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Daily Appeal.

SPEECH OF THE HON. S. A. SMITH, OF TENNESSEE.

On Government Expenditures; delivered in the House of Representatives, January 31, 1859

The House being in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. SMITH said:

Mr. Chairman: An empty Treasury always begets discussion in reference to the expenditures of the Government, and the mode of raising revenue; and the various opinions entertained upon these subjects by the people's Representatives are amusing as well as instructive. The scrutinizing gentleman from Alabama [Mr. Curtin] wants a poor Government; my worthy colleague [Mr. Jones] weeps over the empty exchequer, and, no doubt, thinks our Government a father; while the senior gentleman from Alabama [Mr. Houston] is horrified at the idea of paying bounties to the cod-fishermen of the East. But, sir, it was reserved to the gentleman from Ohio [Mr. Sherman] to make himself the Ogre of the House, and to carry back to imagination to the days when gold spoons and forks, and "looking glasses as big as a peck-measure" filled the palaces of the aristocracy, and for a change in the administration of the Government.

That discussion upon the subjects to which I have alluded are legitimate, no one will deny; and that it is profitable to the country, when properly conducted, no one will question. When, however, it is resorted to for party purposes; when it degenerates into one-sided statements, bold assertions, egregious miscalculations, and false predictions, it is calculated to mislead the public mind, and to do great injustice to every department of the Government, the legislative as well as the executive. Such is the character of the speech of the gentleman from Ohio, delivered in this House on the 26th day of May last, and but little more than a month before the close of the fiscal year 1857. As that gentleman has taken the lead in this matter, both at the last and the present session of Congress, I propose to examine briefly some of his calculations and predictions, that this House and the country may judge as to the reliance to be placed upon his figures in reference to the expenditures of the Government. In the speech to which I have referred, after adverting to the $20,000,000 of Treasury notes previously issued, and the $15,000,000 that afterwards raised to $20,000,000) asked for by the Secretary of the Treasury, the gentleman said:

"I can demonstrate to any sensible man that the Secretary of the Treasury will be compelled to call on Congress for $42,000,000 to supply deficiences in the next fiscal year. To this will have to be added $21,000,000 to redeem the outstanding Treasury notes, and interest, which run for but one year. So that there will be an addition to the national debt of $63,000,000 in two years."

The first paragraph I have read would make the impression, if not so intended, that the Secretary of the Treasury would be compelled to call for $42,000,000, in addition to what had already been called for, to supply deficiences in the revenue for the present fiscal year. Put, however, the best construction upon it for the gentleman from Ohio, and include in the $42,000,000 the $20,000,000 previously asked for, and subsequently granted, and he makes a probable deficit of $21,000,000 in meeting the deficiencies in the revenue for a single fiscal year. Sir, not one dollar has been asked for, at this session of Congress, to supply deficiences in the revenue for the present year. Now will there be a dollar asked for for any such purpose. I have before me a report of the Secretary of the Treasury to the present session of Congress, and so far from stating any deficiency in the means of the Government for this year, he states (on p. 3,) that there will be a balance in the Treasury on the 1st day of July, 1859, of $7,003,298.57. Such gross mistakes as this throw suspicion over all the gentleman's figures. But this is not all. After satisfying himself with his estimates of deficiencies in the revenue, he next tries his hand in estimating the deficiencies in *appropriations* for the present fiscal year. He says:

"By the annual estimate of the Secretary of the Treasury, the expenditures for that year would be $74,954,794. But this does not include many items, most of which will have to be paid for as certainly as the President's salary. Some are as follows:

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Total	$18,098,847

Based upon these figures, the gentleman estimates that the expenses of the Government, for the present fiscal year, will, "in all human probability, reach the enormous one hundred million dollars." Sir, no deficiency bill has yet been introduced, nor has any been called for by the Secretary of the Treasury, except for the Post-office Department. I can also state, from information derived from the proper source, that much less than our million will cover all the deficiencies in appropriations for the present fiscal year, except in the revenue of the department before referred to. Here again, then, the gentleman is equally unfortunate as in his first calculation. He makes a mistake of $14,500,000 in deficiencies in appropriations for a single fiscal year. These statements have gone to the country, and it is proper that their fallacy should also go to the country. I here dismiss the gentleman from Ohio, with the remark that he had better study more thoroughly the rule of "positive," before he again attempts to figure up expenditures for a Democratic Administration.

The embarrassed condition of the Treasury is no fault of the present or past Administration. It has been so before, and the causes which produced it then, have produced like results now. In 1836, when the country was prosperous, and business, trade, and speculation had reached their culminating point, the imports from foreign countries, from which we derive most of our revenue, were in value, $189,980,035. This furnished an ample amount of revenue to defray the expenses of the Government, and leave a surplus in the Treasury. In 1837, the country was visited by a monetary crisis which caused the imports of items to fall off $49,000,000 in that year. And in 1838, the imports were $76,236,651 less than in 1836. As the imports increased so did the revenue. The Treasury was depleted, and the Government was compelled to borrow money to carry on its operations. A similar state of things now exists. During the present Administration came into power there was a surplus in the Treasury, to reduce which, Congress, a few days before the last session, reduced the tariff. Trade and speculation had again reached their highest point. Another financial revulsion came upon the country; business was to a great extent suspended in the last fiscal year. To have broke, and the balance stopped payment. Under those circumstances, the imports from foreign countries fell off in a single year, $76,270,271. The surplus in the Treasury soon disappeared, under the double effect of a reduced tariff and largely reduced importations, and again the Government was under the necessity of borrowing money to defray its legitimate expenses. What statesman can say this was the fault of the Administration? The tariff was reduced before it had an existence, and no human power could have prevented the reduction of imports into the country.

Economy in the public expenditures has, of late days, become a favorite hobby with a certain class of politicians in this country, and, in every session of Congress, those who talk economy most, practice it least. Extravagant expenditures have been instituted between us and our fathers on this subject, and between the expenditures of the Government now and in the early days of the Republic. Sir, where is the man who is a strict economy and accountability in every department of the Government, yet I would strike down the arm of the public service, lest I might go home and tell my constituents that I had, by my vote, saved so much of the people's money. There is no branch of the public service that can be dispensed with, neither do I expect to be able to support a grown up man as cheaply as a new-born infant. I intend to show, not in the spirit of egotism, but in vindication of the truth of history, that, as a people, we are as wise, as honest, and as economical as were our fathers. Sir, we have lived to be the leading purpose of our existence. I stand either as a people or as a nation. There are, no doubt, plenty of corrupt men; but I hope the time will never come when I shall be made to believe that this Government is corrupt, either in the legislative, executive, or judicial department.

And here, Mr. Chairman, I must take occasion to observe, that I am not one of those who believe that all that is in the past is good, and all in the present is evil—that as we go forward decay progresses, and as we turn back, we are then, and then only, refreshed with wide-spread examples of purity, integrity, and patriotism; and the whole body-politic leavened with a spirit of both public and private economy. From the early days of Greece and Rome, down to the times in which we live, it has been the practice of croakers in private, and demagogues in public, to revile and belittle contemporaneous men and things, by selfing comparisons with the exaggerated past. We are told by Englishmen of the good old days of Queen Bess—these good old days when men and women were burned at the stake, for using their tongues too freely. Of the palmy days of England under the Georges—these palmy days when Prime Ministers stood at the doors of the House of Commons, with money in hand, openly and unblushingly purchasing the votes of members. The truth is, "man nature is the same now as it was at the commencement of the world—only to be restrained, influenced, and improved by wise teachings, good examples, and the light of our Gospel revelations. We had Judas Iscariot in the time of our Savior, and Benedict Arnold in the time of our own glorious Revolution; but neither the bad royal of the one nor the perfidy of the other interrupted the march of Christianity, or the spread of free principles and free institutions. I believe, that as a people, we are just as honest, just as economical, just as patriotic, and fully as wise, as the people who sent their representatives to the first Continental Congress. I say that we are as wise as our fathers and grandfathers; and we ought to be wiser, because we have the benefit of their experience, with our own added to it. I believe that we are living in an age of wholesome and substantial progress, progress unfettered by that corruption which many of our generalists and public men would have us believe pervades every branch of our Federal and State Governments. I believe that we are quite as good and know as much as the men of those times which members on this floor are so fond of reverting to; and which have been reverted to during the last five thousand years by succeeding generations in reference to preceding ones. Fifty years ago, Rev. Sidney Smith wrote:

"All that cant, then, about our ancestors, is merely an abuse of words, by transferring phrases true of contemporary men to succeeding ages. Whereas, of living men the oldest have the most experience; of generations the oldest has the least experience. Our ancestors, up to the conquest, were children in arms; chubby boys in the time of Edward I; striplings under Elizabeth; men in the reign of Queen Anne; and we only are the white-headed, silver-bearded ancients who have traversed up, and are prepared to profit by, all the experience which human life can supply."

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The population of the United States in 1859 was	5,305,941	
Value of real and personal estate belonging to individuals	$1,028,848,780	
Extent of territory, (square miles)	864,691	
The expenditures, exclusive of the public debt, were	$7,411,369.97	
The population of the United States in 1859 was		29,800,000
Value of real and personal estate belonging to individuals		$11,500,000,000
Extent of territory, (square miles)		2,936,705
The expenditures for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1858, as estimated by the Secretary of the Treasury		$74,963,098.39

This shows an increase in the expenditures, from 1800 to 1859, exclusive of payments on the public debt, of 900 per cent.; increase in population of 459 per cent.; increase in wealth, 760 per cent.; increase in extent of territory, 340 per cent. These are the three principal elements which constitute the basis of expenditure; but to them may be added the increase of 100 per cent.; at least, in almost every article of subsistence, which has caused a like increase in the wages of labor, and of salaries of all the officers, men, and laborers engaged in the public service.

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"All that cant, then, about our ancestors, is merely an abuse of words, by transferring phrases true of contemporary men to succeeding ages. Whereas, of living men the oldest have the most experience; of generations the oldest has the least experience. Our ancestors, up to the conquest, were children in arms; chubby boys in the time of

discretion of the Secretary of War. All these operations have been carried on under the direction of Maj-General Jesup, who, I apprehend, is as wise in that branch of the public service as any member of this House; and not only so, but he is as honest a man as any member of either branch of Congress. It has been under the supervision of such a man that all these large expenditures have occurred, and yet we have been such only as were demanded by the exigency of the public service.

Passing from this, I come to the navy. In 1798, we had a very small navy, only twelve vessels in all. We had six vessels which had been constructed by the public, and six which had been purchased for the public use. In that year the Secretary of the Navy reported to the House that, for the maintenance of that navy, and for the completion of the vessels then on the stocks, $2,212,000 would be required. At that time our coast was confined entirely to the Atlantic, extending only from Passamaquoddy to St. Mary's; and the extent of the shore line of the main land, measuring the general indentations of bays and sounds, was two thousand six hundred and forty-one statute miles. The present shore line of the United States, including the western coast, is seven thousand and sixty-four miles; and we have now, in all, eighty-eight vessels. We have nearly half as many squadrons on our shores as there are ships in the navy. We have built more vessels since I have been a member of Congress than constituted our whole navy at that early day. Our navy has increased almost every year; and it is the only arm of the service by which the power of the nation can be felt abroad. Will any gentleman here say it has been large? I apprehend not. They would rather say, from experience, that it is too small. Only a short time since, under a resolution of Congress the President sent a fleet to demand satisfaction for injuries done to our citizens by one of the weakest powers upon the globe. So far was our navy from being adequate to that service, that the President had not vessels to send, and he had to turn the Navy Department into a chapter party, and charter a number of vessels for the Paraguay expedition.

The pay of the officers of the navy, seamen and marines, is fixed by law. To maintain a man-of-war at sea, the Secretary of the Navy, in 1719, reported to Congress that it would require more than two hundred thousand dollars a year. We have now eight navy yards, and eighty-eight vessels. The pay, as I say, of the officers and men is fixed by law, so that not a dollar can be deducted from that expense; and where, I ask you, are you going to save money in reducing the expenditures of the Navy Department? Will you do it by refusing to vote a sufficient supply to carry on the navy yards? If you do that, you might as well begin by blowing home your vessels and tie them up, and say you will have no navy. Two million dollars are now asked for the support of these navy yards. I need not tell you what is the business of these navy yards. They are the ground-work of the whole navy. Refuse to furnish them means, and you must tie up your ships, because they must be repaired, and they must have the material which is required to repair them when they are at sea. All those things are constructed at the navy-yards. The whole of those eighty-eight vessels are now at sea and in active service, with the exception of those now upon the stocks and a few receiving ships; and so far from deducting from them we ought to add to them, because the navy is not now strong enough.

In the present condition of the world, with the unsettled condition of Europe and European dynasties, we know not what day we may be precipitated into war upon the high seas, and if we have not vessels enough now to demand satisfaction of one of the weakest powers upon the globe for injuries done our citizens, what our condition would be if we had to meet the combined navies of England and France? Our navy is not so large as that of Brazil, and you cannot reduce it. Every dollar you refuse to furnish to the Navy below what is necessary, you take that much labor from the Navy, and that much material which you have to make up in after days by an appropriation three-fold greater than if you make it now.

I do not believe, then, that the expenses of the War Department, or the expenses of the Navy Department, are more than commensurate to the demands and requirements of the public service. I cannot see, at this time, how less than two million dollars will answer the wants of the service in the eight navy-yards in the United States. If you reduce it below what is necessary, you only lay the foundation for a larger appropriation at some future day. There is no economy in refusing necessary appropriations. Keep up your navy-yards, and keep your vessels in good repair; and you will not only give efficiency to the service, but you will save money to the Government.

And now as to the Post Office Department. Our Postal system dates from 1775, when Dr. Benjamin Franklin was elected Postmaster General by the Continental Congress, then in session in Philadelphia. When the present Government went into operation, in 1789, William Osgood, of Massachusetts, was appointed Postmaster General by General Washington. There were, then, seventy-five post offices in the United States, and about two thousand miles of post road. There was one mail line from Wiscasset, in Maine, to Savannah, in Georgia, with about ten cross lines to the western country. From those little beginnings has increased the post roads in the United States, until the number of post offices on the 1st of December, 1858, was twenty-eight thousand five hundred and seventy-three; of mail routes, eight thousand two hundred and ninety-six; and the length of post roads, two hundred and sixty-thousand six hundred and three miles. Our postal system has grown up like magic; I may say, too, that its rise, its progress, and its expansion, have furnished to the people of this country as much solid comfort and advantage as any other department of the Government. Gentlemen charge extravagance upon the Post Office Department; and yet we, at every session of Congress, from one hundred to one thousand additional mail routes created, which must increase largely the expenses of the Department. They allow these new mail routes to be established without making any objection; and yet upon those routes the Postmaster General is bound to put mail service. These routes are established without regard to cost; and the action of Congress is an instruction to the Postmaster General. He has no discretion; he is bound to put the service upon those routes. We have, I have said, two hundred and ninety-six thousand six hundred and three miles of post routes established by Congress; and on the 1st day of January, 1859, there were in operation, in the United States, twenty-seven thousand eight hundred and fifty-seven miles of railroad, the cost of which was $261,047,861.

This is another great fact to show the rapid progress of our country, its advancement in wealth, power and everything that can minister to the physical or intellectual comfort of man. Your mails are carried on these railroads, which gives to them such accelerated speed as to almost annihilate space, and enables the remotest parts of our country, in a few hours, or a few days, to communicate with the capital of the nation.

Now, Mr. Chairman, if we want to reduce the expenditures of the Government, let us go to work and do something of the kind that I have pointed out. Let us repeal those laws which render it necessary to make useless expenditures; which require the erection of useless public buildings, on which millions of dollars are thrown away annually. Let us repeal the laws establishing overland mail routes and steamship lines, and we can save millions in that way. Let us try, at every other point, to reduce the expenditures of the Government before we call home the ships that protect our commerce on every sea, and our citizens in every clime; or before we call in our outposts and leave the people on the frontier to the mercy of hostile savages.

It has not been my purpose, Mr. Chairman, in the remarks I have submitted, to show that the expenses of the Government cannot be reduced; but first, that for the last half century they have not more than kept pace with the growth, expansion, wealth and population of the country. And secondly, that they have not exceeded the necessities of the public service, as now organized by law. If, then, too much money has been expended, upon whom rests the responsibility? Answer, upon Congress, and not upon the Administration.

Sir, during the last Congress there were one hundred and ninety distinct items of appropriations made which were not asked for or recommended by any Executive Department of the Government, amounting in all to $11,486,779.99. And at the last session of Congress, we all remember that $5,000,000 had to be added to the loan bill, to meet appropriations not asked for or contemplated by the Executive. I, for one, condemn this spirit of the extravagance of the Administration. Nay, more, sir. These gentlemen, who complain so much of the extravagance, have no more to repeal the laws, to execute which the appropriations are made. Let them commence reform in the right way, by a repeal of those laws requiring unnecessary expenditures, and not defeat the appropriation bills, and leave the law remaining on the statute-book unexecuted. I ask you, is it statesmanlike? Is it just to a gentlemen to sit here from Congress to Congress and wait, at each session, for the appropriation bills to come up, and then defeat them, to exhibit their economizing spirit to the world, and particularly to their constituents? While I am here, I expect to vote such appropriations as are required by existing law and as the requirements of the public service demand; and leave my constituents to settle the question as to whether I am right or wrong.

[Here the hammer fell.]

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