

WILMINGTON GAZETTE.

Published weekly by ALLMANN HALL, at THREE DOLLARS a Year.

THURSDAY, MAY 19, 1803.

[Vol. 7, No. 331]

From the National Intelligencer.

A VINDICATION OF THE MEASURES OF THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION.

By ALGERNON SIDNEY.

Where liberty is—there is my country.
No. I.

EXPERIENCE is the great test of human actions. With her assistance we draw that final conclusion which satisfies all: which, not unfrequently, overturns the reasoning of schools, philosophy and politics. She proves, that the greatest abilities united to the first education, and aided by the strictest habits of industry and attention, are not always equal to the task of combining in view, all those facts and circumstances that have a natural connection with the subject. When she sanctions an act, to reason against it is vain. When she refuses her assent to a measure, the motive which induced it may be pure; but the measure itself cannot be a wise one. Her counsels ought to be listened to by all classes, from the man who acquires his subsistence by daily labor, to that one who guides the destinies of a nation.—When she can afford no aid, doubts arise and diversities of opinion exist. This was the case when the last Congress, at its first session, repealed the internal taxes, and re-established the old judicial system, by abolishing the one passed in February, 1801. These measures were approved by three-fourths of the people; a respectable portion of the remaining fourth refused their assent. This class have one common interest with the nation; their wish is to preserve the constitution, the laws, and the liberty of the country.—I speak not of the leaders of opposition.

A government which yields protection, and abstains from oppression, which maintains order, and secures liberty, which preserves the national faith, and practises economy, whose basis is the people, and whose object is their happiness, is the great desideratum.

The laws objected to, have long since gone into operation; the evils predicted have not been realized: Experience proclaims their value; and the murmurs of discontent are dying away. The time has arrived when it has become the duty of the people to re-consider the objections, and decide upon their validity.

We were told, that by abolishing the late judiciary system we should loosen the bands of civil society, destroy the constitution of our country, and defeat the operations of justice. But the system was abolished—the bands of society were not loosened—peace, order, happiness, prevail—the constitution retains its youthful energy—the judges of the supreme court have sanctioned the law—and justice is as fully administered as heretofore. All the purposes of society are answered—an important constitutional principle settled—and an expense saved equal to the support of some of the state governments.

We were told that by abolishing the internal taxes, we should destroy the national credit, violate its faith, dry up its resources, and deprive the government of the means of support.—But by the economical arrangement of the government; the reductions of expenditure exceed the reductions of revenue, more than 200,000 dollars; thus the people were relieved from annual taxes amounting to near a million of dollars, and from all the delay, expense, and embarrassments arising from the whole system of internal taxation; and the government is on safer ground than the preceding administration.

The opposition has endeavored to excite popular discontent on account of repealing the excise on carriages and domestic refined sugars. After having themselves doubled the taxes on salt, tea and brown sugar, while they were in power, after having ridiculed the rights of the people for years, after bestowing on them every epithet which they had genius to invent or knowledge to borrow, when they no longer guide the helm of state, they have attempted to palm themselves upon the public, as the champions of the rights of the people, and the advocates of those in humbler circumstances. They have falsely and artfully represented, that the republicans, whom they usually stigmatized as poor, have directed their attention to persons of fortune, to the

humble and dependent. With some who are uninformed, they have been too successful, while the friends of the government confiding in its integrity, and the wisdom and utility of its measures, have neglected to communicate a correct statement of facts. The public mind is correct; it will pronounce an impartial and just judgment when rightly informed; it demands a knowledge of the case; its claim shall be complied with.

It has been represented, that the taxes upon pleasurable carriages, and refined sugars have been repealed. This is true so far as respects the excise; but false as it relates to the impost.

Whenever a coach, chaise, phaeton or other carriage is imported, a tax is levied upon it equal to one fifth of its value, that is to say upon a coach worth 600 dollars, a tax of one hundred and twenty; upon a phaeton worth 300 dollars, a tax of sixty, and upon a chaise worth 200 dollars, a tax of forty is levied. Parts of carriages are taxed in the same proportion. When a coach or other carriage is built in the United States, every material used in its completion, which comes from a foreign country is taxed. Nothing is exempted but the labour of our own mechanics, the timber from our farms, the iron from our manufactories, and such other articles as are produced by the ingenuity and labor of our citizens. Thus for the broad cloth a tax is paid equal to one eighth of its value; and for the carpeting, leather, paints, tassels, laces, fringes, and other trimmings, fifteen cents for the value of one dollar. So when a citizen purchases a hundred pounds of foreign loaf sugar he pays a tax of nine dollars; when he purchases a hundred pounds of brown sugar, the tax he pays is only two and a half dollars. To produce a hundred pounds of loaf sugar, requires two hundred and sixteen lbs. of brown sugar, the difference in weight is lost by the process of clarifying. This two hundred and sixteen pounds of brown sugar is purchased by the manufacturer, and he pays for it a tax of five dollars and forty cents; of him the consumer purchases it, and pays the first cost, the tax and the expense of refining. This consumer therefore, supports an useful manufacture of our own, and pays as much for each pound of sugar he uses, as he who consumes brown sugar pays for two pounds and one eighth.

Now it is a fact, which will not be controverted, that adding the excise upon the carriage, to the duties levied upon the most expensive articles of which it is made, increases the expense to such a degree, as to lessen essentially the number of purchasers. So adding to the tax upon brown sugar, the excise upon that which is clarified by our own citizens, reduces materially the number of consumers. The excise therefore, operated directly to the injury of the sugar boilers, the carriage-builders, and all persons by them employed, either in furnishing or manufacturing the materials of our own country, or in preparing those of other countries for the use designed.

Nor ought we to compute that the revenue of government is lessened to the amount derived from the excise on those articles. Because the importation of the articles necessary for the mechanics and manufacturers, always will be in proportion to the demand for them, or, in other words, to the quantity used; and the revenue by impost is in proportion to the importation. Therefore to ascertain what reduction of the revenue will in reality take place from the repeal of these excises, it is necessary to deduct from the gross amount of revenue derived from them the increased amount of impost upon the articles of which they are made. The balance, if any thing, constitutes the true reduction of the revenue. The excise has not been removed a sufficient time to enable any person to make this estimation. But I do not hesitate to say, that in a little time the increased demand for, and consumption of these articles, will produce an increase of impost equal to the reduction of revenue, which actually took place by abolishing the excise. Here let me ask, why should laws be so constructed as to injure the interests of these mechanics and manufacturers and to check their laudable enterprise and industry, any more than they should be to check the industry of the cabinet-maker, the gold-smith, the silver-smith, the watch-maker, the engraver and all the artists in the useful and elegant arts of life? Why

should the labors of one man be taxed and the labors of all others remain free? Is not the farmer willing that his son, who devotes his life to manufactures, or the mechanic, should have an equal chance for happiness with that son, who devotes himself to agriculture? Are not the other mechanics and other manufacturers willing that the sugar boilers and carriage-builders should stand on equal ground with themselves? All must pay for the support of government.

While the nation relies on impost for her revenues, the tax is laid directly on the labors and products of other countries, and indirectly on our own citizens, the consumer of the richest and most valuable articles pays the highest tax, the consumer of the plainest and cheapest, the least. For instance, he who consumes the richest tea, pays as great a tax for a single pound as he who consumes common tea, pays for three pound and a third. Each man pays only in proportion to what he consumes; but the farmer pays least of all, because he lives most within himself.

The government by repealing the internal taxes has given equal play to the genius, enterprise and activity of all. It has removed the shackles which retarded the operations of industry. An excise system is to the body politic, what the consumption is to the natural body. It steals upon the frame. It operates imperceptibly. It deceives the patient from time to time, with the appearance of returning health, but it gradually undermines the system and ends in dissolution. Thus the nation perishes, while the officers bleated and swelled by rioting on her property, expire of a dropsey. The humble and distressed condition of the common people of Europe, furnishes proof of the truth of this assertion too impressive and irresistible ever to be forgotten by the citizens of this country.

It has been suggested that these articles are chiefly used by the wealthy, and are therefore more proper objects of taxation. But when the excise was removed from other articles to have retained from these, would have required a continuance of the whole host of excises, at an expense nearly, if not fully equal to the whole revenues. Nor is it believed that when the reduction of impost naturally derivable from the excise is added to the expense of that system, there would arise a cent of clear revenue.

In some states it is admitted Congress might collect an excise upon those articles at a moderate expense. I refer to those states, which in Massachusetts and Connecticut, are replete with population and possess a proportionate number of carriages. In the other states it is far different. In Massachusetts there is one carriage to every 1107 acres of land, in Pennsylvania there is but one to every 15,917, and in Virginia to every 16,212, so that the travel and expense of the Collector in going for the tax, or of the citizen in going to pay it, in Virginia and Pennsylvania, is fourteen times as much as in Massachusetts. In Connecticut there is one carriage to every 1748 acres, while in North-Carolina there is only one to every 11,329.—The real expense therefore of collecting that tax, is six times as great in North-Carolina as in Connecticut. The evil in the Western country, and south of Potomac, is increased by the scarcity of bank notes. The expense of the actual travel must be incurred; the facilities of the public mails cannot be substituted. Neither does it result from this that necessity produces any inequality or injustice in the articles taxed, or in the mode of taxing them. In most countries an inequality might necessarily exist, happily for the people of these states it is not their code.

As it relates to all internal objects of taxation, each state within its limits possesses a right extensive and concurrent with the United States. Nothing therefore is easier than for a state to correct any inequality, which may result from the taxes of the union. Should Congress levy a tax on any article, the state, whose citizens feel the pressure of the tax, will relieve the article from state taxes.—Does congress repeal her taxes, and surrender to the states all the sources of internal taxation, it enables the states to lessen the burdens of their present systems by drawing a revenue from these restored resources. Either of the states may levy a tax on carriages, distilled spirits and refined sugars; and it is to be presumed that

the legislature will wherever the interest of the state requires it. These articles therefore are not exempted from taxation; they are yielded up to the discretion of the state legislatures. Is it not astonishing that states should complain of a surrender of revenue to their use? Ought they not to rejoice that the general government has furnished them with the means of relieving from the poor the poll or capitation tax? And cannot the equalization of taxes be better effected by the acts of the state governments, who legislate for small sections and can adopt their laws to the condition of their citizens, than by the laws of Congress, which must operate by one rule over all the people of this union, however dissimilar and unlike their conditions.

We are told that the annual appropriation of seven millions three hundred thousand dollars, towards the discharge of the principal and interest of the national debt, was deceptive and calculated to inspire hopes, which would never be realized. Experience has demonstrated that the government, notwithstanding it has repealed the internal taxes, has been enabled in the past year, to discharge of national debt, eighty million five hundred and eighty thousand and seven dollars; while not a cent has been borrowed or reloaned, nor a tax of any kind created. The treasury too so far from being exhausted, on the first of January 1803, was possessed of five million twenty thousand two hundred and thirty dollars and sixty two cents a thing altogether unprecedented. The redemption of the public debt by means of the bank shares is included in this estimate.

We are now told that no credit is due to the government, because the monies have been derived from the imposts which were established by former administrations. What? Is there no credit due to a government that administers the finances of a nation with economy, frugality, and sound discretion? Because I have furnished my agent with a capital necessary for my use, is he not entitled to my confidence for the integrity, prudence and judgment he has displayed in the management of my affairs? Do not the man justly challenge a higher claim to that confidence, who faithfully applies the monies I have entrusted to him, than the one who devotes the most methods of drawing my money from my pocket? Ours is exclusively entitled to it, who has devised the means of taking from me the fruits of my own industry.

It is said that these states are to be entrusted with the government, who will to preference and discretion in expending that knowledge of the country and its interests, which may enable them if necessity require, to augment her revenues by additional taxes, least injurious to the people, and most congenial with their habits, condition and feelings. It is equally true that the present government has not created any taxes. But it is not true that the opposition deserve any more credit for the creation of the revenue system, than belongs to the persons in office. That system was contemplated by the old congress, under the confederation; they repeatedly solicited the states to treat them with power to levy an impost. The refusal of those states principally interested in importations in a great measure produced the necessity for a convention. The convention calculated upon the imposts to support the government they recommended to the people. The rights of general taxation were given that the powers of the government might be equal to every exigency. When the Federal government went into operation, the present system of impost was adopted by general consent; many of the officers of the government and friends of the administration, were eminently useful in its establishment.

Indeed one principal objection against the late order of things, was that the late administration would not rely upon impost alone for revenue, but insisted upon establishing the stamp tax, and general system of internal taxation, oppressive to the interior, expensive in the extreme, and productive of daily embarrassments. Of those who possess a knowledge of public affairs, who is there that can deny these facts? From what source then does the opposition derive its apprehensions.

Among various other objections which have been offered against the reduction of impost, it has been said the

people were naturally averse to taxation, and with difficulty brought to submit to new contributions. That these systems were in operation, the people had become accustomed to them, and it was most wise and prudent to retain them; because they might be wanted at some future day. This objection amounts to this "You must tax the people when you do, not when you do want it."

In countries where the iron hand of despotism rules, where the interests of the sovereign are distinct from, and opposed to the interest of the subject, where fear binds him to his master, it is undoubtedly necessary to keep fast the chains by which he is bound.—How dissimilar is our case? If the revenues are wisely and judiciously expended the exigencies of the state are the exigencies of the people themselves. The government is theirs—they object their happiness—they mould and fashion it to their own liking; and there is no one to say "why do ye so." Can it be possible that a people so circumstanced will refuse those contributions which their own security and happiness demand?

Here again let us test this objection by experience. In the war of 1787 the people of these states contributed with liberality to its support.—They have struggled through and supported an arduous war of eight years, with an unanimity unparalleled in the history of nations.

They have submitted quietly to the existing taxes, and to all those which have been repealed, with the solitary exception of the discontents which have been manifested by three or four counties in Pennsylvania. A part of these discontents, probably, would have been easily allayed, had not the then secretary of the treasury believed them calculated to further his views. I boldly challenge the enemies of the government to produce from the annals of the world a people, who have more uniformly yielded a ready obedience to law or more cheerfully contributed to the necessities of state. Yet in every instance when the government no longer wanted the taxes, the people were relieved from them. For my own part I acknowledge I feel indignant when I reflect upon the objection I have combated. I pledge myself voluntarily to contribute my proportion of whatever the necessities of government may require, I enter my solemn protest against being taxed unnecessarily, for the purpose of drifting me.

A former secretary of the treasury and many of his adherents, have advocated a principle, which, if correct, certainly proves the internal taxes ought not to have been repealed. It is this, "That the people ought to be taxed as far as they can pay." I dissent from this principle; it will produce a despotism. To that species of government it is essentially necessary; for an independent yeomanry will never be slaves. While the soil is owned and cultivated by the same persons, liberty is safe. But once oppress the people with a system of taxation, which shall bring the class of moderate planters and farmers in arrears, although the deficit may be small, still eventually it will produce the effect. A consumption will prey upon the vitals of the republic. The nation will become a body of landlords and tenants; one class rich, the other poor and dependent; or in other words, one will become masters, the other slaves.

To give health to the natural body, the blood must flow with regularity, and in due proportion to all its parts; so to give vigor and vitality to the body politic, the attention of government must be directed to all. The interest of all must be consulted.—While the rich are protected, the interests of the common citizens should be carefully guarded, and tenderly watched over. This inequality which the nature of things is constantly producing, should be checked in its career, not fostered and accelerated in its progress; of consequence government should levy as few taxes as possible; because in whatever mode they are levied, the body of the people must pay the greater proportion of them, and they are not healthy. The constant pressure of taxes will depress them. Look to the nations who have gone before us.

I have read of the paupers of England amounting to one seventh of the numbers, and supported by one annual tax of nearly fourteen millions of dollars, a sum far exceeding the whole