

Lord North's Speech on Presenting the Papers

[p. v1:32]

[Referred to by this document.]

The Lord North presented to the House, by his Majesty's command, copies of the same Papers that were this day communicated to the House of Lords.

The following Speech of Lord North, on presenting the American papers to the House of Commons, 7th of March, 1774, was, through accident, omitted to be inserted in its proper place; See folio 32.

These papers, his Lordship said, consist of copies and extracts of letters from the Commander of the forces, and from the several Governors in America; of threats and prophetic warnings to the gentlemen to whom the tea lately sent over by the East India Company was consigned; of copies of letters from the several consignees at Boston to a ring-leader of the faction in that town; of votes and resolves of the town of Boston, previous to the arrival of the tea; of narratives of transactions that happened after the arrival; of a Petition from the consignees to the Council of Massachusetts, praying that they and their property might be taken under the protection of Government; with the absolute denial of the Council to interfere in the business; of notes from the India House; of letters from the Admiral commanding in Boston harbour; and from Lt. Col. Leslie, of the sixty-fourth regiment, in barracks at Castle William; of a Proclamation of the Governor's against the factious meetings of the inhabitants, which they treated with the most insolent contempt; of copies of treasonable printed papers; of the transactions of the Massachusetts Council, condemning the destruction of the tea, and advising legal prosecutions against the perpetrators, none of whom were publicly known. — So far regards the Massachusetts only.

The papers written and printed from the other Colonies, partake in a great measure of the nature of those already mentioned, and are formed exactly on their model. Besides the regular official information of the different Governors, transmitted to the American Secretary of State, there are copies of many inflammatory fugitive pieces, handbills, alarms, resolves of town meetings, and minutes of Council; but as there was no outrage committed but at Boston, it were unnecessary to trouble the House with all the incendiary scribbling and printing in the different Colonies. It may, however, be necessary to observe, that all the printed and circulated trash were plentifully larded with the fashionable phrases of "desperate plans of despotism; ministerial designs to ruin their liberties; slavery; galling fetters; forging infernal chains; encouraging popery; despotic rule;" &c. &c.

The letters from the different Governors contain a minute and regular detail of the state of their respective Provinces, and particularly of the capital cities of each, from the first intelligence of the teas being shipped at home till its arrival in America, and return back, or destruction. Above all Governor Hutchinson's letters are the most precise, exact, and circumstantial. He appears to have left nothing untried to preserve the peace of the town, and secure the property of the

Company. He appears to have endeavoured, first, to sooth, and when that did not do, to intimidate the faction. It was the Governor who advised the consignees to apply to the Council for their advice, for the preservation of the tea committed to their care, and for their personal security; for two of his sons were the two principal consignees. He also, during the height of their turbulent, unlawful, and seditious assemblings, before the tea was destroyed, sent the Sheriff to the town-meeting at Boston, commanding the people there to break up and depart. When the Sheriff, Mr. Greenleaf, entered the hall, and intimated that he had a paper to read from the Governor, the faction put it to the vote, whether he should be permitted to read it or not? After some debate, permission was granted, and the Sheriff accordingly proclaimed the Governor's orders for them to disperse. The instant he had done speaking, the faction saluted him with an universal hiss, which continued during his stay, and accompanied him in his retreat. The Proclamation was afterwards published in the Gazette, from whence it was copied into the other papers, and commented upon with every mark of contempt and indignity.

Before the arrival of the tea, the Governor appeared to have taken every measure that prudence could suggest, or good policy justify, both for the security of the Company's property and for the safety of the consignees. The principal leader of the faction was applied to; he commanded the Governor's company of cadets; and although it was hardly to be expected that he would muster the cadets to oppose his own party, it was judged necessary to make him acquainted with his duty, and to leave him without excuse. The application, as was foreseen, was without effect; and no steps were taken either to preserve the peace, or to secure the tea. The Selectmen of the town insisted, indeed, that Mr. Rotch, the owner of Captain Hall's ship, should demand a clearance outward from the customhouse, in order that the tea might be carried back; Mr. Rotch, knowing that the demand was unusual, resisted for a long time, till finding his life in danger, he was constrained to comply. The custom-house refused to grant him an illegal clearance. The Governor was then applied to for a pass, without which the vessel would have been stopped at Castle William; but this was also refused to Mr. Rotch, because it was totally inconsistent with the duty of a Governor to grant a pass to a vessel that had not been regularly cleared at the custom-house. This negotiation, therefore, being to a crisis, a town meeting was called about the middle of December last, when an account of the several demands and refusals, with the reasons that prevented the compliance, were very fairly reported by Mr. Rotch; upon which a signal was given, and presently a number of men disguised like Indians; boarded the vessel in which the tea was stowed, broke open the chests, and committed the contents to the sea.

This is a succinct account of the proceedings at Boston, as they happened, in regular succession. It happened that the ship bound for Boston was the first, of those employed by, the Company to carry the tea, that reached her destined port. Every civil precaution appears to have been tried, to preserve the property, and the peace of the town; his Majesty's Council, the cadets, and the militia, were all applied to, without effect: the Sheriff read a Proclamation to the faction, commanding them to dissolve their assembly, and this Proclamation was immediately afterwards inserted in the Gazette; both the Sheriff and the Proclamation were treated with insult.

The people of Boston were, on this occasion, fairly tried. The Governor from the beginning had formed the resolution not to call in either the naval or military force, but to trust the management of the whole affair to the conduct of the civil power. The loyal and peaceable people of the

mercantile town of Boston, as they have ever affected to be thought, were wholly left to the exercise of their own judgment, and they have given all the world a notable proof of their justice and moderation, by wantonly committing to the waves a valuable commodity, the property of another mercantile body of loyal subjects, when all they had to do, in order to defeat any supposed imposition, was, to keep firm to their resolution, not to buy or to use it. It is but reasonable, however, that they should be made to pay for their outrageous pastime, and be constrained to make good the loss; such an indemnification will be, to them, the more bitter as they must pay for a commodity they did not taste, and which they pretend to abhor.

The other Governors, after the accomplishment of the Bostonian exploit, wisely agreed to suffer the tea to be carried back from whence it came. The consignees refused to receive it, and as no one had ordered it, no one was obliged to hazard his own personal safety, in taking upon himself to be the owner of it. They, therefore, well knowing that what had already happened, was fully sufficient to rouse the resentment of the British people and Parliament, very prudently acquiesced in the applications that were made to them by the respective Captains, for leave to return home, thereby avoiding an unnecessary occasion of involving their Provinces in a troublesome dispute, the issue of which could not but be foreseen.

With respect to Governor Hutchinson, had it not been for his determined resolution not to irritate the people by calling in the assistance of the naval power, the Company's tea might undoubtedly have been saved; but, as the leading men, in the town of Boston, have always made great complaints of the interposition of the army and navy, and not only declared, but insisted that they were the aggressors in every riotous disturbance that has happened among them, it cannot but give pleasure to every unprejudiced mind, that their Governor gave them no such plea on this occasion. They were left wholly to themselves, and their present conduct has given the lie direct to their former declarations.

By an impartial review of all the letters and papers now laid before the House, I may venture to assert, that it will manifestly appear, that nothing can be done there by officers, civil, military or naval, to effectuate the re-establishment of peace in that Province, without additional Parliamentary powers to give weight to their proceedings. They can make no movement, even the most trifling, but what is exclaimed against by the licentious as an infringement of their liberties. It is the settled opinion of the wisest men in that and this country, that no effort in the Colonies by any body of men, civil, or military, can remove the evils that now reign amongst them. It is Parliament, and Parliament only, which can restore that turbulent people to peace, and bring order out of confusion. It is therefore incumbent upon every member of this House, to weigh and consider the purport of the papers that his Majesty has been graciously pleased, unasked, to communicate; and to lay all prejudice aside in forming an opinion of them.

SOURCE: [American Archives: Documents of the American Revolution.](#)