freeholders. If such a case can possibly happen once it may happen frequently; it may happen always" This argument was further developed in a series of letters and the prediction as to the public reaction was abundantly proved correct.

The Corporation's support for the democratic cause and for Wilkes was such that on 14th March 1770 a remonstrance was addressed to the king saying "..... there is a time when it is morally demonstrable that men cease to be representatives; that time is now arrived: The present House of Commons do not represent the people." And later ".....we do not owe our liberty to nice and subtle distinctions so neither will we be deprived of it by them.....". The king's reply was abrupt and unyielding so on 23rd May Lord Mayor Beckford led a second remonstrance urging the dissolution of parliament and the removal of evil ministers. The king's reply was more abrupt than on the previous occasion and Lord Mayor Beckford stepped forward and addressed the king and spoke in terms which are said to be those engraved on his monument in Guildhall.

Immediately after the king's rejection of the City's first remonstrance Junius wrote "The king's answer to the remonstrance of the city of London and the measures since adopted by the ministry amount to a plain declaration that the principle on which Mr. Luttrell was seated in the House of Commons is to be supported in all its consequences and carried to its utmost extent. The same spirit which violated the freedom of election now threatens to punish the subject for exercising a privilege, hitherto undisputed, of petitioning the crown" and later in the same letter "The city of London have expressed their sentiments with freedom and firmness; they have spoken truth boldly and, in whatever light their remonstrance may be represented by courtiers, I defy the most subtle lawyer in this country to point out a single instance in which they have exceeded the truth."

In December 1769 and in April and May 1770 Junius published letters bitterly critical of the king's association with the actions of the government, but the king did not deviate from his policy. The denunciations of Junius could however have immediate effects as in his letter of 22nd August 1770 addressed to the new Prime Minister, Lord North, on the appointment of Lt. Col. Luttrell as Adjutant-General in command of the army in Ireland as reward for his part in denying Wilkes his victory in Middlesex, Junius wrote "..... to possess himself of another man's right and to maintain it in defiance of public shame as well as justice bespoke a degree of zeal or of depravity which all the favour of a pious prince could hardly requite. I protest, my Lord, there is in this young man's conduct a strain of prostitution which, for its singularity, I cannot but admire. He has discovered a new line in the human character; he has degraded even the name of Luttrell and gratified his father's most sanguine expectations." A few days after this letter was published Luttrell resigned from his post as General in command of the army in Ireland.

In June 1770 a letter in *The Public Advertiser* suggested that Wilkes should stand as parliamentary candidate for the city in the room of the lately deceased Alderman Beckford and this was promptly answered by Junius as being misguided. Junius wrote "He seems to have forgotten that the national resentment has not been so much excited by the exclusion of Mr. Wilkes as by the insertion of Mr. Luttrell. He does not seem to be aware that the discussion of the great question can never be brought on in a new mode as long as Mr. Wilkes is to be the groundwork of the debate; that the arguments for the incapacitation of that gentleman were merely personal: that they respected the member returned, without any reference to the constituents: and therefore that the substitution of other constituents can effect no alteration in the case whilst the person returned continued the

same. Your correspondent would likewise have done well to have borne in mind that the livery of London have, by the most authentic act of the Corporation, declared to the world that the intrusion of Mr. Luttrell has vitiated the present parliament. With what consistency then can the same body of men subscribe to the integrity of the same parliament upon any other terms than the previous extermination of the contaminating object? The introduction of Mr. Wilkes into the House is in itself a circumstance of little importance. If parliament and the county of Middlesex had gone on in an eternal circulation of expulsions and returns the essence of that assembly would not have been affected. The indispensable point is that the corrupt member should be lopped off; a point that will hardly be compassed by an event of such indifference to the public as the mere seating of Mr. Wilkes in the House of Commons as a representative of the City of London. Upon the plan of your correspondent the prosecutors indeed will be changed, but the cause will still be the same. It is in the power of administration alone to vary and extend the cause by arbitrarily incapacitating another member legally elected; a measure which they do in truth 'tremble at the thoughts of'. In conclusion: the restoration of parliament must begin in the person of Mr. Luttrell; nor can the injury to the people of England be heightened in the person of Mr. Wilkes. Every county, every borough is already as essentially affected as the county of Middlesex. It is an eternal truth in the political as well as the mystical body that 'where one member suffers all the members suffer with it'."

In July 1771, by which time Wilkes had been elected Sheriff, Junius had occasion to reply to a letter from the Revd. John Horne a former friend of Wilkes, but by then an antagonist. Junius said "You will not suspect me of setting up Wilkes for a perfect character. The question to the public is where shall we find a man who, with purer principles, will go to the lengths and run the hazards that he has done? The season calls for such a man and he ought to be supported. What would have been the triumph of that odious hypocrite and his minions if Wilkes had been defeated?" .

In September 1771 Junius was concerned by the probability that William Nash, a Court supporter, would be elected Lord Mayor and he published a letter addressed to the livery of London in the following terms: "If you alone were concerned in the event of the present election of a chief magistrate of the metropolis, it would be the highest presumption in a stranger to attempt to influence your choice or even to offer you his opinion. But the situation of public affairs has annexed an extraordinary importance to your resolutions. You cannot, in the choice of your magistrate, determine for yourselves only. You are going to determine upon a point in which every

member of the community is interested. I will not scruple to say that the very being of that law, of that right, of that constitution for which we have been so long contending is now at stake. They who would ensnare your judgment tell you it is a common ordinary case and to be decided by ordinary precedent and practice. They artfully conclude from moderate peaceable times to times which are not moderate and which ought not to be peaceable. While they solicit your favour they insist upon a rule of rotation which excludes all idea of election.

Let me be honoured by a few minutes of your attention. The question to those who mean fairly to the liberty of the people (which we all profess to have in view) lies within a very narrow compass. Do you mean to desert that just and honourable system of measures which you have hitherto pursued in hopes of gaining from parliament or from the crown a full redress of past grievances and a security for the future. Do you think the cause desperate and will you declare that you think so to the whole people of England? If this be your meaning and your opinion you will act consistently with it by chusing Mr. Nash. I profess to be unacquainted with his private character. But he has acted as a magistrate as a public man. As such I speak of him. I see his name in a protest against one of your remonstrances to the crown. He had done everything in his power to destroy the freedom of popular elections in the city by publishing the poll on a former occasion; and I know in general that he has distinguished himself by slighting and thwarting all those public measures which you have engaged in with the greatest warmth and hitherto thought most worthy of your approbation. From his past conduct what conclusion will you draw, but that he will act the same part as lord mayor which he has invariably acted as alderman and sheriff? He cannot alter his conduct without confessing that he never acted upon principle of any kind. I should be sorry to injure the character of a man, who perhaps may be honest in his intentions, by supposing it possible that he can ever concur with you in any political measure or opinion.

If on the other hand, you mean to persevere in those resolutions for the public good which, though not always successful, are always honourable your choice will naturally incline to those men who (whatever they be in other respects) are most likely to co-operate with you in the great purposes which you are determined not to relinquish: The question is not of what metal your instruments are made, but whether they are adapted to the work in hand? The honours of the city, in these times, are improperly because exclusively called a reward. You mean not merely to pay, but to employ. Are Mr. Crosby and Mr. Sawbridge likely to execute the extraordinary as well as the ordinary duties of lord mayor? Will they grant common halls when it shall be necessary? Will they go up with remonstrances to the

king? Have they the firmness to meet the fury of a venal House of Commons? Have they the fortitude enough not to shrink from imprisonment? Have they spirit enough to hazard their lives and fortunes in a contest, if it should be necessary, with a prostituted legislature? If these questions can fairly be answered in the affirmative your choice is made. Forgive this passionate language. I am unable to correct it. The subject comes home to us all. It is the language of my heart."

The questions about the fortitude of Brass Crosby were merely rhetorical as, of course, the livery knew. Crosby had defied the House of Commons over the affair of the printers during his mayoralty only a few months earlier and had suffered imprisonment in the Tower for several weeks. At the time of Junius's letter he was seeking a second term as lord mayor.

In the event the democrats did not act in unison and the outcome was that Mr. Nash, the Court candidate, was elected lord mayor. A few months later Junius wrote alluding to the lord mayor's partial and impolitic conduct upon the common questions of city politics brought before him especially in refusing to call a common hall when requested. Junius wrote to his publisher "What an abandoned prostituted idiot is your lord mayor. The shameful mismanagement which brought him into office gave me the first and unconquerable disgust."

At that time and indeed until 1911 the maximum duration of a parliament was seven years. There were various means by which a government could get its supporters returned to the House of Commons which was, as now, the source of government finance. No 18th century government ever lost a general election. George III aimed to prevent the development of political parties for such groupings might stand in his way of exerting personal control of his governments. He managed this by forming his own group of mercenaries and controlling them by the award of favours and the free use of money. They were referred to as King's Friends and were succinctly described by Macaulay who wrote (in his essay on Chatham) "George III had high notions of his own prerogatives and wished all public men to be detached from one another and dependent on himself alone. He found instruments fit for his purpose and thus sprang into existence a reptile species of politicians who disclaimed all ties except those which bound them to the throne. Their peculiar business was to support the king against the ministry. In return the king covered them with his protection. He never would turn them out and while everything else in the state was constantly changing these sycophants seemed to have a life interest in their offices." Bribery was used on a large scale and £25,000 is said to have been

spent in a single day. In 1774 the king bought the nomination of three seats in parliament at £2,500 each. A comparison with the present day can be achieved by multiplying these sums sixty-eight times. Horace Walpole commented that when the Treaty of Paris was before the House of Commons in 1763 three hundred and nineteen members voted in favour. Sixty-five on the other side, he added, were not bribed.

Junius wrote to Wilkes on 21st August 1771 "I presume, Sir, that you are satisfied that I mean you well and that it is not necessary to assure you that while you adhere to the resolution of depending only on the public favour (which if you have half the understanding I attribute to you, you never can depart from), you may rely on my utmost assistance. Whatever imaginary views may be ascribed to the author it must always be part of Junius's plan to support Mr. Wilkes while he makes common cause with the people."

Junius undoubtedly weakened Wilkes' opponents and contributed to his successes and the development of the democratic movement, but in his last letter, dated 19th January 1773 and addressed to his publisher he wrote "I have seen the signals thrown out for your old friend and correspondent. Be assured that I had good reason for not complying with them. In the present state of things, if I were to write again, I must be as silly as any of the horned cattle that run mad through the city or as any of your wise aldermen. I meant the cause and the public. Both are given up. I feel for the honour of this country when I see that there are not ten men in it who will unite and stand together upon any one question. But it is all alike, vile and contemptible. You have never flinched that I know of; and I shall always rejoice to hear of your prosperity."

Junius said of his anonymity "I am the sole depository of my secret and it shall die with me." He has never been identified with certainty, but, in his essay on Warren Hastings in 1841, Macaulay set out a number of reasons to support his own belief that Sir Philip Francis had been the unknown writer.

As to John Wilkes it was not until 1782 that George III had to accept a government determined to root out corruption from the House of Commons. Wilkes' persistent efforts, since his re-election in 1774, to have expunged from the records all the improper resolutions relating to the Middlesex elections in 1769 were finally successful and electors' rights were restored. He did not stand for re-election in 1790 and as you will all know he continued in office as Chamberlain and as Alderman for Farringdon Without until his death in December 1797.

J.C.
29.03.93