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## Congress of the United States.

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MR. KING'S SPEECH ON THE NAVIGATION ACT.  
FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 1818.

Agriculture, manufactures, and foreign commerce, said Mr. KING, are the true sources of wealth and power of nations; agriculture is the chief and well rewarded occupation of our people, and yields in addition to what we want for our use a great surplus for exportation. Manufactures are making a sure and steady progress; and, with the abundance of food and of raw materials, which the country affords, will, at no distant day, be sufficient in the principal branches, for our own consumption, and furnish a valuable addition to our exports.

But, without shipping and seamen, the surpluses of agriculture and of manufactures would depreciate on our hands; the cotton, tobacco, bread stuffs, provisions and manufactures, would turn out to be of little worth, unless we have ships and mariners to carry them abroad, and to distribute them in the foreign markets.

Nations have adopted different theories, as respects the assistance to be derived from navigation; some have been content with a passive foreign commerce—owning no ships themselves, but depending on foreigners and foreign vessels to bring to them their supplies, and to purchase of them their surpluses; while others, and almost every modern nation that borders upon the ocean, have preferred an active foreign trade, carried on, as far as consistent with the reciprocal rights of others, by national ships and seamen.

A dependence upon foreign navigation subjects those who are dependent, to the disadvantages arising from foreign wars, and to the expense and risk of the navigation of belligerent nations—the policy of employing a national shipping is, therefore almost universally approved and adopted; it affords not only a more certain means of prosecuting foreign commerce, but the freight, as well as the profits of trade, are added to the stock of the nation.

The value and importance of national shipping and national seamen, have created among the great maritime powers, and particularly in England, a strong desire to acquire, by restrictions and exclusions, a disproportionate share of the general commerce of the world.

As all nations have equal rights, and each may claim equal advantages in its intercourse with others, the true theory of international commerce is one of equality, and, of reciprocal benefits; this theory gives to enterprize, to skill and to capital, their just and natural advantages; any other scheme is merely artificial; and so far as it aims at profit is at the expense of natural justice.

The colonial system being founded in this vicious theory, has, therefore, proved to be the fruitful source of dissatisfaction, insecurity and war. According to this system, the colonies were depressed below the rank of their fellow subjects, and the fruits of their industry and their intercourse with foreign countries, placed under different regulations from those of the inhabitants of the mother country; it was the denial to Americans of the rights enjoyed by Englishmen, that produced the American revolution—and the same cause, greatly aggravated, is working the same effect in South America.

Among the navigators and discoverers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Dutch became highly distinguished, and, by enterprize, economy and perseverance, made themselves the carriers of other nations, and their country the entrepot of Europe—and it was not until the middle of the fourteenth century, that England passed her navigation act, which had for its object, to curtail the navigation of the Dutch and to extend her own.

According to this act, the whole trade and intercourse between England, Asia, Africa and America, were confined to the shipping and mariners of England; and the intercourse between England and the rest of Europe was placed under regulations which in a great measure confined the same to English ships and seamen.

This act was strenuously opposed by the Dutch, and proved the occasion of the obstinate naval wars that afterwards followed. England was victorious, persisted in her navigation act, and, in the end, broke down the monopoly in trade which the Dutch possessed.

That in vindication of her equal right to na-

vigate the ocean, England should have resisted the monopoly of the Dutch, and freely expended her blood and treasure to obtain her just share of the general commerce, deserved the approbation of all impartial men. But, having accomplished this object, that she should herself aim at, and in the end establish the same exclusive system, and on a more extended scale, is neither consistent with her own laudable principles, nor compatible with the rights of others; who relatively to her monopoly now, are now in the like situation towards England, in which England was towards the Dutch, when she asserted and made good her rights against them.

By the English act of navigation, the trade of the colonies is restrained to the dominion of the mother country, and none but English ships are allowed to engage in it.

So long as colonies are within such limits as leave to other nations a convenient resort to foreign markets for the exchange of the goods which they have to sell, for those they want to buy, so long this system is tolerable; but if the power of a state enables it to increase the number of its colonies and dependent territories, so that it becomes the mistress of the great military and commercial stations throughout the globe, this extension of dominion, and the consequent monopoly of commerce, seem to be incompatible with, and necessarily to abridge the equal rights of other states.

In the late debates of the English parliament, the Minister, in the House of Lords, stated, "that instead of seventeen thousand men, employed abroad in 1791, forty-one thousand were then (1816) required, exclusive of those that were serving in France and in India. That England now has forty-three principal colonies, in all of which troops are necessary; that sixteen of these principal colonies were acquired since 1791, and six of them had grown into that rank from mere colonial dependencies." And, in the House of Commons, the Minister, alluding to the acquisitions made during the war with France, said, "that England had acquired what, in former days, would have been thought roman—she had acquired the keys of every great military station."

Thus, the commercial aggrandisement of England has become such as the men who protested against monopoly, and desired the navigation act to break it down, could never have anticipated; and it may, ere long, concern other nations to enquire whether laws and principles, applicable to the narrow limits of English dominion and commerce, at the date of the navigation act, when colonies and commerce, and even navigation itself, were comparatively in their infancy; laws and principles aimed against monopoly, and adopted to secure to England her just share in the general commerce and navigation of the world, ought to be used by England to perpetuate in her own hands a system equally as exclusive, and far more comprehensive, than that which she was the chief agent to abolish.

Our commercial system is an open one—our ports and our commerce are free to all—we neither possess, nor desire to possess, colonies; nor do we object that others should possess them, unless thereby the general commerce of the world be so abridged, that we are restrained in our intercourse with foreign countries wanting our supplies, and furnishing, in return, those which we stand in need of.

But, it is not the colonial system, but to a new principle which, in modern times, has been incorporated with those of the navigation act that we now object. According to this act, no trade or intercourse can be carried on between a colony and a foreign country; but, by the free-port bill, passed in the present reign, the English contraband trade, which had been long pursued, in violation of Spanish laws, between the English and Spanish colonies, was sanctioned and regulated by an English act of parliament; and, since the independence of the United States, England has passed laws, opening an intercourse and trade between her West India colonies and the United States, and excluding the shipping of the United States, has confined the same to English ships and seamen; departing by this law not only from the principles of the navigation act, which she was at liberty to do, by opening a direct intercourse between the colonies and a foreign country, but controlling, which she had no authority to do, the reciprocal rights of the United States to employ their own vessels to carry it on.

Colonies being parts of the nation, are subject to its regulations—but, when an intercourse and trade are opened between colonies and a foreign country, the foreign country becomes a party, and has a reciprocal claim to employ its own vessels equally in the intercourse and trade with such colonies, as with any other part of the nation to which they belong.

Governments owe it to the trust confided to them, carefully to watch over, and by all suitable means to promote, the general welfare; and while, on account of a small or doubtful

inconvenience, they will not disturb a beneficial intercourse between their people and a foreign country, they ought not to omit the interposition of their corrective authority, whenever an important public interest is invaded, or the national reputation affected.—"It is good not to try experiments in states, unless the necessity be urgent, or the utility evident; and well to beware, that it be the reformation that draweth on the change, and not the desire of change that pretendeth the reformation."

In this case, the importance of the reformation is seen and acknowledged by every one, and the delay that has occurred in the making of it may call for explanation.

We are unable to state with accuracy the tonnage and seamen employed before the revolution, or the trade between the territories of the United States and the other English colonies, but it is known to have been a principal branch of the American navigation.

The colonies that England has since acquired from France, Spain & Holland, together with the increased population of the old colonies, require more ships and seamen to be employed in the trade now than were engaged in it before the independence of the United States.

Without reference to the tonnage and trade between the United States and the English West India colonies, during the late wars between England and France, which, by reason of the suspension of the English navigation act, and the neutrality of the United States, will afford no standard by which the tonnage and trade of peace can be ascertained, the present custom house returns are the best documents that we can consult upon this subject. According to a late report from the Department of the Treasury, the tonnage employed in this trade during the year 1816, which may be taken as an average, amounted to one hundred and two thousand tons, requiring between five and six thousand seamen. There may be some error in this return, though we are not able to detect it—the magnitude and importance of the shipping and seamen engaged in this trade, will be more readily understood by comparison than otherwise.—The tonnage thus employed exceeds the whole tonnage employed by the English East India Company in its trade with Asia: is nearly a moiety of the American and English tonnage employed between the United States and England, and her possessions in Europe—is equal to the American tonnage employed between the United States and England, and is almost an eighth part of the whole registered tonnage of the United States.

To the loss of profits which would accrue from an equal participation in this trade, may be added the loss of an equal share of the freights made by the vessels engaged in it—the amount whereof must be equal to two millions of dollars, annually. Other advantages are enjoyed by England, by the possession of the exclusive navigation between the United States and her colonies, and between them and England. Freights are made by English vessels between England and the United States, between them and the English colonies, as well as between these colonies and England. English voyages are thus made on three sides of the triangle, while those of the United States are confined to one side of it, that between the United States and England.

But the money value of this great portion of our navigation, claimed and hitherto enjoyed by England, although an object that deserves the public protection is not the most important view in which the same should be considered by the Senate. We must learn a lesson from past times; and while the experience of the father is too often lost on the son, this ought not to be the case in the affairs of nations, which, living from age to age, and profiting by long experience, should become wiser as they grow older. The present condition of nations, and especially that of the inhabitants of our own continent, merits our watchful attention, and admonishes us to cherish our national resources and sensibly to devise, and perseveringly to build up, those establishments, that our present safety demands, and which may be commensurate with our future destiny.

Justice and moderation, which we confidently hope, may preside over and guide our public councils, have not been found to be a sufficient armour for the defence of nations. "Wisdom, in the ancient mythology, was represented as armed, because experience had proved, that good examples and noble precepts, fail of their efficacy, unaccompanied by a power to enforce them." To defend ourselves, our houses, our harbors, and our commerce, from foreign aggression and violence, a navy is acknowledged to be necessary. From the land side we are safe; against dangers from the ocean a navy will prove to be our cheap, our sure, and most efficient defence.

Although a subject of doubt heretofore, this truth is now so well understood, and so universally admitted, that it would be to mispend the time of the Senate to enter into its development.

An efficient navy never has existed, and cannot exist, without a commercial marine; and the maritime history of Europe, which abounds with instruction on this subject, demonstrates this political truth, that the naval power of every nation is in proportion to its commercial shipping. Money may build ships, but the navigation of the great ocean only can make seamen; and it is in connection with this view of the subject, that the exclusion of our shipping and seamen from the navigation, between the Uni-

ted States and the colonies of England, derives its chief importance.

The prosperity and safety of nations are promoted and established, by institutions early and wisely adapted to these ends. A navy, being such an institution, and our experience having proved its importance, it has become the duty of Congress to adopt and to enforce those regulations that are necessary to its efficient establishment. None more efficacious can be devised, than such as encourage and increase the shipping and the mariners of the country, and, for this purpose, exclude those of a foreign power from a principal branch of our own navigation: a branch that now educates and holds ready for service in the navy of England, and which would educate and hold ready for service in our own navy, were the United States, instead of England, in the possession thereof, a body of several thousand seamen.

But, by passing this act, shall we not cut ourselves off from those supplies, which our habits have rendered indispensable? Will not the English colonial markets for supplies hitherto purchased among us, and imported to them, be lost, and shall we increase our navigation by adopting the law?

The documents that have been communicated to the Senate, by the chairman of the committee of foreign relations, (Mr. Barbour) satisfactorily prove, that we are independent of the English colonies for a supply of sugar and coffee for our own consumption; our annual re-exportation of these articles exceeding the quantity of them annually imported from the English colonies; and, in respect to rum, the other article imported from these colonies, its exclusion will be the loss to England of its best, and almost only market; and its place will be readily supplied by other foreign rum and by brandy; or, which is more probable, by domestic spirits distilled from grain.

The exports from the United States to the English West India colonies have been estimated at four millions of dollars annually; the problem has been disputed ever since the independence of the United States, and still remains to be solved, whether these colonies could obtain from any other quarter the supplies received from the United States. To make this experiment, effectually, further restrictions and regulations may become necessary, which it is not now deemed expedient to propose. If the question be decided in the negative, the supplies will be continued from the United States, and our shipping will be benefited.

If the articles heretofore supplied from this country can be obtained elsewhere, we must find out other markets for our exports, or the labor employed in preparing them must be applied to some other branch of industry. We have the power, and hereafter it may become our policy, as it is that of other countries, to resort to a regulation, the effect of which would go far to balance any disadvantage arising from the loss of the English colonial markets. We import annually upwards of six million gallons of molasses, more than half of which comes from the English colonies; we also import every year nearly seven million gallons of molasses; and every gallon of molasses yields, by distillation, a gallon of rum, the rum imported, added to that distilled from imported molasses, is probably equal to twelve million gallons, which enormous quantity is chiefly consumed by citizens of the United States.

If the importation of rum and molasses, for distillation, be prohibited, it would require four million bushels of grain for distillation to supply an equal quantity of ardent spirits; and in this way, our agriculture would be indemnified for any loss it might suffer by losing the English colonial markets.

As respects the timber and lumber trade, including staves and woods, in all the forms in which we prepare them for exportations, should no foreign markets be found to supply those which, by the imposition of high duties, we have lost in England, and those which, by the passing of this bill, we may lose in the English and India colonies, those who are engaged in this precarious, and generally, ill paid and unprofitable business, will hereafter confine their supplies to our domestic wants, which constantly increase, and to the foreign markets that are neither affected by English duties, nor the bill before us.

The timber of the country is becoming scarce, and more and more an object of public concern. The forests upon the frontier of the ocean, and of the great rivers leading to it, are nearly destroyed. In other countries, and even in Russia, the improvident waste of their timber, especially in the neighborhood of their great iron works, is becoming a national inconvenience.

Masts, spars, pine and oak timber, fit for naval purposes, and for the numerous uses for which timber and wood are wanted, were far more abundant, and of better quality formerly and within the memory of men now living, than they are at the present day; and a little more care and economy in the use of our timber even now, will confer an important benefit on posterity. The probability, however, is, that as respects our valuable timber, we shall not want foreign markets for all we have to spare.

As a general rule, it is correct that every person should be free to follow the business he may prefer, since, by the freedom, sagacity, and enterprize of individuals the general welfare is commonly promoted. There are, however, exceptions to this principle; and, as general rules affect unequally individual concerns, and more—  
(See fourth page.)