

Message and Papers Considered, Speech of Lord North

The Order of the Day Read

As soon as the House had resumed its former tranquillity, it was

Ordered, That the order of the day, for taking into consideration his Majesty's most gracious Message of Monday last, together with the Papers which were presented to the House by the Lord North, upon the 7th and 11th days of this instant, March, (by his Majesty's command,) be now read:

And the said order being read accordingly,

The House proceeded to take the same into further consideration.

And his Majesty's said most gracious Message was again read by Mr. Speaker, (all the members of the House being uncovered.) Upon which,

Lord North's Speech

Lord North rose. He said it contained two propositions: the one to enable his Majesty to put an end to the present disturbances in America, the other to secure the just dependence of the Colonies on the Crown of Great Britain. His Lordship observed, that the present disorders originated in Boston, in the Province of Massachusetts Bay; and hoped that the method he should propose to the House would be adopted. He should confine himself particularly to those disturbances which had been created since the 1st of December. He said, that it was impossible for our commerce to be safe, whilst it continued in the harbour of Boston, and it was highly necessary that some port or other should be found for the landing of our merchandise where our laws would give full protection; he therefore hoped that the removal of the custom-house officers from the town of Boston, would be thought a necessary step; and that the consequence of that would produce one other proposition, which would be, the preventing any shipping from endeavouring to land their wares and merchandise there, by blocking up the use of that harbour; he said he should move for leave to bring in a Bill for those two purposes. He observed, that this was the third time the officers of the customs had been prevented from doing their duty in the harbour of Boston; he thought the inhabitants of the town of Boston deserved punishment; he said, perhaps it may be objected, that some few individuals may suffer on this account who ought not; but where the authority of a town had been, as it were, asleep and inactive, it was no new thing for the whole town to be fined for such neglect; he instanced the city of London, in King Charles the Second's time, when Dr. Lamb was killed by unknown persons, the city was fined for such; and the case of Edinburgh, in Captain Porteous's affair, when a fine was set upon the whole; and also at Glasgow, when the house of Mr. Campbell was pulled down, part of the revenue of that town was sequestered to make good the damage. He observed, that Boston did not stand in so fair a light as either of the three before mentioned places, for that Boston had been upwards of seven years in riot and confusion, and associations had been held against receiving British merchandise so long ago. He observed that proceedings were openly carried on in the

beginning of last November, to the 17th of December, denying the force or efficacy of the laws of this country, to be exerted in the harbour of Boston; that during the above time, there was not the least interposition offered by the inhabitants of the town; that at their public meetings, they had regularly given orders for nightly watches to be appointed, consisting of a large body of persons, which were to prevent the landing of the tea. As the merchandise of Great Britain, this surely was highly criminal, and a direct opposition to the execution of an Act of Parliament; and as the tea belonging to the India Company had remained twenty days in the harbour, without a clearance, they were afraid lest it should be seized by the custom-house officers, and by that means landed; they therefore destroyed it on the 20th day. That this appeared to be a violent and outrageous proceeding done to our fellow subjects, by a set of People, who could not, in any shape, claim more than the natural privilege of trading with their fellow subjects. That Boston had been the ringleader in all riots, and had at all times shown a desire of seeing the laws of Great Britain attempted in vain, in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. That the act of the mob in destroying the tea, and other proceedings, belonged to the act of the public meeting; and that though other Colonies were peaceable and well inclined towards the trade of this country, and the tea would have been landed at New York without any opposition; yet, when the news came from Boston, that the tea was destroyed, Governor Tryon, from the advice of the People, thought that the face of things being changed since that account was sent, it would be more prudent to send the tea back to England, than to risk the landing of it. His Lordship observed that Boston alone was to blame for having set this example, therefore Boston ought to be the principal object of our attention for punishment. He proposed one clause to the Bill, which, he said, would prevent the Crown from restoring the re-establishment, till full satisfaction was made to the East India Company for the loss of their tea. He said, he did not propose it by way of tax, but by way of restitution to the injured, who were our own subjects; and to let it go forth to the world, that the Parliament of Great Britain will protect their subjects and their property; that the Crown, by that clause, will not even then be obliged to restore the custom-house, unless his Majesty is thoroughly convinced that the laws of this country will be better observed in the harbour of Boston for the future; this restitution entirely depended upon Boston alone. He should be happy to have those, who had been the promoters of these disturbances in Boston found out, and that they might be obliged to make good the damage to the East India Company; but as those persons are unknown to us, Boston will, no doubt, endeavour to find out such persons, or pass acts of their own Assembly, to levy such money in the most equitable and just manner. We have only to request it for the East India Company. He said that this Bill was not all he meant to propose; that other parts, of more nice disquisition, will remain for the future consideration of Parliament. There, perhaps, might be other methods proposed that were better than this; but he had as yet found out none that deserved a preference. Some persons had proposed that the fishery might be taken away; but this, he observed, would affect the Colony at large. Others proposed the Straits trade; and this would be liable to the same objection. No method of punishment ever came from him, but with great regret: he therefore hoped for that unanimity in a vote of this sort, which would give strength to the measure. It had been said, that we owed this proceeding of the Americans to our own ill conduct in taxing and repealing; but if gentlemen would recollect, when the Stamp Act passed, there was hardly a dissenting voice; and when it was repealed, it had the consent of a great majority of that House; that the doctrine then laid down was, that external duties were our right, internal taxes theirs; that when the repeal of the Stamp Act took place here, the clamour raised against that Act in America had subsided; that the non-importation

agreements, it was true, were not remedied, because they ceased of themselves. It was my fate, he said, to propose the repeal of the duties laid on in 1767, and to continue the Tea Duty only. The reason was, I thought, the non-importation agreements would break up of themselves; which was afterwards the case. It was proposed by some, that the Tea Duty should be taken off; it was urged by others, that it would then become a monopoly of the East India Company; nor did I think the giving up the duty to the East India Company of consequence enough to venture the struggle of the Legislative authority of this country. If they could sell tea cheaper than any other People, they would certainly have the market to themselves. His Lordship observed, that at Boston we were considered as two independent States; but we were no longer to dispute between legislation and taxation, we were now to consider only whether or not we have any authority there; that it is very clear we have none, if we suffer the property of our subjects to be destroyed. He hoped that all would agree with him, both peers, members, and merchants, to proceed unanimously to punish such parts of America as denied the authority of this country. We must, he said, punish, control; or yield to them. He did not wish to molest without an offence given; he therefore proposed this measure to day; and observed, if such conduct was followed, it would tend to cement two countries, as important to the one as the other; he therefore moved, "That leave be given to bring in a Bill for the immediate removal of the officers concerned in the collection and management of his Majesty's duties and customs from the town of Boston, in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, in North America; and to discontinue the landing and discharging, lading and shipping, of goods, wares, and merchandise, at the said town of Boston, or within the harbour thereof."

When Lord North sat down, there was a perfect silence for some minutes.

Mr. Grosvenor

Mr. Grosvenor got up to second the motion, and condemned very much the proceedings of Boston; he said, they were all entirely owing to the repeal of the Stamp Act.

Governor Johnstone

Governor Johnstone desired to know, if it was to be left to the Crown, to what part of America the custom-house should be removed?

Lord North

Lord North said, a clause was intended to be inserted in the Bill to leave that matter to the Crown.

Mr. Dempster observed, that should this indemnification to the East India Company take place by way of tax, it would be collected over America, and thereby injure the property of People who had been entirely innocent of this affair; that when he spoke formerly so much about taxation in general, he meant not as to the right which we had, but only as to the prudence and policy of the measure.

Mr. Sawbridge

Mr. Sawbridge got up to speak, but the noise of the House being great for the question, he sat down, he said, till gentlemen had done coughing, and the House had done calling for the question; that though he could not be heard now, he should sit coolly till he could. The House being little silent, he said, he always gave his genuine opinion, and he was now, and always had been, of such opinion, that this country had no right to tax America; that it might be said by some People here, that America is not represented; that if this country had a right to take a single shilling out of an American's pocket, they have a right to take the whole. He then sat down a second time, the House being noisy, and said though he could not be allowed to speak long, he could sit long; and observed, that this destruction of the tea was entirely done by a mob unarmed; and that if a requisition was to be sent to Boston to make satisfaction to the India Company he made no doubt but what it would be complied with. He said, he was against the motion.

Mr. Byng

Mr. Byng said, he only meant to ask the noble Lord one question, whether this measure was not preventing the English ships from trading there, and a punishment on ourselves?

Mr. Fuller

Mr. R. Fuller said, the Bill brought in would shew whether it was a punishment upon A or B; that he should therefore reserve his opinion until he saw the Bill.

Mr. Dowdeswell

Mr. Dowdeswell rose, upon which the House thought the debate would continue; he said, he was of opinion they were going to do very great mischief, and should think it his duty to give that opinion in this early stage of the Bill: he said, this Bill was to punish the town of Boston: why will you punish Boston alone? Did not other towns send your tea back to England, and refuse the landing? Have they committed no offence? He asked, if there was any evidence of a general concurrence of the inhabitants of Boston; he said, the examples of punishment the noble Lord had mentioned, were not similar to the present case; that the counties being obliged by law to make good the loss between sun and sun, was an old established law, not made for a particular purpose; that this Bill would be an ex-post-facto law; that the case of a corporation was different from the present; the corporation chose their own officers, the magistrates of the town of Boston were chosen by the Province at large. Would the House nor hear what Boston had to say in its defence? Would the House condemn without evidence, in the absence of the parties? He should trouble the House no more at present; he thought they were going to do a wrong act, nor could he think, that the cases of London, Edinburgh, or Glasgow, could at all be brought as examples of punishment in this case. He disapproved much of the Bill, and said, he should give a negative to it.

Mr. Cavendish

Mr. Cavendish approved of the proposition; but hoped, if the merchants of this country could any way be injured by it, that time would be given them to come and petition.

Captain Phipps

Captain Phipps said, he felt no reason to imagine that any opposition to the Bill at Boston could be effectual: that it was no new thing to direct and order a port for the reception of the trade of America; that harbours were in great plenty there; that all authority had been trampled upon in that country for many years; that if our subjects could not trade to Boston, they must go where they could trade with safety; that he did not attribute the disturbances to the Stamp Act, or the repeal of it. When he was in that country, he thought that that Act might have been put in execution; that the repeal might be proper. He imagined, one of the provisions that would be adopted by the House, would be to repeal the Declaratory Act, which, he said, was the most absurd and unconstitutional Act ever passed. Let America alone, and it would return of itself to obedience, and do not let us search for trifling taxes, by way of experiment, to try our power; the moment they see that taxation is not for effectually collecting of money, but for experiment only, they will always oppose you.

Lord Cavendish

Lord G. Cavendish said, he was not sure but the object before the House would be prejudicial to our trade; that he looked to the mutual interest of the two countries; that they were united by proper measures, and, he hoped, they would be kept so; he wished that no idle ideas of superiority might prevail, for that country which is kept by power, is in danger of being lost every day.

Colonel Barré

Colonel Barré said, he was urged to rise to discharge his duty in not giving a silent vote upon the occasion. The proposition before the House, he could not help giving his hearty affirmative to; that he liked it, harsh as it was; he liked it for its moderation; and argued, that the noble Lord's (North) conduct would be of the same stamp throughout. He said, I think Boston ought to be punished, she is your eldest son. [Here the House laughed, and some members observed by him, that she would be a proper person to direct the admission of Irish members into the House, as he had hinted a day before that office for Mr. Rigby.] After the House had laughed heartily, he said, I mean your daughter, she is a noble prop; she gave herself that form of constitution she now has; cherish and support her. He wished to see an unanimous vote in the onset of this business; that when Boston saw this measure was carried by such a consent, they would the more readily pay the sum of money to the East India Company; that he hoped, if they did, that the Crown would mitigate the rest of their punishment; if the Crown went further, perhaps they could not do it without, as Governor Tryon observed, at the muzzle of your guns; that we had given America limited and prescribed means to acquire wealth; that he hoped they would leave the rest of the matter to themselves; that he had often thought, in the coolest hours, that America ought not to be taxed by this country. Endeavour, says he, to take the power of taxing out of their Assemblies, and it will be strongly opposed; he meant not to stick to experimental taxes; the tax of the Stamp Act was made to please this side [meaning Mr. Grenville's friends] of the House. Go, says he, to some great request at once, and if they wont comply with it, try then your power. You have been paying £4,000,000, for doing of nothing, only for teasing and scratching; I wish to see a fair

decided line at once; I don't, says he, see any appearance of war at present; now is your time to try, in a civilized manner, your power over the Americans; other of your enemies are not in a condition to take part with them. I am not in office, that my advice can be taken; if I was, I should give it freely. If office comes to me, it comes as an atonement for repeated and unmerited affronts. I shall at all times speak the language of a free and disinterested member.

Motion Agreed To

The motion of Lord North, for leave to bring in the Bill was then agreed to; and Lord North, Mr. Onslow, Mr. Charles Townshend, Mr. Attorney General, Mr. Solicitor General, Mr. Rice, Mr. Cooper, and Mr. Robinson, were ordered to prepare and bring in the same.

Ordered, That the further consideration of the Message and Papers be referred to a Committee of the whole House.

Resolved, That this House will, on Friday morning next, resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House, to consider of the said Message and Papers.

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