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BRITISH PARLIAMENT.

HOUSE OF LORDS.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 1800.

MIS MAJESTY'S MESSAGE.

[DEBATE CONTINUED.]

THE DUKE OF BEDFORD rose in reply—He could not but lament, from the tenor of the speech which he had just heard, joined to the whole conduct of Ministers, that there was but little prospect of Peace. Their only object indeed, seemed to be, by a continued system of insult, to put that blessing to a greater distance from our hopes than ever. This was the manifested tendency of the manner in which they had treated those communications from the enemy, on which the House was that night to deliver its opinion, and such seemed to be the intended effect of the train of arguments by which the Noble Secretary of State endeavoured to procure their approbation of the rejection of Pacific Overtures. But unless the subject of their deliberations were supposed to be the original grounds of the War, which he maintained it was not, he would occupy but little of the time of the House with what he had to say in reply to those arguments. He would not detain their attention with repeating the opinions which he had on former occasions delivered with respect to the principles of the war. But he would seriously impress upon their Lordships' consideration what was the real situation of the country, and what their prospects of terminating this calamitous contest, if they were disposed to sanction the principles laid down in the speech of the Noble Lord who had preceded him. He had largely descanted on the character of the successive Rulers of France, since the commencement of hostilities; and had thence arguing the impossibility of entertaining any well founded hopes of success, from entering into Negotiation with its present Government. But the answer was easy: All his observations on that topic might have been urged with equal force, at the moment an Ambassador was sent to treat with the Agents of the French Government at Lisle. At that time, however, all the vices which were attributed to the system of Government or its conductors, were not regarded as insurmountable obstacles to the commencement of Negotiation. The Noble Lord had particularly dwelt on a passage in the last communication from the Enemy, which seemed to justify, from necessity, their attempts to extend the War to every individual part of the world. He was the last man who would think of defending the unwarranted aggression which had in several instances been made by France. He would no more attempt to justify or palliate them, than he would the partition of Poland, and the share which our principal Ally had in that transaction, or the system of iniquity and cruelty by which the British Dominion was first extended in India. The Noble Secretary, however rested a great deal upon this circumstance, as an avowal of the principles which formed the foundation of this revolution; while he insisted that the Note from the British Ministers opened the way to a declaration of principles of a different kind—of principles which might have encouraged him and his Colleagues to treat with them. But what could have been expected from a paper which explicitly told them that they were not men capable of being treated with. It had been represented as extraordinary that the French should refuse to admit the charge of their being the original aggressors. But who were the first to state the subject? Who were the first to abandon the means of conciliation, and stimulate resentment anew by recurring to the grounds of the

contest? Did they shew any disposition to refuse that question, or studiously imitate the British government, by the language of abusive reproach? No. They left that conduct to the Rulers of this Country, who treated their very first approach with the most marked insult. It would have been well, if Ministers had, before descending to such meanness, recollected the way in which they repelled the reproaches made against the English Nation by Lacroix, previous to the Negotiation at Paris. But the question was not now, who were the aggressors, though he was not surprised that Ministers should endeavour to remove that charge from their own shoulders; for the time would come when that question would be dispassionately investigated, and the guilty Authors of a War which had been productive of such wide spread misery, would meet with that punishment due to their crimes from their contemporaries, insure the execration of posterity, and be devoted to everlasting infamy. The Noble Secretary had foreseen that the Administration might be charged with continuing hostilities with the view of restoring Monarchy in France, and had laboured much to refute it. But though he had directly disclaimed such an intention, every argument which he had used tended to strengthen the imputation. What else could be the import of his observations on the infidelity of every other Government that had been erected in France. What else could be the intention of justifying their refusal to treat with its present rulers, by remarking upon the various changes of persons and systems, that had taken place there since the Revolution; and so forcibly contrasting them with its ancient Monarchy? To carry on the war for the expectation of succeeding in such an object was indeed so wild and frantic a scheme, that he could scarcely think it could enter into the mind of any rational man. But, however, much Ministers might disclaim it, certainly it was the only supposition that could give any degree of consistency to their conduct. If they did not boldly avow the re-establishment of Royalty, as the *fine qua non* of Peace, they, at least, made it a *fine qua non* of Negotiation. But if he could suppose that any British Minister could entertain a wish for the restoration of Monarchy as it formerly existed in France, he would conjure him to reflect on the arduous nature of the undertaking; and, setting aside the innumerable calamities which must be produced in the progress of so desperate an enterprise, he would entreat him to consider the wide extent of misery which must immediately result from, should it, contrary to all reasonable expectation, terminate with success. Property to no less an amount than two millions sterling, which had been acquired under a revolutionary title must be violently torn from its present possessors; who besides being exposed to the vengeance of the late Noblesse, would, with their dependants, be condemned to all the horrors of beggary and want. There were only three objects which he could conceive Ministers to have in the prosecution of the War, after the recent overtures from France; the re-establishment of Monarchy, or at least, a different Government from the present, or that a situation may be attained more favourable for their views of Peace. They might, indeed, have another object. They might have so implicated themselves with the British Allies, as to make it difficult to conclude a Peace at this moment. But they had advanced nothing of that kind in their justification. The restoration of Monarchy he had heard to be beyond all probable expectation. If their views were directed to the establishment of any other sort of Government, let them particularise it. Had not experience proved that in proportion as France was pressed at her frontiers, her Government al-

ways became more violent? Was it not at such a crisis that Jacobinism always raged with greater fury? Nor was this transition peculiar to that Government. In times of War that of every Country exercised their authority with a more oppressive hand. To prove this so far as regards this Country he would only refer to our own statute book, which would abundantly justify the assertion during the present war. If Ministers likewise disclaim this object, did they expect, by the acquisition of territorial possession, or any other advantages, to be placed at a future period in a more favourable situation for treating? If, indeed he was to judge merely by their language, their principal object was to gratify their personal feelings by the ruin of Buonaparte. Such, at least, was a fair inference from their manner, from the eagerness with which they published the Intercepted Correspondence, and from the spirit of the Notes which they attached to it. He had read only the Introduction to the last publication of this sort, in which he should hope that the Government of this country had no concern; for it was written in a style which certainly reflected infinitely more disgrace on the man who had wrote it, than it did on those whom it was intended to degrade.—But he would not impute to Ministers the pitiful malevolence of a personal triumph. He would not suppose they prosecuted the contest until they could attain a more favourable situation for treating. Such a situation might possibly arise; but what was our present prospect? If we depended on our Allies, what security had we that they might not be detached from our interest by separate Treaties of Peace? Did we rely on the assistance of Austria? What pledge had we that she did not, as before limit her views to her own aggrandizement, totally regardless of the interests of this country, or the rest of Europe. If Russia was the main pillar of our hopes, was there no room to doubt that she might fall off from the common cause with as little reason as could be given for many of her public acts. But admitting that our allies might be kept together, were there no other considerations to be taken into account? When we looked to our internal situation, was it of so consoling a nature as to prompt us to continue the contest? If we looked to Ireland, we should find those who have the least opportunity of information asserting, that it is far from being in a state of tranquillity. Were our finances so flourishing as to justify the prosecution of hostilities? Our financial system we had already been compelled to abandon, and two different modes had been tried within two years. The first had been abandoned as inefficient, and the second though not relinquished, had fallen far short of expectation, and would require to be new modelled. Some time ago it was thought, that we could starve France into submission; but what was our own situation? What greater configuration could there be of the necessity of Peace, than to see the miserable wretches who wandered in our fields and woods a prey to all the horrors of cold and famine. In lately riding through a village in the county, he was shocked by seeing the children ranging about in all the wildness of despair, and crying out for that food which it was impossible for their unhappy parents to give them. Such of the noble Lords as had occasion to act as Magistrates, must have lately known frequent instances of appeals from the Parish Officers, by men whose claims for charity had been passed unheeded, because they appeared to be strong, healthy, and capable of labour. But the miserable sufferers in vain demand for the means of employment; and they cannot return to meet the horrid sight of a wife and children perishing with hunger. This was but very lately the deplorable situation

of the lower classes of our fellow countrymen. It was true, it had been somewhat changed within these few weeks. Men of property had voluntarily adopted measures to prevent the recurrence of such scenes. But surely that was not the natural situation of a country in which the many subsisted on the charity of the few. Six months ago violent and unprecedented measures had been taken to recruit our army; and the flower of the British troops had been landed on a foreign coast, in a manner more suitable to the celebration of a triumph than that of going to battle. The consequence was, that they had been obliged to purchase their retreat with a disgrace hitherto unknown to British Soldiers. Did Ministers intend to repeat the project? Did they mean to collect provisions from every quarter, and to empty the public magazines for the purpose of fitting out some other frantic expedition? If he were asked whether the present was a favourable opportunity to conclude a peace, he would say it was the most so which had occurred since the negotiations at Lisle. But Ministers intend to wait for the evidence of facts—such evidence as that which preceded the negotiations at that period; namely, the succession of the Emperor. That was the event which constituted the principal ground of treating upon that occasion; for it was regarded as absurd in England to continue the contest after the defection of her Continental Allies. But this government had not, it seems, lasted a sufficient time. Had the house so gotten that in his Majesty's Speech in the month of October it was stated, that the affairs of France were hastening to a favourable crisis? That crisis was the event which happened on the 8th of December, and which elevated to the supreme authority the present Rulers of France. The Noble Secretary raised, that the only grounds of pacification held out by the Enemy, rested on the personal disposition of Buonaparte. The plainest answer to that assertion would be the perusal of his letter. [Here the noble Duke read the whole of Buonaparte's letter to the King.] In this his personal disposition was not the only ground; his reasons were also of a general nature. He mentioned the evils which had already arisen from the war, and those which would most probably result from continuing it, as motives to a commencement of Negotiation. The same reasons were alleged in the second communication. [Here the noble Duke read some passages of M. Talleyrand's official note.]—Whether these professions were sincere or not, was not material to the present question. When a nation unanimously expressed a desire for Peace, and the government became the organ of their wishes, it was a pretty strong reason for at least receiving them with attention and respect. That such is the general desire in France might be inferred from the anxiety which every public person, and even the generals of their armies discovered in recommending themselves to public attention by pacific professions. From the manner in which the Noble Secretary spoke that night of the negotiations at Paris and Lisle, he was at a loss to know whether Ministers wished to be considered as sincere in those transactions, or whether they were mere mockeries practised to suit their own purposes? If it did not detain the house too long, he could easily shew, whatever their intentions might then have been, their language was at variance in every point to every sentence uttered that night by the Noble Secretary. During the first attempt to negotiate, after feelingly describing the calamities of war, they laboured, in case of the negotiation failing, to throw the reproach upon the French government. At Lisle they pursued the same conduct, and when the negotiations there were broken off, they declared, in the name of his Majesty, that they