

DEFENSE OF LAMBERT'S COUP

Lieutenant-General Charles Fleetwood (c. 1618–1692)

to General George Monck (1608–1670), Governor of Scotland (1653–1659)

Charles Fleetwood, a prominent commander during the Civil Wars and staunch supporter of Oliver Cromwell, on 22 April 1659 dissolved the Third Protectorate Parliament and re-called the Rump Parliament on 6 May. Parliament soon moved to limit the power of the Puritan-dominated army, and on 13 October Fleetwood joined with General John Lambert to purge Parliament of its objectionable Members. General George Monck, commander of the English army in Scotland, held the balance of power—across the nation everyone waited to see if Monck would support or oppose the coup.

25 October 1659

I have sent this bearer, Colonel Talbot, unto you, knowing him to be a hearty lover of your Lordship as well as a friend to myself, and by him I shall deal plainly and freely with you to let you know how much I am surprised at yours, which by your messenger I received from you. I much wonder you should put yourself in a posture of opposition to your old friends upon a bare report, for I am sure you have not received a right state of the case. I shall therefore give you an account how affairs have been amongst us.

I must let you know there was no resolution to give disturbance to the Parliament sitting upon the Wednesday morning, until that night that after the House was up, Sir Arthur Haselrig,¹ Colonel Morley, and Colonel Walton had ordered two regiments of Foot and one of Horse, in whom they thought they could most confide, to be drawn together into Westminster Hall, who were put into a posture of opposition unto the rest of their fellow officers and soldiers. Such a sudden resolution and management thereof put the rest of the officers of the army into a sudden revolution that to prevent blood and the division of this army, it was judged necessary for the forces to draw together in order to the preserving of the peace and disappointment of designs to give disturbance, which accordingly was done.

The Council, having a full account of this action, thought fit to command those gentlemen to retire, as also those forces which they had got together, who had dispersed most of them, although that order had not come, having received satisfaction in their being led into a snare. I shall not take upon me at present to give an account what led to this action, being intended by a declaration to be published, which I hope will give all peaceable-minded people satisfaction. And let not mistaken earnestness engage you in a design of blood, which I am confident the Lord will bear a [testimony] against you in, if you undertake it.

You are pleased to direct a declaration to the churches, of whom I do not think there are two in England will own your Lordship in what you are about to do; no, the sober godly Presbyterian and other good people in the nation who were not engaged in Charles Stuart's design will abhor the action. My Lord, I love and honour you, but give me leave to say, no man of sober principles throughout this nation will otherwise interpret this action of yours than a way to bring Charles Stuart amongst us again, though I hope not intended by you.

If it be thought advisable to [recall] this Parliament again, I am sure you take a course direct against it by dividing the army, which certainly no man can suppose a readier way than that to begin a civil war in these nations and give them an advantage to rise who, you cannot but know, hanker for all such occasions. And shall the army in Scotland give the advantage to that party by their putting themselves into a posture of opposition to their brethren of the army of England?

Certainly [neither] your Lordship nor any good man whatsoever spreading this case before the Lord can satisfy themselves thus to engage. If there be such an earnest desire of the Parliament's return, surely you should have laboured to satisfy yourself in the grounds of their disturbance and, like brethren, have sent some of your own

¹ Sir Arthur Haselrig (1601–1661), M.P. for Leicestershire (1640–1659), led the attempt to dismiss General Lambert from his command.

number to have reasoned the case with us. But to conclude us as guilty and threaten us with blood is a strange way of proceeding amongst friends.

We have committed our cause, I hope, to the Lord and, if we be in a wrong, I trust He will convince us. But at present let me tell you that I think there has not been more unanimity and satisfaction throughout the nations in any one action that has fallen out in several years past than in what is done.

As to what you say concerning our repentance for our late apostasies, I shall only say this, that I hope there was and is a due sense thereof; but certainly in our calling this Parliament together it was well known what were the arguments that did invite and encourage us thereunto. Nay, assurances were given of those in whom there was a confidence of their influence in that House that what we had proposed should be effected, which how little thereof has been done I need not say.

Although I know it is not fitting for any to impose upon a Parliament, yet give me leave to say that this Parliament so long laid aside, and having so many several Parliaments by the choice of the people acted since, by which, as has been acknowledged by them who were the chief in owning this House, that by that consent of the people's choice the authority of this Parliament did cease. Yet such was the honour we did bear to the remembrance of this Parliament that we were willing to improve any part thereof to give a settlement to these poor nations, and to have the reputation of it themselves. And in the confidence of that persuasion that what you, as well as we, had proposed should be granted, they were invited to sit again; and instead thereof what has been done but to undo whatsoever has been done for these six years last past?

And though we are far from the thoughts of returning to that form of government of a single person, yet there were many things then transacted, as well relating to the good of this cause as to persons, properties, etc., which now is at a loose. I am one amongst others who desire to retain a due remembrance of those great things which this Parliament has done, and therefore shall forbear to speak anything which may too much reflect upon them.

If Your Lordship be unsatisfied with what we have done, send any of your number in whom you may most confide in, and I doubt not but we shall give or receive satisfaction—nay, I have that value for you that if you please I can freely meet you as far as York in order to give you satisfaction. We shall (I hope) be led into anything which may be for the peace and settlement of these poor nations, but through the Lord's gracious presence and assistance we shall not be forced into anything; and therefore as you tender the peace of these poor nations, the good of this cause we have been so long contending for, and the prevention of a further effusion of blood, let me beg you to refuse and decline everything which may cause further distractions and divisions amongst us.

As to what you mention of your authority in constituting officers and removing, as being one of the seven Commissioners, I am sure there is nothing in that Act will countenance you in any of these actions, for no one can by virtue of that Act do anything, the quorum being three, but besides the powers therein are wholly subordinate to the Council of State, which sat this day and would no doubt of it have discountenanced this way of proceeding had they been advertised of it in their sitting.

And for you to judge our design to be to set up arbitrary power, I shall make the same earnest request unto you that you are pleased to do to me, that you would not be deluded by the specious pretences of any ambitious or malicious persons whatsoever; and if blood be shed, I fear you will not quit yourselves of being guilty thereof. We have no base, unworthy, selfish designs, but the desires of our hearts are that these nations may be settled in a free commonwealth, to the greatest security of the interest of this people; when we decline that you will have wherewith to justify you in such a case.

My Lord, I have no design upon you, but the tenderness of love I have to you and other friends with you makes me thus large, and that, if the Lord please, we may not by our divisions give a ruin to these poor nations. The Lord direct you to do that which shall be right in His sight.

C.H. Firth, ed. *The Clarke Papers* (Longmans, Green, and Company: London, 1901), IV:70–74. [modernized]