

**THE SPEECH OF SIR HERCULES  
LANGRISHE, IN THE IRISH HOUSE  
OF COMMONS, ON THE SUBJECT  
OF A PARLIAMENTARY REFORM,  
SPOKEN IN 1785**

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The speech of Sir Hercules Langrishe, in the Irish House of commons, on the subject of a parliamentary reform, spoken in 1785 by Hercules Langrishe

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**HERCULES LANGRISHE**

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THE  
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OF  
<sup>1st part</sup>  
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IN THE  
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OF A  
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S P E E C H, &c.

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PARLIAMENTARY REFORM having, at this time, become the object of some attention, we are induced to re-publish the substance of a Speech, published here in the year 1785, which was made on that subject in the Irish Parliament by Sir Hercules Langrishe, Bart.

Mr. FLOOD moved, " That the House  
" resolve itself into a Committee to consider

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" of an instruction to the Committee ap-  
 " pointed to prepare a Bill for the more equal  
 " representation of the people, to receive a  
 " clause, That, the better to promote popu-  
 " lation in decayed and contracted boroughs,  
 " no borough in the province of Ulster, hav-  
 " ing less than 140, and in the other pro-  
 " vinces 70 voters, shall return more than  
 " One Member to Parliament."

SIR HERCULES LANGRISH said—Mr.  
 Speaker, The object of this motion, taken  
 abstractedly, is certainly desirable, and car-  
 ries with it the strong recommendation of  
 bearing a reference to Lord Chatham's notion  
 of Parliamentary Reform, which was, " the  
 pouring some young blood into the consti-  
 tution." 'Tis true, Sir, nothing that I know  
 of can promote population so effectually as  
 this same infusion of young blood; however,  
 neither

neither on that account, nor on any authority, however respectable, shall I be induced to increase the mass or the motion of the blood when the constitution is in full vigour; and much less should I be inclined to do so when the pulse beats high, and discovers some symptoms of a fever. I, therefore, feel no reluctance in voting against the motion.— It is a *part* of a system which, I think, is *the whole* inadmissible, and I shall therefore oppose it in the first instance. Though the question immediately before you does not, it is true, go to the whole subject of a Parliamentary Reform, yet the very able speech of the honourable Member who introduced it, so fully explained the *whole plan*, and so strongly enforced the necessity of the measure, that I cannot suffer it to remain under the uncontroverted recommendation of so able an advocate, but must take the liberty



to follow him into the subject at large, and state to the House my sentiments on it.

And indeed, Sir, as the various assemblies which have of late been so generally convened throughout this country, for the purposes of *peace* and the propagation of *political learning* amongst the lower orders of the people, have displayed so much of their wisdom and eloquence on this subject, I may hope it will not be thought an indecorum, if the House of Commons assume to share in the common privilege; and that *we* may be permitted, with the usual authority of *full and free debate*, to examine the *plan*, the *principle*, and the *progress* of a measure that affects to be a *reformation of Parliament*.

As soon as a restitution of every right, and a concession of every favour that you could  
*desire*

*desire* or *demand*, had satisfied every rational wish in the nation, it was natural to expect that the patriot's care should be awakened to look out for something that might provide for the *agitation of the day*, and protect the public mind from the *lassitude of contentment*; for it was much to be feared, in those degenerate days, when the people should see commerce ready to reward their industry, and the best constitution in the world ready to ensure their acquisitions; that they would be but too apt to surrender themselves to the cold dictates of *common sense*, and degrade their high exertions by embracing the condition of *inglorious happiness*. But the public virtue of this country has always been ready to awaken their sensibility to *nobler pursuits*, and cultivate the growth of *unceasing demand*; for the public virtue of this country has always supplied us with some spirits so exalted, that

that they aspire at something *more than liberty*; and whose conceptions of prosperity despise the narrow bounds of *peace and affluence*.

To rescue the people from this *ignoble mediocrity*—to secure them from this *delusive tranquillity*—to keep alive their *cares and fears*, and their *jealousies*, that they may neither slumber nor sleep even in the arms of freedom and peace—the subject of Parliamentary Reform naturally presented itself, as that of all others most *likely to inflame*—because it was that of all others most *unlikely to be understood*---It was a combination of politics, and jurisprudence, and history, and experiment, and speculation, so complicated as to furnish every thing to *perplex*, and nothing to inform the public mind. The *object* ambiguous, the *means* unascertained, its  
preachers