


# A Dialogue Between Mr. Schism and Mr. Cutbrush □ Boston Gazette, 29 October

Boston newspapers sometimes printed satirical “dialogues” on local politics. In addition to the one printed here, the *Massachusetts Centinel* published three others in the debate over the Constitution before the meeting of the state Convention on 9 January 1788. (See “A Political Dialogue,” 24 October [CC:189, between “Mr. Grumble” and “Mr. Union”]; and “A Dialogue Between Mr. Z and Mr. &,” 31 October, and 7 November, both below.) The one that appears immediately below was reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Herald* on 10 November.


The “*General*,” first referred to by “Mr. Schism,” was James Warren of Milton, an old revolutionary who was criticized for supporting tender laws and paper money, opposing the proposed federal impost, sympathizing with the [163 ] demands of the Shaysites, and attacking the repressive measures taken against them by the state legislature. Warren also came under attack because Federalists believed that he had written and had encouraged others to write newspaper essays criticizing the Constitution. Criticism of Warren was severe because he had seemingly switched sides in the ongoing political conflict between former governor James Bowdoin and the popular Governor John Hancock. Hence, the Bowdoinites viewed him as a traitor.

“A Dialogue Between Mr. Schism and Mr. Cutbrush” was among the first of the attacks on Warren during the public debate over the Constitution. The attacks continued through the spring of 1788,

becoming scurrilous in January 1788 after Warren had begun to publish his moderate and well-argued essays under the pseudonyms of “Helvidius Priscus” (27 December) and “The Republican Federalist” (29 December). Although Warren was not a member of the state Convention, Federalists were convinced that his opposition to the Constitution had to be negated. Perhaps not even Elbridge Gerry, who had refused to sign the Constitution and published a letter explaining his position, was as vilified in the Massachusetts press, although James Winthrop, a prolific Antifederalist propagandist and Warren’s alleged collaborator, was also roughly handled. Samuel Adams, another important Antifederalist, was not often criticized because he refused to state his position publicly. Federalist opposition to Warren persisted after the Constitution was ratified and in the spring elections in 1788 he was defeated in his bid to become lieutenant governor.

On 25 April 1788 John Quincy Adams visited Milton and met with Mercy Warren. A strong opponent of the Constitution, Mrs. Warren had published in February, under the pseudonym “A Columbian Patriot,” a lengthy pamphlet attacking it (CC:581). After his visit, Adams confided to his diary that “The Genl.’s political character has undergone of late a great alteration. Among those who were formerly his friends he is extremely unpopular; while the insurgent and antifederal party (for it is but one) consider him in a manner as their head; and have given him at this election many votes for lieutenant governor. — Mrs. Warren complained that he had been abused shamefully, & very undeservedly; but she thought me too federal to talk freely with me” (Allen, *JQA Diary*, II, 395).

About two months later, Adams noted that General Warren “was formerly a very popular man, but of late years he has thought himself neglected by the People; his mind has been soured, and he became

discontented, and querulous: he has been charged with using his influence in favour of Tender acts and paper money; and it has even been very confidently asserted, that he secretly favoured the insurrections and rebellion of the winter before last, whether his conduct has been misrepresented or not, is a point that must for the present remain undetermined. But he has certainly given some reason for suspicion by his imprudence; and when in a time of rebellion a man openly censures the conduct in general, and almost every individual act of an administration, an impartial public will always judge, that such a man cannot be greatly opposed to a party who are attacking the same measures. — Mrs. Warren however positively declared there was no truth in those allegations, & was very confident, that they were nothing more than the suggestions of the general's [164 ] enemies, whose malignity was unaccountable, but whose utmost spite and envy could not disturb his happiness

‘For all the distant din this world can keep

Rolls o’er his grotto and but soothes his sleep.[’]” □ (*ibid.*, 5 July 1788, 425–26. The two lines of verse are quoted from Alexander Pope, *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace* [1733; revised 1739], lines 123–24.).

Mess’rs. Edes. *The following Dialogue lately fell into my hands; if you think proper, please to publish it.*

Mr. *Schism*. Good morning Mr. *Cutbrush*, — What’s the News?

Mr. *Cutbrush*. Nothing very strange, except, they say the New Constitution, that they call the Federal Government, is come.


Mr. *Schism*. And what say the people of your town to it? — I hope they will not be in a hurry to pass their

judgments; there is a *darn deal* of jockeying now a days about. —

Mr. *Cutbrush*. Why no, they don't seem to be much in a hurry as you say; and it is best they should consider before they determine, especially about a matter of so much consequence; — however, I hope they will not think too long neither. — Much learning makes some people mad; and it seems as if *some folks* would be very well pleased if they could make the people mad enough to reject this new Plan of Government.

Mr. *Schism*. I find friend *Cutbrush*, you are at the old point; you and I can never agree in politicks. Now I am for the people's having time sufficient to mature matters in their *own mind*, and to find out the secret design of this famous Continental Convention — for although their plan is a right noble one, yet I fear a snake in the grass, wherever our great men get their heads together — What says our good friend the *General* to this scheme of a *national* Government?

Mr. *Cutbrush*. Why as to the *General*, you know *him* as well as I do — you know he is a Friend to *Tender Laws* and an Enemy to *Imposts* — the reason of the *first* every body can tell, and as to the *latter* he seems to be mistaken in his Scheme, for *dry Taxes* are held in mortal detestation now a-days. There is no doubt for these reasons that he is a bitter enemy to the Federal Government — But as he has been *out* in his Politics for a number of years past, it is not expected that he will be able to make many proselytes.

Mr. *Schism*. Perhaps *you* may be mistaken – the General is an old *tried* Whig – always uniform, except it may be in his *personal* Enmity – but a man is at liberty to alter his sentiments. If he should oppose the Continental Plan of Government as he no doubt will, he will gather up his Popularity he thinks: and if he can defeat the friends to that system he will establish himself – and bid defiance to his enemies and creditors: [165 ] For my part I have no notion of a man's being obliged to strip himself to pay his Debts, so as to be rendered ineligible to any Posts in the Service of his Country.

Mr. *Cutbrush*. But what, friend *Schism*, ought we to think of a man who pretending to be a *friend* to the Constitution of his Country, opposes a *Federal System* of Government, which all good men admire, because he *pretends to think* that it strikes at the Sovereignty of his *own State*, and *that Constitution* which he would not support. For my part I abhor such characters, and think they have justly *lost* their Popularity, and the Confidence of their Townsmen, and hope their secret movements and selfish schemes will be narrowly watched and properly exposed.

Mr. *Schism*. But what Mr. *Cutbrush* will become of us poor Debtors, if we are deprived of *Tender Acts* and *Suspension Laws*? What will become of the *Sovereignty* of this State, if we are deprived of the right of doing what we *please*? – If this Federal Government should be adopted we

may never hope to see a *Bankrupt Law* to our minds – and the *Great Men* will swallow us all up as a *Porpoise* does a Scool of *Mackrel*.

Mr. *Cutbrush*. And what Mr. *Schism* will become of the whole Church and State, if we do not have an *alteration* in Government? – The General may cant till his heart achs, there are ten persons thrown into distress by these accursed *Tender Acts* and *Suspension Laws*, to one that is relieved by them – and you may as well expect to turn a stream up hill, as try to hire a Dollar of our rich men, so long as the Government remains in its present deplorable situation. – I do not know how you have made out, Mr. *Schism*, by your running about and sowing sedition; attending conventions at *nine shillings (a)* a day, &c. but for my part, with all my industry at home, I can but just live, & I see no prospect of things mending under our present situation; and to live and die without hope, is terrible Mr. *Schism*. – It appears to me, Mr. *Schism*, and to almost all my neighbours, that the American Constitution is that *little article* Hope, left at the bottom of *Pandora's* box of evils, which are so thick upon us at this day. – And if this last resort of the wretched should fail us, I tremble for the consequences. – The last Winter's campaign was but a sample of that horrid scene of *war*, *anarchy* and *bloodshed*, which would open upon us – for despair makes men mad indeed.

Mr. *Schism*. As to your reflection about my attending *Conventions*, Mr. *Cutbrush* – you have said enough upon that

subject before – The *General* and all our *friends* know that we were *oppressed*, and ought to be *relieved*; and I hope in God, that we are not to have our State *regulating* Conventions taken away by this Federal Government – we have carried *many points*, and there are *many more* to carry – No, Mr. *Cutbrush*, if our [166] friends do but sound the horn loud enough, there will be a *goodly* number flock to the standard of *Regulators* – We have not fought for liberty to be ruled by any set of men whatever.

Mr. *Cutbrush*. So you at last have thrown off the mask, better have no government than one that shall make knaves do honestly – But I trust the good sense of my countrymen will see the fatal issue of your scheme, and that of all Antifederalists, as they call them. – Every rank of *peaceable, well disposed, industrious* Citizens, now looks up to the New Constitution as to their last refuge from misery – And its base and *unprincipled* opponents, must and will be considered as the worst enemies of their country. – So good bye to ye, and an honester disposition, friend *Schism*.

**(a) Actually paid to Members of Conventions. 1**

**1** During the 1780s, county conventions representing many towns were a favorite means of putting political pressure on the state legislature. These conventions developed political programs or nominated candidates for the state Senate.

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