



AND

North-Carolina State Gazette.

One is the plane of fair, delightful Peace,
Unwar'd by party rage, as live like Brothers.

Vol. XII.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER, 29 1810.

No. 584

Legislature of North-Carolina.

DEBATE

THE PUBLIC PRINTING.

House of Commons, Thursday, November 22.

Agreeably to the order of the day, the house took up for consideration the following resolution introduced by Mr. Owen:

"Whereas it is consistent with true Republicanism and the faithful discharge of the representative duty to consult economy in the expenditure of the public money: And whereas it is represented to this General Assembly, that \$1430 are annually expended for printing and distributing the Laws of the State, when it is believed the same can be done for a much less sum: Resolved, therefore, that it is expedient a law be passed regulating the Public Printing, in such a manner that it may be done for the lowest price."

Mr. OWEN took notice of a remark made by the Editors in the last Register as to the amount of compensation, stating, that if he had made an error of a few dollars, it could not have been with a view of representing that the Printer received more than was actually paid, because he had omitted to add to his statement \$75 which is paid to him for extra services during the session.*

Mr. MUMFORD proposed to amend the Resolution by fixing the salary of the Printer at \$1000, which should include the delivery of the Acts of Assembly and Laws of Congress.

Mr. OWEN was opposed to the amendment, because it would defeat the intention of the original resolution. He believed the business could be obtained for a less sum. The object of the friends of this resolution is economy; they wish therefore to get the Printing done for the lowest sum. And how can this best be done. We are not judges of the value of printing. Proposals must be received from the Printers themselves.

Mr. PRIFER was in favor of the original resolution, and opposed to the amendment. If he understood the object of the resolution, it was to change the mode of disposing of the Printing Business. Under the existing laws, this office is in the gift of the Legislature, and is the means of exciting much party spirit at the commencement of every session, and much enquiry whether the sum paid for the services performed is too much or too little. For his own part, he would not say what was the value of the work. If too much is paid, he was willing to lessen the sum. But he was desirous of doing away this office, and taking away the business from the Legislature entirely. The duties performed by this officer are merely mechanical, and can be done by many individuals. Why, then, should party feelings be excited on this occasion, as if the State were endangered by meddling with this subject. The first object ought to be to repeal the present law, and then substitute some more economical mode. It would be best to decide upon the principle first; if that was adopted, then a bill might be introduced to carry the principle into effect.

Mr. LOVE disliked both the original resolution and the proposed amendment; the former because it went to letting out the business to the lowest bidder, and to the latter, because he apprehended it proposed to reduce the compensation to a lower sum than was just and equitable. Mr. LOVE exhibited the course which the Printing Business had taken, from the year 1785 to the present time. In that year, he stated, the salary of the Public Printer was fixed at £500. In the following year it was raised to £600 (which is the present salary); that exclusive of this salary, he found, on examination, that from £50 to £100 had every session been allowed for extra printing. In the year 1798 Mr. Hodge, who had held the office for many years, was removed, and a gentleman from the lower part of the State was elected. In 1799, Hodge & Boylan were elected, and at the session of that year petitioned for an increase of allowance, on the ground of increased business, from the great accession of Justices. This application was not successful. In the following year Mr. Gales was elected. In the year 1804, complaints, similar to those heard at the present session, were made against the high price paid for printing. A committee was appointed to enquire into the duties and compensation of this office. This committee,

* Mr. Owen is here in an error. What were formerly deemed extra services were by the act of 1804 included within the salary.

after spending a considerable time upon the subject, and consulting Mr. Hodge and Mr. Martin (printers then in the city) the former of whom said he had always thought the salary too low, and still thought it so. Mr. Martin concurred in opinion that it ought not to be reduced. The committee, however, reported a bill which passed into a law, including the printing theretofore deemed extra printing within the salary. If the salary was too low in 1804, what, after this reduction, now renders it exorbitant, especially when, it is well known, the business is constantly increasing? Mr. LOVE could not account for this apparent inconsistency. If, however, gentlemen were desirous of going into another enquiry and investigation of the value of the Public Printing, he should not object to it. But said Mr. L. the difficulty lies in getting correct information on the subject. If we obtain a statement from Mr. Gales, that will not be relied on, nor ought such as comes from his competitors to be more favorably received. How, then, shall a just estimate of the value of this work be obtained? For he took it for granted that the members of the Legislature were not competent judges on this subject. If the present allowance to the Printer were too high, no one would be more willing than himself to reduce it. He was as desirous as any other gentleman to relieve himself and his constituents from unnecessary burthens; at the same time he was willing to allow for this business what should be deemed a fair and liberal price, in the same manner that he would be willing to allow any individual, in his private capacity, what was deemed a fair and equitable price for building him a house, or for executing other work. For his part, he had no notion of letting out Offices to the lowest bidder. Bad consequences might arise from it. We have printers enough here, said he, at present; but who knows but in a few years there may not be more than one or two left. If only one he might demand his own price; and if two they might unite and require double the sum which is now paid for the business. Mr. LOVE said, that he had drawn up an amendment, which he thought calculated to obtain correct information from a pure source, and when that was before the Legislature they would act understandingly upon the subject. Mr. L. was proceeding to read his amendment for the information of the house, when Mr. Owen and others called him to order.—Mr. LOVE thought himself in order; but the Speaker pronouncing him otherwise, he desisted. And concluded with observing that he was against setting any precedent for the letting out of Public Offices to the lowest bidder. It might lead to the letting out of the offices of the Clerks of the two Houses, the Comptroller's Office, and others. He had no doubt persons might be found who would be willing to perform the duties of each for a less sum than now paid. He thought if the Treasurer, or some other of the Heads of Department was directed to obtain correct information on this subject, and lay it before the Legislature, all difficulties would vanish. The salary would be fixed, and the different printers would be at liberty to offer their services.

Mr. WEBB thought the gentleman from Haywood completely out of order. His opinion was, that the house ought, in the first place, to act on the resolution of the gentleman from Bladen. If that should fail, then any gentleman might bring forward any other proposition.—The few observations which he should make, therefore, would apply to the original resolution. In order to come to the truth of this business; at a knowledge whether the Public Printing costs more than it ought to do, let us, said he, revert to our statute book—there we shall see what are his duties and what is his compensation. [Mr. W. read extracts from the act of 1804 prescribing the duties and compensation of the Printer.] After which he added that about \$50 a session was allowed for extra services,* and one dollar a county for distributing the acts of Congress. Making out that the Printer receives \$1018 for the labor of himself and journeymen for the two months and a half in which they are employed.—The gentleman from Haywood, said he, complained that we were putting up our offices to the lowest bidder. But was there any objection to this mode of letting out the printing of the State House, or the erection of the very ele-

* See the preceding note.

gant Steeple upon the house? He believed not, then why object to letting out the Printing in the same way? He could see no reason why the spirit of Party should be excited whenever any petty officer was to be appointed. When a Governor, Judge or Senator was to be elected, this might be expected: but when we wanted a man to execute a piece of work for us, we ought to look out for the best workman, and one who would do the work at the cheapest rate.

Mr. W. concluded by asking members if they could expect to hold their seats on this floor, if they continued to squander the people's money?—The first question, he said, when a Member returns home, is, have you raised our taxes? You will probably be able to answer in the negative. But when you make known that you have paid upwards of a thousand dollars to your printer for two months and a half work, can you expect your constituents to remain satisfied?

Before he sat down, Mr. W. said he would state, that he had heard no complaint against the present Public Printer—nor had he any to make. He believed he had executed the business in a workmanly and satisfactory manner; and provided he will do the business as cheap as any other person, he should have his most hearty support.

Mr. GLISSON called for the Yeas and Nays.—Agreed.

Mr. SEAWELL deemed it his duty on this occasion, to give the reasons upon which he should vote. He professed to belong to no party, except to that of honest men. He hoped to act, whether in a private or public situation, in such a manner as honesty requires. Why, on this occasion, enquire whether your Printer be called a Federalist or a Republican; or whether the present proposition was brought forward by Federalists or Republicans? Every measure proposed ought to be considered as intended for the public good, without enquiring who brought it forward, or who advocates it; if the measure be good it ought to be advocated, without enquiry whence it came. The plain question now before the house is, whether we will consult economy or not? The gentleman from Haywood, for whose opinions Mr. S. professed great respect, says he is opposed to the resolution in toto; that it is derogatory to the Legislature to put up its offices to the lowest bidder. But there is no feature in this resolution which goes to set up the printing business to the lowest bidder, as horses are put up to sale by a Constable. It professes indeed, to have in view economy. Suppose it sanctions that kind of conduct which Congress has pursued for some years past. Suppose the Secretary of State, were authorized to receive sealed proposals in writing, and to give the business to him who offers to do it on the lowest terms. If the gentleman find fault with this course, he arraigns the conduct of the General Government. This is the manner of proceeding in Congress, and in the General Post-Office. How came this practice to prevail, Mr. S. enquired? Times have been, said he, that snug offices have been given to friends, when there were other persons would have done the business for a much less sum. This being discovered, the manner of disposing of public business has been changed; and we owe this change to Mr. Jefferson, the Father of Republicans, (in which class I rank myself) who calls Economy one of the main pillars of a Republic, and who says that all unnecessary expences ought to be abolished.

Mr. S. said he came forward in the character of a Representative, not for himself, but in behalf of those who appointed him to act for them. Will you voluntarily pay 15 or 1600 dollars for your printing, or will you give it to persons who will execute it for a less sum? He appealed to the members, as individuals, and enquired how they would act in such a case? He knew they would accept the lowest price. Not to act in the same way, for our Constituents, then, would be treason, and contrary to our duty. The conduct of members a few days past, said he, affords an example worthy of imitation. When this body first convened, much noise was heard about the tavern-keepers raising their board a few cents per day only.—If members are so scrupulous about a few cents, what ought they to feel in this case? He was not disposed to legislate for either of the printers; but for his country. He wished to put the business on the same footing as it is in Congress. Mr. Jefferson says we ought to be as particular in abolishing political

intolerance as religious intolerance. If a majority in power pretend to prescribe a certain set of men, how does this square with another part of Mr. Jefferson's doctrine, which is "that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable." Now is it reasonable, or unreasonable that we will confer a particular appointment upon a favorite, when, if fixed upon a proper foundation, it might be done for a more moderate sum? It is not; and therefore he was for giving the business to the person who would execute it for the lowest price, and then none would have reason to complain.

Mr. LOVE declared himself as much in favor of economy as the gentleman from Wake, or any other; but he had also a respect for what was right and proper. That gentleman had spoken of the course pursued by Congress. It would be recollected, that Mr. Blackledge had informed the House, at the last session, that the two contending Printers had, at the commencement of the last Congress, united and given in but one estimate, which was 50 per cent. higher than any former one, and as there was but one proposal, the Clerk was under the necessity of accepting of it.—This was what he apprehended here, if the resolution passed.

Mr. SEAWELL said he had omitted to remark upon an observation which fell from the gentleman from Haywood, when first up. That the Members were not judges of the value of printing; that if they applied to one printer, he would state one price, a second another, and so on. In this he agreed with the gentleman; and for that reason he would not prescribe any price, nor apply to any of the printers, but let them offer their own terms and let the Government take the lowest offer. That gentleman has told the House what a certain Member said at the last session, respecting the printing of Congress; but the House will not be governed by any declaration of this kind. The gentleman has been mistaken; because if this mode of disposing of the business did not answer, Congress would before now have changed it. But the gentleman says, that if the business was let to the lowest bidder, some of the printers might leave the city. No fear need be entertained on this head, since they did not all subsist on the bounty of the public.

Mr. S. asserted that scarcely any of the Editors of the presses either set a type or read a proof, but leave it entirely to the men and boys whom they employ. He therefore could see no difference whether the business was done in one office or the other. And though Mr. Hodge, Mr. Boylan or Mr. Gales might have received too much for their services in time past, he saw no reason why the Government should continue in the error.

Mr. OWEN produced a letter from Alexander Lucas and Abraham H. Boylan (to whom W. Boylan has transferred the Minerva and his printing business) proposing to execute the whole of the public printing, and to distribute the Acts of Assembly & Journals and Acts of Congress for \$900, which was read at the Clerk's table.

Mr. EDM. JONES said he should vote in favor of the resolution of the gentleman from Bladen; but, perhaps, some amendment might be proposed which would make it more palatable to others. He thought the gentleman from Haywood had not been fairly dealt with, in being refused the privilege of reading in his place the amendment which he proposed to offer. He had never before seen this liberty denied. It might certainly be read for the information of the House. Did the House know what was contained in the amendment of the gentleman from Haywood, they could vote more understandingly upon the one now before them.

The SPEAKER declared the question to be on the amendment of the gentleman from Rowan.

Mr. GLISSON thought the question had been on the original resolution; but if the Speaker determined otherwise he was satisfied. He believed no amendment ought to be received to a proposition which was a substitute for the proposition itself. As the question is now on the amendment of the gentleman from Rowan, when that is decided, the amendment of the gentleman from Haywood will be in order; but it is not in order to

* Mr. S. has received erroneous information on this subject.

read one amendment before another is decided.

Mr. J. CLARK observed, that by the rules of the House, a motion to commit was always in order; he would therefore move, that this resolution, with the several amendments proposed to it, may be committed to a select committee, where they may be examined, and a proposition reported which will probably be more agreeable to the House than the present resolution.

The SPEAKER declared the motion out of order.†

Mr. WEBB thought the question ought to be on the original resolution, as the amendment proposed must be considered as a substitute.

Mr. W. W. JONES did not agree with the gentleman from Halifax. The resolution of the gentleman from Bladen was before the House. The gentleman from Rowan offered an amendment, which was received. The House will therefore decide first upon the amendment. If this be rejected, then any other amendment may be proposed, or the question may be taken on the original resolution.

The SPEAKER said the question was on the adoption of the amendment.

Mr. OWEN and Mr. SEAWELL both said this could not be.

The SPEAKER asked if either appealed from the decision of the House.

Mr. SEAWELL said he did not appeal, but that no amendment could be received until the resolution was agreed to.

After some further conversation, however, the decision of the Speaker was acquiesced in, and the question on the amendment was put and negatived 103 to 18. Those who voted in the affirmative were, Messrs. T. Bell, Barnard, Burton, Ballard, Camp, Gamble, Horn, Hulme, Daniel Jones, K. Jones, E. Jones, Mumford, D. Miller, J. S. Nelson, Relf, Rainey, Sawyer, H. G. Williams.

Mr. LOVE then moved his amendment as follows:

"Whereas it appears from representation made to this Legislature, that impressions have gone abroad amongst the people of this State, that the Public Printer receives a salary too high for his services; and whereas it is the wish as it is the duty of this General Assembly to pay no more for any services than they really deserve. But it unfortunately happens in this case, that the Members of this Legislature are not themselves competent judges of the value of the business performed by this officer, nor is it believed that they have at hand the means of obtaining such impartial, disinterested information on the subject, as would enable them to form a correct opinion upon it: It is therefore Resolved, That the Treasurer be and he hereby is authorised and directed to collect and report to the next General Assembly, such information in relation to the true value of the public printing of this State, as shall enable that body satisfactorily to determine, whether any, and if any what alterations ought to be made in the existing laws on this subject."

Mr. GLISSON hoped this amendment would not be agreed to. In every attempt which had been made to correct this business, something had always been produced to create delay. He was clear for having the business disposed of to the lowest bidder.

Mr. W. W. JONES did not intend to have said any thing on this subject; but this was so extraordinary a motion, he could not help saying a few words.—From whom and from whence is the Treasurer to enquire for information? Were we to go out of the State to know the worth of labour in this State, where the expence of living is not known, or to apply to persons who have carried on business for years upon the spot? If correct information can be got only from those who reside here, this information is already received by a letter which has been read, and this is enough; there is no necessity for putting off the business for another year. Mr. J. asked of members how they would answer to their constituents on their muster grounds for throwing away their money, because we are told we ought to collect information from a distance? He was in favor of an immediate decision upon the information already received.

Mr. BURTON said, perhaps some modification of this amendment might render it more acceptable. No one knew less about the value of printing than he did. If he were convinced the Printer received more for his services than they are worth, no one would be more ready than he to diminish the present allowance. He thought if a joint committee was appointed to enquire into the subject, it would answer every purpose. He

† On the following day, on Mr. Clark's bringing the subject before the House, the Speaker allowed that he had been mistaken as to this point of order.