

Letter from Lieutenant-Governor Colden to the Earl of Dartmouth; June 1, 1774

The Act of Parliament shutting up the port of Boston was brought to this place by a merchant vessel a few days before I received it from your lordship's office. The Act was immediately published in all our newspapers and was the subject of all conversation. I knew that people universally in this colony had received such ideas of being taxed at the pleasure of Parliament, that I was particularly anxious upon this occasion to discover the sentiments of those who might have most influence over others, and was assured by the gentlemen of the Council and others of weight in the city, that no means would be omitted to prevent the hot-headed people taking any measures that might endanger the peace and quiet of the colony.

The men who at that time called themselves the committee, who dictated and acted in the name of the people, were many of them of the lower rank, and all the warmest zealots of those called the Sons of Liberty. The more considerable merchants and citizens seldom or never appeared among them, but I believe were not displeased with the clamour and opposition that was shown against internal taxation by Parliament.

The principal inhabitants, being now afraid that these hot-headed men might run the city into dangerous measures, appeared in a considerable body at the first meeting of the people after the Boston Port Act was published here. They dissolved the former committee and appointed a new one of fifty-one persons, in which care was taken to have a number of the most prudent and considerate people of the place. Some of them have not before joined in the public proceedings of the opposition, and were induced to appear in what they are sensible is an illegal character, from a consideration that if they did not, the business would be left in the same rash hands as before.

Letters had been received from Boston with an invitation from that town to the sister colonies immediately to come into a resolution to refrain from any commerce with Great Britain and the West India islands till the Act for shutting up the port of Boston was repealed. A printed handbill of this proposal is enclosed.

I am informed that the new committee in their answer to Boston have given them no reason to expect that the merchants of this place will adopt so extravagant a measure, and people with whom I converse assure me that they think it cannot be brought about by the most zealous advocates of opposition. As yet no resolutions have been taken by the people of this colony, and the cool, prudent men will endeavour to keep measures in suspense till they have an opportunity of adopting the best. I am told that they have proposed that the colonies be invited to send deputies to meet together, in order to petition the king for redress of grievances, and to deliberate upon some plan whereby the jealousies between Great Britain and her colonies may be removed. It is allowed by the intelligent among them that these assemblies of the people, without authority

of government, are illegal, and may be dangerous, but they deny that they are unconstitutional when a national grievance cannot otherwise be removed. What resolutions will be taken I cannot as yet say. The government of this province has no coercive power over these assemblies of the people, but the authority of the magistrates in all other cases is submitted to as usual.