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CONGRESS.

House of Representatives.

Friday, March 7.

DEBATE

On Mr. Gregg's Resolution.

[CONTINUED.]

MR. SLOAN. I do not rise to deny, but to acknowledge myself, one of those horn-book politicians alluded to by a member from Virginia, and to assure this committee that I do not envy or begrudge that member either his superior genius, talents, or learning—and farther, to ask on behalf of myself, and others of this class, the favor of being permitted to deliver our sentiments on this and other important subjects in such language as we are capable of, until our constituents may have an opportunity of electing other members of superior learning and talents, and farther advanced in political knowledge. This is a favor I hope will not be denied, otherwise a great number of American citizens, the remainder of this and the ensuing session must go unrepresented.

In answer to the assertion that our late conduct respecting Spain was such as we dare not mention, that we dare not take off the injunction of secrecy, that we are ashamed to let the nation know the secret, permit me to assure that member, and this committee, that I feel neither shame nor compunction of heart for the part that I acted in that business; not doubting that when the injunction is taken of, and the public acquainted with the whole transaction; the real friends of the peace, and interest of the U. S. will fully approve the conduct of the majority with whom I had the pleasure to act, and which, were I by side glances, and insinuations to endeavor to impress the public mind, with a belief that a majority of their representatives had acted in a manner they were ashamed of—I conceive my constituents would thenceforth consider me unworthy of their confidence, and consequently of a seat on this floor.

We are told that we have no cabinet. Is it necessary, is it recognised by the constitution? No. The President's powers are defined, and have for five years been fulfilled to the satisfaction of the people.

I have heard of British cabinets. British ministers, and British privy councils——of their conduct I imbibed a very bad opinion, before the member alluded to, was out of his nurse's arms, and have seen no cause to change that opinion—it is therefore pleasing to me to hear that we have no such institution.

Mr. Chairman, however great my gratitude to that member for his paternal care over the children in politics on this floor, which roused him from his sick bed, to give his superior opinion upon this important subject, before our weak and feeble minds had been misled by Tom, Dick and Harry, or some other arrogant chap, that might have same knowledge of steering a ship at sea; but totally ignorant in navigating our vessel of state, I say, notwithstanding I gave all the attention in my power, to his eloquent speech of 2 hours 48 minutes, there was divers parts which my weak brain could not comprehend, and which I beg leave to lay before this committee for the purpose of receiving further information.

1. I cannot comprehend how our demanding the release of our impressed seamen; and restitution for unjust captures of our vessels; can be construed as throwing our weight in the scale of France, for the purpose of supporting a set of men, who do not support the public weal of the U. S.

2. Nor can I possibly discover that G. Britain stands precisely in the same situation that republican France did in '93. For information on this subject, let me ask, was it not British gold and British intrigue that then formed the coalition against republican France? And is it not the same that has formed the present coalition against monarchical France? Have the armies of France in either case advanced beyond their own territory, previous to the raising and advancing toward their powerful armies for the express purpose of subjugating them, and dividing their property amongst the coalesced powers? If the accounts received are true, they have not.

But we are told that Britain is now the only Barrier against tyranny, and her navy our only security, that the battle off Trafalgar prevented the fleets of France and Spain from laying our seaport towns under contribution, and that the British navy alone stands between us and their tyranny. Mr. Chairman, if a British subject was admitted on this floor, to advocate his sovereign's cause, I should from him have expected such language, but to hear it from a member of Congres has astonished me more than any thing I ever heard within these walls. I may add that I believe even a British subject of common sense and prudence would not have committed his character, by asserting that the combined fleets of Holland, France, and Spain, were so reduced, that ten British ships (I expect of the line was meant) would be glad to meet their whole force.

Neither can I comprehend that language that in one breath asserts that Spain has grossly insulted us on our own territory; that we pocket those insults because they are a favored nation, and in the next breath asserts that she is no nation; but those aggressions are the acts of France.

I here deem it my duty to make some remarks on observations made on this floor, which have a tendency to mislead and alarm the public mind with regard to France and Spain. We have been told that Spain has insulted us on our own territory. I appeal to the gentleman from Virginia whether he has not declared that we do not possess a foot of ground beyond the Iberville. If so, let the world judge of the consistency of his remarks. I ask if Spain has not ordered her cruizers to respect our vessels, and whether France is not on a friendly footing with us. Shall then the public mind be deceived with the idea that Congress have not acted towards those nations with spirit? For what? Because our boundaries with Spain are not defined. I trust in God, we shall never go to war for that. I repeat it, our affairs are in a train of amicable settlement, and, I trust, they will be soon settled.

It is asserted that France would be as tyrannical on the ocean, as England, had she the same power—this is a point that I have neither foreknowledge or sagacity enough to determine, nor do I consider such assertions either necessary or proper on the present occasion, the degraded point of view in which Spain has been represented, the tyrannical disposition of France; and Britain represented as the only barrier against her tyranny, the forlorn hope of European liberty—I have heard with sorrow, believing such language highly improper, to be used in a legislative capacity, by any representative of a free people whose interest it is to cultivate peace and harmony with all nations of the earth.

I shall only trouble the committee with one more observation upon the learned and eloquent speech first mentioned, in which I think it was alledged that parchment was the only remedy applied to aggressions on our territory, for which a member from New Jersey might receive a vegetable specific. If I am the member alluded to, permit me to reply, that if by dealing in parchment, we can continue to purchase as good bargains as Louisianana, and thereby preserve peace, I hope the U. S. will always prefer dealing in that commodity rather than to imbrue their hands in human blood. Respecting vegetable specifics I shall only observe, that if that member lives to my age, needing no more specific medicine, either vegetable or mineral, he may consider it a great blessing; but which I think very improbable.

Mr. Chairman, believing it my duty to deliver my sentiments in as few words as possible, that other members standing on an equal floor, may have an opportunity to deliver theirs, I shall hasten to a conclusion—at the same time not doubting, that if I was disposed so to do, I could take up the time of the committee as long, and to as little purpose as any member within these walls.

I could, under the pretext of explaining, keep the floor two hours and nine minutes, if the chairman did not order me down, which I hope he will if ever I attempt it.

In explaining I could declare that I did not mean to stigmatize a respectable class of citizens with dishonesty, or any other reproachful epithet—and immediately compare them to butterflies of the day, & to slippery eels who will get round and evade any regulations or restrictions that can be made, whose interest is their guide, regardless of the peace and interest of the nation in which they reside.

I could declare that I had not insulted the House; but aimed at certain political characters—and in the next breath charge a majority of the same house with having hoodwinked its members, but unable to do so with foreign nations—I again, could charge them with bullying England, and truckling to France, and exclaim in an imperious tone, this you have done and you know it.

Mr. Chairman, I could go on still further, and assert that the little trifling arguments of my opponents ought to bear no weight, because destitute of reason, that instinct the guide of the brute creation, was superior to such reason—yet declare, that I meant no insult to their understanding.

I could then in the prophetic line inform the committee, that if they offended the British minister, he would immediately put forth his strength, and make the United States feel it—and that although France at present appears friendly, she is like the still hog drinking swill, meditating future evil, and will eventually (if in her power) treat us worse than England.

I could in a few words remove this mighty bugbear that the freinds of the resolution have made so much ado about, I mean the impressment of three thousand of our seamen; by informing the committee that it has been the practice of Britain time immemorial—that it has been found indispensibly necessary to enable them to man their fleets—that is to say, without these diabolical means, which none but infernal fiends in human shape could even use; they could not so effectually have carried fire and sword, devastation and plunder, to every habitable part of the globe; and thereby so greatly increased the quantum of human misery, and the cries of the widows and fatherless.

I could also, if my conscience would permit, after venting my hatred in the most bitter invectives against the French emperor, that my genius could invent, charging Congress with truckling to him; and bestowing on the government of England the highest applause, for their opposition to French tyranny; repeatedly deny being the apologist of Britain; but a subsequent question arises, would the members of this committee subscribe to the truth of such declarations?

But, Mr. Chairman, I will detain the committee no longer with telling them what might be done; but earnestly call their attention to what has been done, to what has been said on this floor—we have been told that France cannot get a pound of coffee, or sugar, from her own islands except through the medium of American vessels, and that we have a treaty that obliges us to treat them as one of the most favored nations—this raises the curtain, and gives a full and complete view of the whole scene—this explains in the most clear and explicit manner, the elaborate speech of two hours and forty-eight minutes, and the explanation of two hours and nine minutes. A horn book politician may by this clearly discover the intention of the member from Virginia, and Tom, Dick and Harry, if they have only learned the three first letters of the alphabet may understand his meaning, and why he would prefer an embargo, to even a partial non-importation of British manufactures. It is possible that George the third, that zealous defender of the most holy faith, by whose most gracious orders, the colonies of North America were declared out of his protection; and afterwards his paternal care was further manifested, in burning their towns, murdering their citizens, and causing their prisoners to perish with famine, and pestilence, in noisome dungeons, and filthy prison ships. I say it is possible as the precious life of this great benefactor of mankind is yet preserved, and we are told on this floor, remains animated with the same benevolent spirit, fighting the battles of liberty, against Gallic tyranny; if he should fail by land, his pious zeal may induce him once more to resort to his forlorn hope (as he did in the late war with republican France) declare all her ports and her allies in a state of blockade, cover the ocean with his fleets, in order to effect by famine, what he is unable to do by force of arms—in that case an embargo on American vessels would facilitate his purpose. But here let me ask this committee, can the Congress of the United States countenance such a procedure?—I hope not.

Before I sit down, let me ask the members of this committee, especially you in whose ears the expiring groans of your brethern in arms, of your beloved fellow citizens yet vibrates; slain by the murderous hands of the mercenaries of Great Britain; or more barbarously deprived of life, by famine or pestilence—can you while that same monarch reigns, and instead of diminishing, has added to the long, and black catalogue of crimes, set forth in our declaration of independence, which induced you to risk your lives in opposition to his tyranny; can you with complacency, or any degree of approbation, sit and hear that government who continues her tyranny and injustice to these United States, (witness the capture of our vessels and impressm of our seamen) held up by a member on this floor, as the only barrier we have against the tyranny of that nation who in our struggle assisted us with vessels of war, arms, ammunition, men, and money; whose soldiers fought by your side, and bled to support American liberty and independence, and whose government continues friendly towards us—I hope not, I believe you cannot, your hearts must turn indignant from such language. For my own part, I am free to declare, that since I have had the honor of a seat on this floor, I have heard nothing that has so hurt my feelings.

I have long borne them in silence—I am happy in obtaining a few moments in my plain unlearned way to express them, that this committee, and all the United States may know, that I retain the same abhorrence against British tyrany that I did in the revolutionary war; and also the same love for the liberty and independence of the United States.

MR. FINDLEY said he had been long in the habit of observing that when a subject was discussed which occasioned numerous arguments the question was often lost sight of. In the heat of debate, instead of the subject before them, the preceding argument became the text to him that replied, and his to the next who took the floor, and so on in succession until some member succeeded in calling the attention of the members to the original subject; though the present question had but a few days engaged the attention of the committee of the whole, yet, in his opinion several of the speakers on the floor had lost sight of it, further than he had formerly observed in so short a time, that he would attempt to draw the attention of the committee from these desultory excursions, which settled no point in debate, and often had no visible connection with it, to the important question they were called upon to decide. That in doing so, he would take no notice of any thing that had been offered as argument, which was not necessarily connected with the question. He would neither be the advocate or apologist for any one nation of Europe, nor treat any other nation with irritating contempt. Such language of that kind, as has been used within two days past in this House, ought not to be admitted, unless we were employed in supporting a manifesto to support a dedeclaration of war, and even for that purpose it is inconsistent with national dignity.

He said, the subject before the House is a resolution referred to the committee of the whole House on the state of the union, to prohibit all importation of goods the produce or the manufacture of Britain, or any of the British dominions; not to prevent Britain or her dependencies from receiving supplies of provisions, raw materials, &c. from us. It does not go to prohibit exportation, but even this should not be done without a very sufficient cause.

Two causes are assigned in the preamble to the resolution. First, the impressment of our seamen—Second, commercial aggressions.

Mr. F. asked, was it ever known before in the history of independent nations that any one nation impressed the citizens or subjects of another nation into their fleets to fight against a nation friendly to that from which they had been impressed, and to receive no wages or emolument unless they would enlist, which few of them ever do, except under the lash of the boatswain; which is done if they appear reluctant to do the meanest drudgery, and who must of necessity hate the nation for which they fought. No, sir, this cannot be shewn. The British government has long been in the habit of impressing their own citizens for seamen. In France, we have been lately told, in this House, that conscripts are forced to the army. Perhaps the conscripts of France are the same that we have been accustomed to call the classes of militia in this country; but it is of their own citizens; impressments to the navy are a very different thing. It is such an exercise of tyranny that it is hoped will never be exercised in this country; yet still except in the case of our seamen it is their own citizens, they do not impress Swedes, Danes, or Prussians.

A man impressed is condemned to a slavery of the worst kind. Slavery for a limited time is a suitable punishment for crimes, but the sentence with us, and in all nations civilised or savage, is decided by known and responsible judges, for the breach of some known law. But, by whom is the sentence of condemnation to slavery passed on our citizens, sailing under the protection of our own flag, chargeable with no crime. Not by a court of justice in any form; not by even an officer of high responsibility, but by some young subaltern of a man of war, which is universally admitted to subject to the most arbitrary species of government existing. No other crime is alledged, to justify the condemnation, but that he speaks the English language, or has become an American citizen, and no other judge but a lieutenant or midshipman selected for this exertion of tyranny.

We have not long since expressed a just abhorrence of slavery by a very unanimous vote of this House. We have expressed a very commendable sympathy for the untutored sons of Africa, of a different color from ourselves, stolen or forced from their families and all that is dear to them; and shall we make no exertions to protect our own citizens from the worse kind of slavery. If the planters of S. Carolina or any other state, where slaves are employed, should forcibly take any of our sons from the plough or other lawful and necessary occupation, and set them to work with other slaves, in raising cotton or rice, the outrage would be horrid indeed, but not equal to the impressment of our citizens. The slave to the planter must labor, but he is not obliged to kill those who have given him no provocation, or to be killed himself, and he may be found and redeemed. Money redeemed our captives from the Barbary coast, and we felt for them & advanced the price.

There is, sir, another point of view presented in the impressment of our seamen, which ought to address our attention—it is admitted that several thousand of our impressed citizens are employed aboard the British men of war fighting against France; these, it is believed, are sufficient to man five ships of the line. If by our silence we connive at this, or by our wilful neglect of the use of such peaceable means as are within our power to prevent it, may not this be charged as a breach of neutrality, may it not be just, called war in disguise; but I forbear.

Commercial aggressions, such as capturing our merchant ships laden with cargoes of colonial produce purchased in return for the produce of our own country and the property of our own citizens, and condemning contrary to the laws and usages of nations as approved and practised even by the British courts until August last, and openly in her decisions substituting the instructions of the court in place of the law of nations, contrary to her own former practice, by which it is acknowledged by the opposers of the resolution the British courts have already condemned at least six million dollars of the property of our citizens on new principles which not being known to the owners, it was impossible to provide against the events. Though these aggressions have hitherto been principally committed on cargoes of colonial produce, where only we can find a market for the produce of the middle and eastern states, yet the principles are equally applicable to much of our East India trade, and to the trade with France, Spain and Holland, from which we derive most of the favorable balance of trade, which enables us to discharge the unfavorable balance of the trade with Britain, and she can so apply them without giving notice of her intention at a time when she knows we have the greatest amount of property on the ocean. We cannot admit the plea of necessity as suggested in a well known British pamphlet, and advocated without reserve by the gentleman from Virginia. To admit this would justify every possible aggression of the power at war against neutral nations. *We make no war in disguise against Britain;* we favor her as much as in our neutral station and commercial situation we can do We bear with aggressions from her that would not be offered nor borne with from any other nation. The profits accruing from a favorable commercial balance with other nations is cheerfully thrown into her lap, and if we do not continue to do so, it is her own fault.—Justice and policy require that she should do so. Britain pretends no cause of complaint against us. We have readily removed such as she ever had. By pleading necessity the aggression on her part seems to be acknowledged—let her remove the cause.

This question therefore naturally arises, are these things wrong; do they not only affect our interest but our national independence? It was confidently expected that to this enquiry every member would answer in the affirmative. One member however has gone far to advocate all the aggressions complained of; no doubt however a great majority of the members are convinced that the impressment, and the other aggressions require a remedy, the object of the present deliberation is to discover such measures as will be most expedient not only to correct the evil, but to procure reasonable redress without war.

Mr. F. added, that it was reasonable to expect some diversity of opinion, that such a diversity does exist is evident from the number and variety of the resolutions referred to this committee. Of these some are substitutes for the resolution which is now the subject of debate, they have the same object in view, but vary in the means proposed. Others may be very properly pursued in concurrence with, and in aid of the resolution under debate; for some of these with proper modifications he said he would probably vote. There is certainly a variety of methods in our power, of applying an effectual and at the same time peaceable and permanent corrective of our grounds of complaint. The method proposed in the resolution on the table he thought well calculated to produce the effect; that the discussion of it would at least bring the whole subject into view, and prepare their minds for other resolutions.

Mr. F. said he would perhaps be told that it is a war measure, and as such ought to be avoided. We have been told so already by a gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. J. Randolph) who was up yesterday. Mr. F. said his colleague who introduced the resolution, declared he did not consider it as a war measure, and that he himself was absolutely opposed to war equally with his colleague.

This resolution provisionally proposes terms which it is just and reasonable that Britain should comply with, and which is fully in her power, to prevent the importation of goods the produce & manufactures of the British dominions, until a reasonable accommodation is made by negociation. It does not go to prevent exportation.

But it may be said, and it is no doubt the opinion of some members, that the subject should at this time be left wholly to negociation, without being aided by any legislative measure. This is the most important point in view in the subject before us.

Both the supporters and opposers of the resolution agree, that an accommodation by negociation is solely their object. This, he said, was undoubtedly his object, and he would support the resolution on the table, subject to whatever modification the majority of the