

“Manifesto and Proclamation,” of the Carlisle Peace Commission, 3 October 1778.

When in early 1778, following the battles of Saratoga, the French formally joined in alliance with the American revolutionaries, the face of things completely changed for the British. War with the French took on an importance that made the struggle in America, relatively speaking, little more than a sideshow. Among then the first political measures placed under consideration by King George was the replacement of Lord North with ardent whig William Pitt (the elder), Earl of Chatham. Personally, the King was much averse to the idea; insofar as appointing Chatham to prime minister, as a practical matter, represented the further relinquishing of his own royal power and authority. And yet it was understood by all, Americans as well as British, that if there was any single individual who might hope to reunite the colonies with Britain it was Pitt. Unfortunately for those who sought such reconciliation, Chatham became seriously ill and died in May.

Meanwhile, in a second attempt at peace (the first had been tried by Sir William Howe in 1776), the king and Parliament, having decided the matter in March, sent forth negotiators under 30 year old Frederick Howard, Earl of Carlisle across the Atlantic to seek an end to the American conflict. After some preliminary efforts by General Sir Henry Clinton, the new British commander in chief in America, to commence a dialogue with the Americans, the Carlisle commissioners arrived in British held Philadelphia in June. They subsequently communicated to Congress, then sitting in York, PA -- and as well to individual colonial assemblies and to disaffected Americans generally -- that His Majesty's government was willing to repeal all of the proscriptive Acts against the colonies and spare Americans future taxation, if the colonies would agree to return and submit once more to British rule.

On the 17th of the same month, the Continental Congress, with Henry Laurens as its sitting President, declared its refusal to treat with the commissioners on the terms proposed without the removal of British military forces from the former colonies; accompanied by the full admission and granting of American independence. Carlisle had not been authorized to accede to such concessions; so that his peace efforts came to naught; with some attempt however being made, also unsuccessfully, to secure the release of the British soldiers taken at Saratoga; in view, as it was argued, of the Americans having violated Burgoyne's conditions of surrender.

When Clinton evacuated Philadelphia (being stopped at the battle of Monmouth en route to New York), the Carlisle commission as well returned to New York and remained there a few months. Before finally leaving for home in Oct., they had printed (by Rivington) a “Manifesto and Proclamation” as Britain's, for the moment, final response to the unyielding colonials. What follows is the text of that same.

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MANIFESTO AND PROCLAMATION.

To the Members of the Congress, the Members of the General Assemblies or Conventions of the several Colonies, Plantations, and Provinces, of New Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the three Lower Counties on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, and all others, free inhabitants, of the said colonies, of every rank and denomination.

By the Earl of Carlisle, Sir Henry Clinton, and William Eden, Esq; Commissioners appointed by his Majesty, in pursuance of an act of parliament made and passed in the 18th year of his Majesty's reign, to enable his Majesty to appoint Commissioners to treat, consult, and agree upon the means of quieting the disorders now subsisting in certain of the Colonies, Plantations, and Provinces, in North America.

Having amply and repeatedly made known to the Congress, and having also proclaimed to the inhabitants of North America in general, the benevolent overtures of Great Britain towards a reunion and coalition with her colonies, we do not think it consistent either with the duty we owe to our country, or with a just regard to the characters we bear, to persist in holding out offers which in our estimation required only to be known to be most gratefully accepted: And we have accordingly, excepting only the commander in chief, who will be detained by military duties, resolved to return to England a few weeks after the date of this manifesto and proclamation.

Previous, however, to this decisive step, we are led, by a just anxiety for the great objects of our mission, to enlarge on some points which may not have been sufficiently understood, to recapitulate to our

fellow-subjects the blessings which we are impowered to confer, and to warn them of the continued train of evils to which they are at present blindly and obstinately exposing themselves.

To the members of the Congress, then, we again declare, that we are ready to concur in all satisfactory and just arrangements for securing to them and their respective constituents, the re-establishment of peace, with the exemption from any imposition of taxes by the parliament of Great Britain, and the irrevocable enjoyment of every privilege consistent with that union of interests and force on which our mutual prosperity, and the safety of our common religion and liberties, depend. We again assert, that the members of the Congress were not authorized by their constitution, either to reject our offers without the previous consideration and consent of the several assemblies and conventions of their constituents, or to refer us to pretended foreign treaties which they know were delusively framed in the first instance, and which have never yet been ratified by the people of this continent. And we once more remind the members of the Congress, that they are responsible to their countrymen, to the world, and to God, for the continuance of this war, and for all the miseries with which it must be attended.

To the General Assemblies and Conventions of the different colonies, plantations, and provinces above mentioned, we now separately make the offers which we originally transmitted to the Congress; and we hereby call upon, and urge them, to meet expressly for the purpose of considering whether every motive, political as well as moral, should not decide their resolution to embrace the occasion of cementing a free and firm coalition with Great Britain. It has not been, nor is it, our will, to seek the objects which we are commissioned to pursue, by fomenting popular divisions and partial cabals; we think such conduct would be ill suited to the generous nature of the offers made, and unbecoming the dignity of the king and the state which make them. But it is both our wish and our duty to encourage and support any men, or bodies of men, in their return of loyalty to our sovereign, and of affection to our fellow-subjects.

To all others, free inhabitants of this once-happy empire, we also address ourselves. Such of them as are actually in arms, of whatsoever rank or description, will do well to recollect, that the grievances, whether real or supposed, which led them into this rebellion, have been for ever removed, and that the just occasion is arrived for their returning to the class of peaceful citizens. But if the honours of a military life are become their object, let them seek those honours under the banners of their rightful sovereign, and in fighting the battles of the United British empire against our late mutual and natural enemy.

To those whose profession it is to exercise the functions of religion on this continent, it cannot surely be unknown, that the foreign power with which the Congress is endeavouring to connect them, has ever been averse to toleration, and inveterately opposed to the interests and freedom of the places of worship which they serve; and that Great Britain, from whom they are for the present separated, must, both from the principles of her constitution, and of Protestantism, be at all times the best guardian of religious liberty, and most disposed to promote and extend it.

To all those who can estimate the blessings of peace, and its influence over agriculture, arts, and commerce, who can feel a due anxiety for the education and establishment of their children, or who can place a just value on domestic security, we think it sufficient to observe, that they are made by their leaders to continue involved in all the calamities of war, without having either a just object to pursue, or a subsisting grievance which may not instantly be redressed.

But if there be any persons who, divested of mistaken resentments, and uninfluenced by selfish interests, really think that it is for the benefit of the colonies to separate themselves from Great Britain, and that so separated they will find a constitution more mild, more free, and better calculated for their prosperity than that which they heretofore enjoyed, and of the change which the maintaining of such a position must make in the whole nature and future conduct of this war; more especially when to this position is added the pretended alliance with the court of France. The policy as well as the benevolence of Great Britain have thus far checked the extremes of war when they tended to distress a people still considered as our fellow-subjects, and to desolate a country shortly to become again a source of mutual advantage. But when that country professes the unnatural design, not only of estranging herself from us, but of mortgaging herself and her resources to our enemies, the whole contest is changed; and the question is. How far Great Britain may, by every means in her power, destroy or render useless a connection contrived

for her ruin, and for the aggrandizement of France. Under such circumstances, the laws of self-preservation must direct the conduct of Great Britain, and if the British colonies are to become an accession to France, will direct her to render that accession of as little avail as possible to her enemy.

If, however, there are any who think, that, notwithstanding these reasonings, the independence of the colonies will; in the result, be acknowledged by Great Britain, to them we answer, without reserve, that we neither possess or expect powers for that purpose; and that if Great Britain could ever have sunk so low as to adopt such a measure, we should not have thought ourselves compellable to be the instruments in making a concession which would, in our opinion, be calamitous to the colonies for whom it is made, and disgraceful, as well as calamitous, to the country from which it is required. And we think proper to declare, that in this spirit and sentiment we have regularly written from this continent to Great Britain.

It will now become the colonies in general to call to mind their own solemn appeals to Heaven, in the beginning of this contest, that they took arms only for the redress of grievances, and that it would be their wish, as well as their interest, to remain for ever connected with Great Britain. We again ask them, whether all their grievances, real or supposed, have not been amply and fully redressed; and we insist, that the offers we have made, leave nothing to be wished, in point either of immediate liberty or permanent security. If those offers are now rejected, we withdraw from the exercise of a commission with which we have in vain been honoured: the same liberality will no longer be due from Great-Britain, nor can it either in justice or policy be expected from her.

In fine, and for the fuller manifestation, as well of the disposition we bear, as of the gracious and generous purposes of the commission under which we act, we hereby declare, That whereas his Majesty, in pursuance of an act made and passed in the eighteenth year of his Majesty's reign, intitled, *An act to enable his Majesty to appoint Commissioners with sufficient powers to treat, consult, and agree upon the means of quieting the disorders now subsisting in certain of the colonies, plantations and provinces of North-America*, having been pleased to authorize and empower us to grant a pardon or pardons to any number or description of persons within the colonies, plantations and provinces of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay, Rhode island, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, the three; lower Counties on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, South-Carolina, and Georgia: And whereas the good effects of the said authorities and powers towards the people at large, would have long since taken place, if a due use had been made of our first communications and overtures, and have thus far been frustrated only by the precipitate resolution of the members of the Congress not to treat with us, and by their declining to consult with their constituents: we now in making our appeal to those constituents, and to the free inhabitants of this continent in general, have determined to give to them what in our opinion should have been the first object of those who appeared to have taken the management of their interests, and adopt this mode of carrying the said authorities and powers into execution. *We accordingly hereby grant and proclaim a pardon or pardons of all and all manner of treasons or misprisions of treasons, by any person or persons, or by any number or description of persons within the said colonies, plantations or provinces, counselled, commanded, acted or done on or before the date of this manifesto and proclamation.*

And we further declare and proclaim, that if any person, or persons, or any number or description of persons within the said colonies, plantations, and provinces, now actually serving either in a civil or military capacity in this rebellion, shall, at any time during the continuance of this manifesto and proclamation, withdraw himself or themselves from such civil or military service, and shall continue thenceforth peaceably as a good and faithful subject or subjects to his Majesty, to demean himself or themselves, such person or persons, or such number and description of persons, shall become and be fully entitled to, and hereby obtain all the benefits of, the pardon or pardons hereby granted; excepting only from the said pardon or pardons, every person, and every number or description of persons, who, after the date of this Manifesto and Proclamation, shall, under the-pretext of authority, as Judges, Jurymen, Ministers, or officers of civil justice, be instrumental in executing and putting to death any of his Majesty's subjects within the said colonies, plantations and provinces.

And we think proper farther to declare, That nothing herein contained is meant or shall be construed to set at liberty any person or persons now being a prisoner or prisoners, or who, during the continuance of this rebellion, shall become prisoner or prisoners.

And we offer to the colonies at large, or separately, a general or separate peace, with the revival of their ancient governments secured against any future infringements, and protected for ever from taxation by Great Britain. And with respect to such farther regulations, whether civil, military, or commercial, as they may wish to be framed and established, we promise all the concurrence and assistance that his Majesty's commission authorizes and enables us to give.

And we declare, That this manifesto and proclamation shall continue and be in force *forty days* from the date thereof; that is to say, from the third day of October to the eleventh day of November, both inclusive.

And in order that the whole contents of this manifesto and proclamation may be more fully known, we shall direct copies thereof both in the English and German language to be transmitted by flags of truce to the Congress, the General Assemblies or Conventions of the colonies, plantations, and provinces, and to several persons, both in civil and military capacities within the said colonies, plantations, and provinces. And for the further security in times to come, of the several persons, or numbers or descriptions of persons, who are or may be the objects of this Manifesto and Proclamation, we have set our hands and seals to thirteen copies thereof, and have transmitted the same to the thirteen colonies, plantations, and provinces above mentioned; and we are willing to hope, that the whole of this Manifesto and Proclamation will be fairly and freely published and circulated, for the immediate, general, and most serious consideration and benefit of all his Majesty's subjects on this continent. And we earnestly exhort all persons who by this instrument forthwith receive the benefit of the King's pardon, at the same time that they entertain a becoming sense of those lenient and affectionate measures whereby they are now freed from many grievous charges which might have risen in judgement, or have been brought in question, against them, to make a wise improvement of the situation in which this Manifesto and Proclamation places them; and not only to recollect, that a perseverance in the present rebellion, or any adherence to the treasonable connection attempted to be framed with a foreign power, will, after the present grace extended, be considered as crimes of the most aggravated kind, but to vie with each other in eager and cordial endeavours to secure their own peace, and promote and establish the prosperity of their countrymen, and the general weal of the empire.

And, pursuant to his Majesty's commission, we hereby require all officers civil and military, and all others [of] his Majesty's loving subjects whatsoever, to be aiding and assisting unto us in the execution of this our Manifesto and Proclamation, and of all the matters herein contained.

Given at New York, this 3d day of October 1778.

Carlisle, L. S.
H. Clinton, L.S.
Wm Eden. L. S.

By their Excellencies command,
Adam Ferguson, Sec.

[Taken from Almon's *Remembrancer* for 1779; while for a detailed presentation of the exchanges between the Carlisle Commission and the American Congress including and leading up to the Oct. 1778 Manifesto and Proclamation, see the same volume pages 38-72, and available at: <https://archive.org/details/TheRemembrancerOrImpartialRepositoryOfPublicEventsvol.7>]

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