

DISSOLUTION OF THE LONG PARLIAMENT

Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) and his Council of Officers

22 April 1653

Our intention is not to give an account, at this time, of the grounds which first moved us to take up arms and engage our lives and all that was dear unto us in this cause; nor to mind, in this declaration, the various dispensations through which Divine Providence has led us, or the witness the Lord has borne and the many signal testimonies of acceptance which He has given to the sincere endeavours of His unworthy servants whilst they were contesting with the many and great difficulties, as well in the wars as other transactions in the three nations; being necessitated, for the defence of the same cause they first asserted, to have recourse unto extraordinary actions, the same being evident by former declarations published on that behalf.

After it had pleased God not only to reduce Ireland and give in Scotland, but so marvellously to appear for His people at Worcester, that these nations were reduced to a great degree of peace and England to perfect quiet, and thereby the Parliament had opportunity to give the people the harvest of all their labour, blood, and treasure, and to settle a due liberty both in reference to civil and spiritual things, whereunto they were obliged by their duty, their engagements, as also the great and wonderful things which God has wrought for them; it was matter of much grief to the good and well-affected of the land to observe the little progress which was made therein, who thereupon applied to the army, expecting redress by their means; notwithstanding which, the army being unwilling to meddle with the civil authority in matters so properly appertaining to it, it was agreed that His Excellency and officers of the army which were Members of Parliament should be desired to move the Parliament to proceed vigorously in reforming what was amiss in government, and to the settling of the Commonwealth upon a foundation of justice and righteousness. Which having done, we hoped that the Parliament would seasonably have answered our expectation.

But finding, to our grief, delays therein, we renewed our desires in an humble petition to them, which was presented in August last. And although they at that time, signifying their good acceptance thereof, returned us thanks and referred the particulars thereof to a Committee of the House, yet no considerable effect was produced, nor any such progress made, as might imply their real intentions to accomplish what was petitioned for.

But, on the contrary, there more and more appeared amongst them an aversion to the things themselves, with much bitterness and opposition to the people of God and His spirit acting in them, which grew so prevalent that those persons of honour and integrity amongst them, who had eminently appeared for God and the public good, both before and throughout this war, were rendered of no further use in Parliament than by meeting with a corrupt party to give them countenance to carry on their ends, and for effecting the desire they had of perpetuating themselves in the supreme government, for which purpose the said party long opposed and frequently declared themselves against having a new Representative. And when they saw themselves necessitated to take that Bill into consideration, they resolved to make use of it to recruit the House with persons of the same spirit and temper, thereby to perpetuate their own sitting; which intention diverse of the activist amongst them did manifest, labouring to persuade others to a consent therein. And the better to effect this, diverse petitions, preparing from several counties for the continuance of this Parliament, were encouraged, if not set on foot, by many of them.

For obviating of these evils, the officers of the Army obtained several meetings with some of the Parliament to consider what fitting means and remedy might be applied to prevent the same. But such endeavours proving altogether ineffectual, it became most evident to the Army, as they doubt not it also is to all considering persons, that this Parliament, through the corruption of some, the jealousy of others, the non-attendance and negligence of many, would never answer those ends which God, His people, and the whole nation expected from them; but that this cause, which the Lord has so greatly blessed and borne witness to, must needs languish

under their hands and, by degrees, be wholly lost, and the lives, liberties, and comforts of His people delivered into their enemies' hands.

All which being sadly and seriously considered by the honest people of this nation, as well as by the Army, and wisdom and direction being sought from the Lord, it seemed to be a duty incumbent upon us, who had seen so much of the power and presence of God going along with us, to consider of some more effectual means to secure the cause which the good people of this Commonwealth had been so long engaged in, and to establish righteousness and peace in these nations.

And after much debate it was judged necessary and agreed upon that the supreme authority should be by the Parliament devolved upon known persons, men fearing God and of approved integrity, and the government of the Commonwealth committed unto them for a time as the most hopeful way to encourage and countenance all God's people, reform the law, and administer justice impartially; hoping thereby the people might forget monarchy and, understanding their true interest in the election of successive Parliaments, may have the government settled upon a true basis, without hazard to this glorious cause, or necessitating to keep up armies for the defence of the same.

And being still resolved to use all means possible to avoid extraordinary courses, we prevailed with about twenty members of Parliament to give us a conference, with whom we freely and plainly debated the necessity and justness of our proposals on that behalf, and did evidence that those, and not the Act under their consideration, would most probably bring forth something answerable to that work, the foundation whereof God Himself has laid, and is now carrying on in the world.

The which, notwithstanding, found no acceptance; but, instead thereof, it was offered that the way was to continue still this present Parliament as being that from which we might reasonably expect all good things. And this being vehemently insisted upon, did much confirm us in our apprehensions that not any love to a representative but the making use thereof to recruit, and so perpetuate themselves, was their aim.

They being plainly dealt with about this and told that neither the nation, the honest interest, nor we ourselves would be deluded by such dealings, they did agree to meet again the next day in the afternoon for mutual satisfaction; it being consented unto by the Members present that endeavours should be used that nothing in the meantime should be done in Parliament that might exclude or frustrate the proposals before-mentioned.

Notwithstanding this, the next morning the Parliament did make more haste than usual in carrying on their said Act, being helped on therein by some of the persons engaged to us the night before; none of them which were then present endeavouring to oppose the same. And being ready to put the main question for consummating the said Act, whereby our aforesaid proposals would have been rendered void and the way of bringing them into a fair and full debate in Parliament obstructed; for preventing thereof, and all the sad and evil consequences which must, upon the grounds aforesaid, have ensued; and whereby, at one blow, the interest of all honest men and of this glorious cause had been in danger to be laid in the dust, and these nations embroiled in new troubles at a time when our enemies abroad are watching all advantages against us, and some of them actually engaged in war with us, we have been necessitated, though with much reluctancy, to put an end to this Parliament. Which yet we have done, we hope, out of an honest heart, preferring this cause above our names, lives, families, or interests, how dear soever; with clear intentions and real purposes of heart, to call to the government persons of approved fidelity and honesty; believing that as no wise men will expect to gather grapes of thorns, so good men will hope that if persons so qualified be chosen, the fruits of a just and righteous reformation, so long prayed and wished for, will, by the blessing of God, be in due time obtained, to the refreshing of all those good hearts who have been panting after those things.

Much more might have been said if it had been our desire to justify ourselves by aspersing others and raking into the mis-government of affairs, but we shall conclude with this: that as we have been led by necessity and Providence to act as we have done, even beyond and above our own thoughts and desires, so we shall and do, in

that part of this great work which is behind, put ourselves wholly upon the Lord for a blessing; professing we look not to stand one day without His support, much less to bring to pass any of the things mentioned and desired without His assistance. And therefore do solemnly desire and expect that all men, as they would not provoke the Lord to their own destruction, should wait for such issue as He should bring forth, and to follow their business with peaceable spirits, wherein we promise them protection by His assistance.

And for those who profess their fear and love to the name of God, that seeing in a great measure for their sakes and for righteousness' sake, we have taken our lives in our hands to do these things, they would be instant with the Lord day and night on our behalfs, that we may obtain grace from Him and, seeing we have made so often mention of His name, that we may not do the least dishonour thereunto. Which indeed would be our confusion and a stain to the whole profession of godliness.

We beseech them also to live in all humility, meekness, righteousness, and love one toward another, and towards all men, that so they may put to silence the ignorance of the foolish, who falsely accuse them, and to know that the late great and glorious dispensations, wherein the Lord has so wonderfully appeared in bringing forth these things by the travail and blood of His children, ought to oblige them so to walk in the wisdom and love of Christ, as may cause others to honour their holy profession, because they see Christ to be in them of a truth.

We do further purpose, before it be long, more particularly to show the grounds of our proceedings and the reasons of this late great action and change, which in this we have but hinted at.

And we do lastly declare that all judges, sheriffs, justices of the peace, mayors, bailiffs, committees, and commissioners, and all other civil officers and public ministers whatsoever within this Commonwealth, or any parts thereof, do proceed in their respective places and offices. And all persons whatsoever are to give obedience to them as fully as when Parliament was sitting.

G.B. Adams and H.M. Stephens, eds., *Select Documents of English Constitutional History* (London: MacMillan, 1901):403–407. [modernized]