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CONGRESSIONAL.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

Remarks of Mr. WILLIAMS, of North Carolina, in support of his motion to repeal the internal taxes.

(CONCLUDED.)

Sir, we were called upon the other day to receive three thousand dollars as a salary to the commissioner of the revenue. He received only this sum when supervising the collection of seven or eight millions internal revenue. He now also receives that sum for supervising the collection of only two or three millions. This feature in the system of internal taxes is perhaps quite as odious as any other. Mr. Smith, no doubt, is a very faithful and deserving officer; he may be as well entitled to receive three thousand dollars, as any other man would be, under similar circumstances; but, sir, no man who deserves only three thousand dollars for supervising the collection of seven or eight millions, can be entitled to the same salary when he supervises the collection of only two or three millions. The same fact, I imagine, obtains throughout the whole system. You may reduce the amount of tax on the people, but you cannot make a correspondent reduction of salary to the officers; all of them must live.

Some of the taxes I know to be oppressive on the people, and for that reason I should endeavor to repeal them. The gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. Calhoun) said the taxes were not oppressive; that we had received no petitions requesting a modification or repeal of any of them. Gentlemen urged the other day, in debate, that instructions from the people were not binding on the representative. If instructions would not be obligatory on gentlemen, I should suppose the people would have a very poor prospect of success, when they presented themselves to this House in the character of humble supplicants. But, sir, it is not necessary that we should receive petitions before we can know that a particular law, or a general system of laws, operates a grievance on the community. Why has the constitution of the United States declared that the representatives in Congress shall be inhabitants of the states from which they come?—and why is it a law either statutory or common in the states, that each member shall have his residence in the district he represents? It is for the purpose of enabling each representative to have an intimate knowledge of the interests, feelings and wishes of his constituents. By visiting them when he returns home, and by talking with them, he finds out the bearing of any measure may have on their welfare. It is from knowledge thus acquired, that a true and faithful representative must act, much more than from petitions. Suppose I were to receive a petition from my district, complaining of the excise, would I be better able to act from the information thus furnished, than from personal conversation with my neighbors and acquaintances, during the recess? Sir, I think information acquired in the latter way more entitled to credit, and I should certainly give it the preference, were it to come in conflict with a petition.

But I make these remarks merely to shew the gentleman from South Carolina, and others who may think with him, that I do not consider it necessary to be burdened with petitions before I should feel it a duty to interpose for the relief of those whom I represent in this House. The excise I know to be oppressive, both as to the amount of duty imposed on stills, and as to the inconvenience to which the people are subjected in obtaining a license. In the first place, the tendency of the law is to throw the whole business into the hands of capitalists. The owners of small establishments cannot compete with those who carry on great distilleries: a tax on the gallon would, therefore, be much more equitable than the one which exists on the capacity. It likewise appears to be an extraordinary provision in the law, that after a distiller has paid for a license, he shall not be at liberty to retail a less quantity of spirits than one gallon. You may rightfully impose a duty on the manufacturing of commodities; but it is extremely rigid to prohibit the citizen from retailing his commodities when manufactured, in whatever quantities he may choose. By this law the owners of small establishments are frequently prevented from raising the money with which to pay the tax on stills. The owner of a cloth factory may be called upon to pay a duty on his machinery; but I imagine it would be thought a strange provision in the law, if he were restrained from selling one, two or three yards at a time.

The law, as to its object, is unfair and oppressive upon many portions of our country. Distilled spirits are the staple commodity in many parts of the United States; and it does appear to me, that Congress have just the same right to tax the tobacco of Virginia; the cotton

of South Carolina and Georgia; or the sugar of Louisiana, as the whiskey of any other quarter of the country. The tax operates with peculiar pressure on those parts distantly situated from market, while it is not felt in those near the seaboard. It is, therefore, giving to the latter a great advantage over the former. Such advantages, given by a law to one portion of the community over any other portion, ought to form a sufficient objection to the law itself to produce its repeal.

As to the duty on carriages, on auctions and stamps, it affects materially but few portions of the state I have the honor in part to represent. Were it only for my individual benefit and accommodation, I should not be very anxious to effect the repeal of those duties. But, sir, if one or two of them be taken off, the revenue arising from the others would scarcely justify a continuance of the system; and as I have no wish to see the rest of the people of the United States loaded with taxes, while my constituents are free from them, I am for this reason prepared to vote an entire repeal of the system.

Another objection inducing a wish to repeal the taxes at this time, is, that it would probably make the representative branch of the government more acceptable in the eyes of the nation than it now is. The best writers on the British constitution say, that the tendency of that government is to a concentration of all power in the King. Some gentlemen of great research and profound thought, in our country, have said that the tendency of this government, is to a concentration of all power in the Executive. It, indeed, requires but a partial acquaintance with the history of the present day, to be convinced that the Executive branch of the government threatens to swallow up all the rest. Gentlemen have admitted, in debate, on this floor, the existence of this fact, with much apparent regret, and have exhorted the House to adopt such measures as would be likely to counteract Presidential influence. It is for this reason, then, that I would repeal the acts imposing internal duties. Let me ask, if the President had recommended the repeal, whether there would be such opposition to the measure as we had witnessed? No, sir, I feel justified in stating that if the President had advised it there would be scarcely a dissenting voice. But what would be the consequence of such a measure upon the character and reputation of this House? It would be resounded from one end of the continent to the other, by the friends of the Executive, that he deserved all the praise for alleviating the burdens of the people; that his superior foresight, penetration and love of country, had pointed out that wise and beneficial measure. In this state of the case, the President would have more of the praise and gratitude of the nation, than he was entitled to receive; while Congress would be regarded as instruments in the hands of the Executive, as the immediate agents of the people, laboring exclusively for the good of those whom they represented. As a member of this house, I would prefer voting for a repeal of the taxes before it was recommended by the President, rather than afterwards; because, if you carry a repeal without, or even against Executive recommendation, you will then come in for a share of that praise which would attach to the President alone, if he had recommended the measure. Not as an individual, then, but as a member of the representative branch of our government, and anxious to see it raised to that degree of favor which it merits, in the estimation of the people, I shall vote for an immediate repeal of the system of internal taxes. It seems to be admitted by some, that the taxes cannot exist many years to come. Why not then accomplish the work at the present session? Why wait for the President to say, "repeal the taxes?" Why not rather anticipate him in announcing relief to the people? Gentlemen say that Congress has ceased to be as important and gracious in the eye of the people, as it formerly was; that many causes have conspired to depress its character, and to render it less an object of favor than heretofore. It is lamentable, indeed, if this be the fact; but we ourselves are to blame. We have been too much in the habit of waiting for Executive recommendation, before we would presume to adopt any measure which was likely to render us acceptable to the nation; while the odium of every improper or unpopular measure was sure to be levelled against us. Let us, then, at the present session, act a part which becomes us; let us convince this nation and the world, that we, the representatives of the people, are independent of Executive will; that we will pursue the interests of our constituents, even without Presidential recommendation. But, sir, if we adopt a contrary course; if we wait to be dictated to by the Executive; if we suspend our own opinion till his be first proclaimed, then we shall realize the condition of which we now only behold the prospect, and to which we see only the tendency, that is, the concentration of all power in the Executive, and the depression of the representative branch of our government. Miserable, indeed, will be the fate of our country, if the representatives of the people should, by an improvident use, or improper forbearance of the powers with which they are entrusted, bring upon themselves such annihilation.

The last, but not the least reason with me for repealing the taxes, is, that it may become necessary to reduce the army. For my own part I think the taxes may be taken off and the army permitted to remain at the present number of ten thousand. But I am conscious that so long as we continue to raise money and vote supplies, there will be no disposition

either to practise economy or curtail any of the expensive establishments which now exist. It is the opinion of some gentlemen, that, with the existing military establishment, it would be improper to dispense with the taxes. I wish it therefore (by repealing the taxes) to become necessary in the opinion of those gentlemen to reduce the army. This part of the subject is as important as any which can or will come before Congress at this or any other session. It involves a principle of politics which appeared at one time to be settled, but which now appears to be again in doubt. It is my opinion that the army ought to be reduced to six thousand—first, because standing armies in time of peace have ever been held dangerous to the liberties of a free people;—and, secondly, because of the unnecessary expense to which we are subjected by supporting an army of ten thousand.

What, sir, was the language held by our fathers, who achieved the independence of their country, and who, as they knew best how to secure liberty, also knew best how to maintain it? They were called upon for an opinion, said that standing armies in time of peace were dangerous to the liberties of a free people, and ought not to be allowed. So sacred was this principle, that it was inserted in the constitutions of most, if not all of the states. In the constitution of North Carolina I know there is a provision to this effect. The same I believe will be found in the constitutions of all the states; but as there are gentlemen present from the several states, they will correct me if I should be wrong. Our forefathers, Mr. Speaker, were not to be scared at shadows: they had braved the direful effects of British vengeance; they had rode in triumph through the storms of war; they had conquered the independence of their country; and it is not to be supposed that they would be so terrified at a mere phantom as to guard against it by the solemn provisions of the constitution; I speak, therefore, in the language of wisdom, because it is the language of the sages and heroes of the revolution, when I say that standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to the liberties of a free people, and ought not to be allowed; in corroboration of this truth, I can refer you to the history of all governments. What enabled Caesar to overthrow the government of Rome, or Cromwell that of England, but a standing army? Or what in more modern times, enabled Bonaparte to desolate the fairest portion of Europe, but a standing army and the diffusion of an ardent, restless, military spirit? Sir, if I had no other evidence of this truth than the mere dictum of the sages and heroes of the revolution, I should yield my assent to it; but when it comes to us in the shape of a solemn constitutional provision, and when that provision is strengthened and confirmed by all the evidence which history affords, I should think myself worse than a sceptic to withhold assent.

It has, sir, been well remarked by a writer of great reputation, that man is very much a creature of habit; that he often acts from habit more than reflection; hence, the necessity of forming correct habits, by resorting at first to the dictates of sound reason and dispassionate judgment. It is with governments as with individuals; for governments are operated upon, are put into motion, by the principles of the men who administer them. If standing armies are dangerous to the health and well being of a government, we should as carefully avoid keeping them in existence, as we should avoid, in our private capacity, the formation of bad habits. If government should continue a standing army, the alarming tendencies, the frightful consequences of such an establishment, will at length become familiar to us, and we shall be lulled into security amidst even the most threatening danger. To avoid then a habit of fondness for a standing army, we should always in time of peace bring it down to the minimum of what may be needful. In war we must necessarily have men to combat the enemy; but as soon as war is over, we should recollect the maxim transmitted to us by our forefathers; we should consider that in peace an army is dangerous, and immediately reduce it as low as the situation and circumstances of the country will permit. I would not be understood to intimate, in the most distant manner, that any of our officers and soldiers at present would endanger the liberties of their country. No, sir, such is not my meaning, and I beg the House not to believe me as conveying the most distant idea of the kind. The present army has neither the numbers nor the disposition to engage in so unhallowed a work. All I contend for is this, that the government and people of the United States should not, in opposition to the advice of our forefathers, acquire a habit of fondness for, and dependence upon a standing army; that, to avoid this habit, it should be a settled rule in time of peace to reduce the army as low as the situation of the country will permit; that the question should not be "how many men can we retain in the service," but how many can we dispense with; that we should not keep in service as many as possible, but as few as possible. Now, sir, I ask whether it is necessary to continue in service an army of ten thousand men? In my judgement it is not; we want just so many men as will garrison our posts and fortifications. I hold in my hand a statement, from which it will appear, that a little upwards of six thousand men will be amply sufficient for this purpose; any greater number involving a risk of contracting that dangerous habit of fondness for a standing army, to which I have alluded. The indulgence of the House will, I trust, be extended to me while I read the state-

ment—it was furnished by one in whose military knowledge I have the utmost confidence. If gentlemen are not equally disposed to confide in it, they have only to produce other statements, and the candor and intelligence of the House will determine between us.*

The statement exhibited to the House had gone very much into detail, and Mr. Williams said, he must apologize for having so long occupied the attention of the gentlemen. It appeared to him necessary that a statement of the kind should show the different positions of the garrisons, and the various uses to which they must be applied. If this were done, those not inclined to a reduction of the army could more easily point out the errors contained in any statements made to the House, and he hoped his consideration would justify him for having consumed so much time by minute details of this part of the subject. It is obvious from this statement, that an army containing about six thousand two hundred men will be entirely adequate to every purpose. He must then, in the seriousness and sincerity of the most heartfelt conviction, say, that the army should be reduced; that he would adopt the maxim that standing armies in time of peace were dangerous to liberty, and that no act of his should ever induce the government to form a habit different from that maxim by continuing in service a greater number than is absolutely wanted.—This, he said, is the point to which we should always go, and beyond which we ought never to go because the least extravagance in this matter involves the most dangerous consequence.

But gentlemen contend that it would be improper to reduce the army in the present unsettled state of the world. Sir, I consider their fears on this head as perfectly visionary; for we cannot, I think, entertain apprehensions of another war within any short time. On the Canada frontier, Great Britain is the weaker power in relation to the United States. She cannot act with such a want of wisdom, with so much precipitation, as to commence war upon us in that quarter. The same remark applies to Spain on our South Western frontier; in addition to which the state of her South American provinces will be most ample security (For conclusion, see fourth page.)

* Mr. Williams then read to the House the number, situation, and names of our forts and other public works; and the number and description of force necessary to be placed in each, as follows:

Fort Hawkins—At this fort one company of infantry is necessary to prevent the white people from intruding on the Indians, and also to preserve the factory established for the purposes of trade.

Town of Savannah—One company of Artillery, to keep the fort in repair; the cannon and small arms in order, and also to aid the revenue officers, if occasion should require.

Charleston—At Charleston there are Fort Moultrie, Fort Johnson, and Castle Pinckney.—At these places two companies of artillery will be necessary, for the same purposes as at Savannah.

Fort Johnson, below Wilmington, in North Carolina.—The works at this place are very unimportant, and scarcely merit the attention of a garrison; but, to swell the estimate, we will assign to that fort one company of artillery.

Norfolk—Fort Nelson and Fort Norfolk, are the only works.—There may be a water battery on Craney island, erected during the war, but it is not necessary to garrison it in time of peace.—At these works two companies of artillery may be necessary to keep them in repair; to preserve the cannon, small arms, and munitions of war, and occasionally to aid the revenue officers, as at Savannah.

Baltimore—Fort McHenry; one company of artillery, for the same purposes.

Philadelphia—Mud or Sullivan's Fort; one company of artillery, for the same purposes.

New-York—Here there is a fort called Castle Williams, with two or three other forts, the names of which are not recollected, and which are not material. At these places three companies of artillery would do the ordinary garrison duties, but we will say four.

Newport, Rhode-Island—Fort Trumbull, it is believed, is the name of the works.—At this place one company of artillery may be necessary.

Boston.—The name of the works unknown; but, from the extent of them, generally understood, two companies of artillery will be sufficient.

New-London, Connecticut—One company of artillery.

Plattsburgh—Rouse's point near Plattsburgh, is in the neighborhood of Isle de Noix, in Lower Canada; and lest at some unguarded moment, the enemy might possibly make a dash upon it, we will assign to this place two companies of artillery and two of infantry.

Sackett's Harbor—One company of artillery.

Niagara—One company of artillery.

Detroit and its dependencies, Mackinaw, Greenbay, and Chicago—Fort Detroit, three companies of infantry and one company of artillery; For Mackinaw three companies of infantry, and a subaltern's command of artillery.—For Greenbay, two companies of infantry, and a subaltern's command of artillery.—For Chicago, two companies of infantry. It is necessary there should be a larger force at Detroit than the other places, for the purpose of escorting supplies of provisions and munitions of war to Mackinaw, Greenbay and Chicago.

St. Louis and its dependencies, fort Edwards, fort Armstrong, fort Crawford, fort Clarke, fort Osage; and a fort to be established on the Arkansas. To these places may be assigned ten companies of riflemen and one of artillery, to be disposed of as follows viz: Fort Edwards, one company of riflemen.—Fort Armstrong, two companies of riflemen, and a subaltern's command of artillery.—Fort Crawford, three companies of riflemen and a subaltern's command of artillery.—Fort Clarke, one company of riflemen.—Fort Osage, one company of riflemen. The fort to be established on the Arkansas, one company of riflemen.—The depot at St. Louis, one company of riflemen, and the residue of the artillery, to keep the stores in readiness, and to escort supplies to the outposts, when necessary.

Fort Washington, on the Potomac, one company of artillery.

New-Orleans and dependencies, fort St. Philip, fort St. Charles, fort St. John, fort Pech Coquille.—Four companies of artillery will be entirely sufficient to garrison these places.

Mobile.—Two companies of artillery.

Those little forts in the Creek nation, viz: Fort Jackson, fort Decatur, fort Williams, fort Crawford, &c. &c. are considered unworthy of notice, because the Indians are completely subdued; the country is fast settling, and these places will be of no use.

It may be necessary to establish a fort on the Apatachicola, at or near the Spanish line, where one company of artillery will answer every object the government can propose.