

## Benjamin Franklin to the House of Commons, 1765, Regarding the Repeal of the Stamp Act, External and Internal Taxes

Duties imposed in the regulation of trade were however sometimes called external taxes. In that use of the term the question whether there was any distinction between duties or “external taxes” imposed in regulating trade, and internal taxes, was put to [Benjamin] Franklin on his examination by the House of Commons, 1765, in regard to the repeal of the Stamp Act. “I never heard any objection,” Franklin had said, “to the right [of Parliament] of laying duties to regulate commerce; but the right to lay internal taxes was never supposed to be in Parliament, as we are not represented there.” Could he name any Act of Assembly, or Public Act of the colonial governments, that made such a distinction? “I do not know,” was the reply, “that there was any. I think there was never an occasion...till now that you have attempted to tax us. That has occasioned resolutions of Assembly, declaring the distinction, in which I think every Assembly on the continent...has been unanimous.” “Now can you show that there is any kind of difference between” external and internal taxes “to the colony on which they may be laid?” “I think the difference is very great. An external tax is a duty laid on commodities imported; that duty is added to the first cost and other charges on the commodity, and when it is offered for sale makes part of the price. If the people don’t like it at that price, they refuse it; they are not obliged to pay it. But an internal tax is forced from the people without their consent, if not laid by their own representatives. The Stamp Act says, we shall have no commerce, make no exchange of property...neither purchase, nor grant, nor recover debts...neither marry nor make our wills, unless we pay such and such sums....” “But supposing the external tax or duty to be laid on the necessaries of life imported into your colony, will not that be the same thing in its effects as an internal tax?” “I know not a single article imported into the northern colonies but what they can either do without or make themselves....” “If an excise was laid by Parliament, which they might avoid paying, by not consuming the article excised, would they not then object to it? “They would certainly object to it, as an excise unconnected with any service done, and as merely an aid which they think ought to be asked of them, and granted by them, if they are to pay it, and can be granted for them by no persons whatsoever whom they have not empowered for that purpose.” “You say they don’t object to the right of Parliament to laying duties on goods, to be paid on their importation; now is there any kind of difference between a duty on the importation of goods and an excise tax on their consumption?” “Yes, a very material one; an excise, for the reasons I have just mentioned, they think you can have no right to lay within their country. But the sea is yours; you maintain your fleets the safety of navigation in it, and keep it clear of pirates. You may therefore have a natural and equitable right to some toll or duty on merchandise carried throughout that part of your dominions, toward defraying the expense you are at in ships to maintain the safety of that carriage.”