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CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DEBATE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS CONTINUED.

December 6.

(Mr. Campbell's speech continued.)

Sir, what was the situation of your commerce when the embargo was laid? By the orders of G. Britain you were prohibited from going to any country on the continent of Europe, except Sweden—the poor barren country of Sweden, as it is emphatically called by an English writer, to which country you export about 55 000 dollars worth of your own domestic produce. You were not permitted to export thither the produce or manufacture of any other country. Of course this was all the trade left open to this country by those orders on the continent of Europe. If you carried on any other trade to Europe, it must be directly with or through a British port. In order to shew the correctness of this statement, and also to shew what was considered in England the operation of those orders in council, and in what condition they placed the commerce of this country with Europe, I will refer to the production of a late writer of the first respectability, whose authority, for the purpose I have in view, will not be denied. I mean Mr. Baring's pamphlet, on the subject of these orders. In the 12th page of which is stated what was considered there as the practical construction of them.

"All trade directly from America to every port and country of Europe at war with Great Britain, or from which the British flag is excluded, is totally prohibited. In this general prohibition every port of Europe, with exception at present of Sweden is included, and no distinction whatever is made between the domestic produce of America, and that of the colonies re-exported from thence."

"The trade from America to the colonies of all nations remains unaltered by the present orders. America may export the produce of her own country, but that of no other directly to Sweden."

"With the above exceptions, all articles whether of domestic or colonial produce exported by America to Europe, must be landed in this country, from whence it is intended to permit their re-exportation under such regulations as may hereafter be determined.

"By these regulations, it is understood that duties are to be imposed on all articles so re-exported, &c.

"Any vessel the cargo whereof shall be accompanied with certificates of French consuls abroad of its origin, shall, together with the cargo, be liable to seizure and condemnation, &c."

Thus, sir, we see that according to the construction given those orders, by the English themselves, (for this Mr. Baring was a member of Parliament) at the time the embargo was laid, your commerce was prohibited from every country on the continent of Europe, except Sweden alone, poor and barren in trade as already stated, to which your trade, as has been observed, is of no importance, being confined to your own produce, of which you send there only about the value of $36,000; an amount too inconsiderable to deserve material notice in the great scale of American commerce. On the other hand you were by the decrees of France prohibited from trading to Great Britain, or to any other country occupied by British troops. About this time it is believed, there were British troops in occupation of Sweden—If so, you were totally excluded and shut out from all Europe; there was not a single port to which you could go with safety. But, sir, it is altogether immaterial for my purpose, whether Sweden was occupied by British troops or not; the trade with her is not worth naming, and would afford no sufficient inducement to keep open a commerce, that would probably involve the destruction of a hundred times its value of your property under one pretext or other; and would also compromit your honor and independence as a nation—for if you voluntarily surrendered all your trade as far as forbidden by G. Britain and France, and continued the small precarious scraps, if any, that they chose to assign you, you at once acknowledged their right to regulate your trade at their own pleasure, and in fact to give laws to this country. If this view of the subject be correct, and I call on gentlemen if they deny it, to shew the contrary, what trade could you have pursued or enjoyed when the embargo was laid? Your trade with all Europe was totally cut off as has been already shewn—(that with Sweden whether permitted or not would not sensibly affect the general result)—your only trade that remained was that with the colonies. Let us enquire what this trade would be. With the British colonies you have no permanent trade; she never opens the ports of her colonies to your ships, except when forced by necessity to do so. Your whole trade then to the colonies would have been in domestic produce only somewhat more than $5,000,000 worth. This would have been all the trade you could carry on; your trade with those colonies in foreign articles would cease, because you could not procure the foreign goods that constituted that branch of trade. When therefore, the embargo was laid, your whole commerce, amounting to more than $108,000,000 of exports, was liable to capture and confiscation, except the small amount of somewhat more than $6,000,000. When your trade was in this situation; when those orders and decrees were about to sweep your commerce from the ocean, the embargo was laid, and like a shield interposed and saved it from certain destruction. Yes, sir, I venture to affirm, without the hazard of a contradiction from any well informed merchant of candor, as my information is derived from the most respectable authority, that the embargo has saved the American people more than $100,000,000, that would, if it had not been laid, most undoubtedly have fallen into the hands of the belligerent powers—No man will be so wild as to say that those powers, after solemnly declaring that they would capture your vessels, trading to their enemies, would, notwithstanding, refrain from taking them if they came in their way. There is not the slightest pretext for this—there was then no security for your commerce, but to withdraw it from the ocean. This was done, and it has been saved. The edicts of the belligerents left no alternative with your government, but to leave your commerce to be entirely destroyed, or retain it within your own limits—the latter was resorted to, and was rendered indispensable by the conduct of those powers. There is not therefore any foundation in fact for the assertion that the embargo destroyed your trade; the contrary is shewn beyond a doubt. Yet, sir, unfounded as this assertion is, it has been industriously circulated throughout the nation; has imposed upon and deluded many honest, well meaning men, and aided by constant misrepresentations, equally unfounded, which are constantly spread from one end of the union to the other by the opponents and enemies of the present government, has been made the hobby-horse upon which they have indulged the hope for the last year of riding into power. In this hope, however, they may probably be disappointed. So soon as the people are correctly informed, the delusion which has been produced by misrepresentation will vanish and disappear—[Mr. *Southard* here observed, that as the gentleman who was speaking, appeared somewhat exhausted, and was not probably near the conclusion of his remarks, & it being now a late hour, he would with his consent move to adjourn, which was agreed to.]

DECEMBER 7.

Mr. CAMPBELL said when he closed the remarks which he had the honor of making on yesterday, he had just submitted to the House some observations with the view of shewing that it was not the embargo that destroyed our commerce, or brought on the nation the pressure which is now so sensibly felt, & so much complained of. I had stated to the House (said he) that the orders of G. Britain and the decrees of France were the real cause of all the difficulties which are now experienced by this country—That they and not the embargo had cut up your trade by the very roots, and rendered a total suspension of commerce for a time indispensible for its salvation from inevitable destruction. This is a truth supported by facts that cannot be denied—remove the embargo and you expose your trade, naked and defenceles to certain destruction—the same that would have taken place if it had not been laid.

Fortunately for the merchants (but unfortunately it would seem for the government, if the misrepresentations that are circulated abroad, should be believed) your commerce did not feel the destructive scourge that was prepared for it. The embargo intervened and saved it from the devouring jaws of the great Leviathan of the ocean, that were already open to receive it. If the embargo had been postponed a few weeks longer, until your trade had felt a partial destruction, until a few hundred more of your ships had been swept from the ocean, and condemned by G. Britain and France under their orders and decrees, your merchants and the people of the U. S. generally, would have been more sensible of the salutary effects of this measure in saving the property of the nation. They would then have been convinced of the real cause of the present suspension of trade—and ascribe it to its true source, the edicts of the belligerent powers. They would have seen that nearly all their property on the ocean was seized and sequestered or condemned by those powers, and that the residue, if it had been suffered to go out, would have shared the same fate—That this would have been the case there can be no doubt. It is proved by the fact, that of the vessels that left this country for Europe, shortly before the embargo, scarcely one arrived safe at their intended market—a fact of the strongest kind in support of this position is well known, and has already been stated, that of nine vessels that went out of one of the eastern ports, immediately previous to the embargo, not one of them arrived safe at the place of destination. It is a fair calculation, that if your commerce generally had been permitted to go on the ocean, it would have shared the same fate. Hence the conclusion is inevitable that this measure, so far from destroying your trade has saved it from certain destruction.

Entertaining this view of the subject, and being convinced of its correctness, I confess I have been much astonished that it has been so often repeated in this House, and also in the party prints in different parts of the country, that the embargo has brought the nation to the verge of ruin; when it is undoubtedly true, that if it had not been laid, property to a vast amount, which is now within the country and in your own possession would have been captured, condemned and added to the resources of your enemies. You would have been stripped, I may say robbed, of more than one hundred millions of property, and that would have been added to the common stocks or funds of G. Britain and France. This is precisely the situation in which you would have been placed by the edicts of the belligerents, if the embargo had not been laid. Will gentlemen say that this would be a more desirable situation than you are in at present? Will they say that your own people being deprived of their property while it is thrown into the hands of their enemies, would render their condition more eligible, relieve their distresses, or add to the money in your treasury? Is it better, sir, that G. Britain should have the greater part of your vessels & merchandize, & a great proportion of your seamen, and make use of them against you, whenever the occasion should occur, than that they should remain in the country in your own possession, and add to the resources of the nation? There can be no doubt on this subject—no one will assert this. I might pursue the enquiry further. Is it not better and much more honorable for this country that your produce should even rot in your own warehouses, than that it should be enjoyed by your enemies, and used by them for your destruction. The people of America cannot entertain a doubt on this point. If they know what is the fact, that there was no alternative but either to leave it in their warehouses to rot, or throw it into the hands of their enemies, they would not hesitate to say with one voice, "we will suffer it to moulder & rot in our warehouses rather than supply our enemies with it to our own destruction." This is the precise question, which was presented when the embargo was laid, and which is still to be decided. That those powers would have captured all your property which they could find upon the ocean cannot be doubted by any one who has attended to their conduct, and is in any degree acquainted with their proceedings.

It may not be improper here to notice some particular instances in the conduct of those powers on this occasion, in order to ascertain whether we had any thing to expect from their friendship or justice, whether on the contrary they did not seem to prepare deliberate plans to entrap and destroy your commerce.

It will be recollected that G. Britain in the famous note of reservation, which was annexed to Monroe's treaty (so often noticed here) lately rejected by our government, expressly stated, that "if however the enemy should carry these threats (meaning the Berlin decree) into execution, and if neutral nations (contrary to all expectation) should acquiesce in such usurpation, his majesty might probably be compelled, however reluctantly, to retaliate in his just defence, and to adopt, in regard to the commerce of neutral nations with his enemies, the same measures which those nations shall have permitted to be enforced against their commerce with his subjects." From this it appears that the two requisites necessary in the opinion of the British ministry themselves to justify retaliation, are the execution of the decree and the acquiescence of neutral nations in such execution. This note was calculated to lull into security the people of America, and induce them to believe there was no danger to be apprehended from G. Britain, unless France should carry her decrees into execution, and there should also be an acquiescence on the part of this country. But what was the result? After this public declaration, without waiting to ascertain either of these facts, without knowing whether France would execute her decree, or the U. States acquiesce therein—nay, in less than eight days after such declaration G. Britain issued her retaliating orders of the 7th January, 1807, which contrary to the acknowledged law of nations, and in direct violation of the note that had been officially communicated, declared as good prize vessels of the U. S. sailing from the ports of one belligerent to a port of another belligerent. This was spreading a net, in which would probably be taken a great part of your commerce then afloat upon the ocean.

In the next place, a minister extraordinary, Mr. Rose, was sent to this country, to adjust existing differences between the two nations; it was announced that he was the messenger of peace; this was also calculated to quiet the apprehensions of your people, to lull into security the councils of your nation, and produce an impression that nothing hostile or unfriendly was intended by that government. He gave you no information respecting the existence or intended publication of any orders violating your commerce; mark the result. At the very time he left England, those orders in council of the 11th November, 1807, had issued, and another scheme was thereby laid, more deep and much more extensive than the former, to sweep the whole of your commerce from the ocean, and put an end at once to all rivalship of British trade by that of America; can the object of this measure be mistaken or misunderstood? Will gentlemen close their eyes against the strongest proof? This minister extraordinary, did not mention those orders to your government; he did not even know of their existence, as was pretended; yet they had actually issued before he left that country. A fact may be mentioned here, which I have received from such authority as induces me to believe it, that may throw some light on this subject, and shew the effects it was there expected the measure would have. Bets were offered in England immediately after those orders issued, that in a few months the United States would not possess 100 merchant vessels; so confident they were that their plan was so well laid, that they would sweep from the ocean the whole commerce of the United States! And it was not so important to Great Britain, whether this was effected by herself or by France, so as it was done. Her great object was to destroy your commercial importance; if she effected that, she gained the great point she had in view. Again, it so happened, that in some parts of this country there was a great out cry made against the embargo; misrepresentations were numerous, and industriously circulated, (principally by the enemies of this country and the friends of England) and its pressure on the people was exaggerated, and its evils highly colored, beyond all reason and without the least regard to truth. These misrepresentations and false coloring of facts, reached England, and there probably gained some credit. That government was induced to believe that when Congress met, they must and would remove the embargo. The session had hardly opened, the members had scarcely taken their seats, when this great Leviathan of the ocean, hungry for the prey, of which she had been deprived by the embargo, again opened her avaricious jaws to engulph your defenceless commerce the moment it floated upon the seas. But unfortunately for her, (though fortunately for your own merchants) she was again disappointed. She had declared the French West India islands in a state of blockade about the time the session commenced, in order to be prepared in case the embargo was removed, to seize and destroy your trade whenever it was committed to the ocean, and had your embargo been taken off, every ship which would have left this country, would undoubtedly, under one pretext or other, have fallen a prey to British cruizers. These are three honorable instances of British consistency, friendship and candor. I have thought proper to notice them to the House, to show that we have nothing to hope from the friendship of Great Britain, who has now the entire command of the seas. That so far from having any disposition to favor us, she has deliberately laid one plan after another, to seize your vessels and destroy your trade; so that if your commerce had been permitted to go out, it would most undoubtedly have been annihilated. Further, sir, experience has proved that almost the whole of the vessels that went out about that time, and shortly before, have either been seized and condemned, or made to pay tribute by Great Britain, or sequestered, or condemned by France. If your trade had generally gone out, it must therefore all have shared the same fate. And yet, sir, you are told that, by laying the embargo and saving your commerce from certain destruction, you have brought this country to the verge of ruin.

From this view of the subject I feel myself authorised to say, that the embargo when it was laid, was not only a wise and proper, but also a fortunate measure. This has been proved by events, which afterwards took place, that could not have been foreseen, in their full extent, or in all the points of view in which they afterwards presented themselves. The result has shewn it to have been more important, as well as more fortunate, than it could fairly have been estimated at the time it was imposed. How long it may be proper to persevere in the embargo, in preference to war is a question of quite a different nature; a question which I do not intend at this time to investigate. But, sir, if gentlemen consider the embargo, aided by a non-intercourse law as proposed, inefficient and too weak a measure, the committee, whose report is now under consideration, has presented to the House another alternative—war. If gentlemen prefer this course, and are willing to adopt it, let them come forward and say so; we have not said that we will not join them in it; we have not said that we will not go every length to vindicate the injured rights of our country. Let gentlemen therefore declare to the nation the ground they are willing to take to resist aggressions.

2. I propose to shew that the embargo, when laid, was not submission to those powers, (as has been asserted and often repeated), that it was taking a firm and dignified ground in opposition to their aggressions and in vindication of our rights.

Nothing could give the least appearance of plausibility to the assertion, that the embargo was submission, but the situation in which we were placed, in regard to the two great belligerent powers, who were at war with each other, rendering it necessary that we should resist both at the same time. When the measure is considered, as it certainly ought to be, as applied to each of them separately and distinctly; and as if adopted and operating first against one alone, in consequence of its conduct towards us, and then against the other in like manner, its true character will be manifest, and no doubt can exist on the subject. First, then as it regards France; by her decrees she declares, you shall not trade to Great Britain or any of her dependencies. To resist this aggression on our rights, we say to France, you have violated our lawful commerce, we will therefore shut up our ports as to you, if you do not permit us to trade with other nations on fair terms, we will not trade with you at all; we will keep our commerce at home, and shew you and the world, that we can do better without your manufactures, than you can subsist without our produce, so essential to your support. Surely, sir, this cannot be called submission to France—and although not a hostile measure, it is a measure of firm and decided resistance. In the first place you save your own trade from threatened destruction, you deprive her of supplies, and the advantages she derived from your commerce; and next you say to her, although we have not as large a navy, or as many soldiers to fight as you have, yet we will be independent; we will remain within our own limits; live on our own productions and protect our own soil; we will not hold intercourse with you on your own terms, nor submit to go to those ports only, which you point out, and to no others.

On the other hand, apply the measure to Great Britain. She by her orders in council, has declared "you shall not trade with France or with any of her dependencies," that is, "you shall not sail to a single port on the continent of Europe," (except perhaps those of Sweden) if you do, my cruisers are authorised to seize you and carry you into my ports, where you shall either be condemned, or made to pay a tribute, a heavy tax for licence to go, where you will most undoubtedly be condemned for having such license. To this outrageous aggression on their best rights, the United States have said—in the first place, "we will cut off our export trade from you altogether; if you do not suffer us to trade with other nations on fair terms, we will not trade with you at all. We know we have not a navy to protect our commerce against your thousand ships of war, upon the ocean; we will therefore withdraw our commerce from that element, and retain it within our own limits; you shall not receive supplies from us, or be furnished with our produce. We will in the next place, cut off all intercourse with [illegible] until you agree to do us justice [illegible] feel much more sensibly the loss of