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The Age.

WOODSTOCK

Freedom of Inquiry and the Power of the People.

VOLUME V. **WOODSTOCK, THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 3, 1844.** NUMBER 229.

POLITICAL.

MR WEBSTER'S SPEECH

AT FANEUIL HALL, BOSTON,
OCTOBER 3, 1820.

Mr WEBSTER said he felt an unfeigned embarrassment in addressing the meeting on a subject, which so many members of it understood much better than himself.

As it was a question, however, of general, and, as he thought, of very high importance, he would beg leave to detain the meeting for a few moments.

It was, in the first place, necessary that he should repel any suggestions of a feeling unfriendly to american manufactures. He believed there was no ground for supposing that such a feeling existed in any part of the community. It certainly did not exist with him. He thought it, therefore, quite unjustifiable, that those who could not support the proposed Tariff, should be charged with hostility to Domestic Industry. There was power in *names*, and those who had pressed the Tariff on Congress, and on the country, had represented it as immediately, and almost exclusively, connected with Domestic Industry and National Independence. In his opinion, no measure could prove more injurious to the industry of the country, and nothing was more fanciful than the opinion that National Independence rendered such a measure necessary. He certainly thought it might be doubted, whether Congress would not be acting somewhat against the spirit and intention of the Constitution, in exercising a power to control essentially the pursuits and occupations of individuals in their private concerns—a power, to force great and sudden changes, both of occupation and property, upon individuals, not as incidental to the exercise of any other power, but as a substantive and direct power. If such changes were wrought *incidentally* only, and were the necessary consequence of such imposts as Congress, for the leading purpose of revenue, should enact, then they could not be complained of. But he doubted whether Congress fairly possessed the power of turning the *incident* into the *principal*, and, instead of leaving manufacturers to the protection of such laws as should be passed, with a primary regard to revenue, of enacting laws, with the avowed object of giving preference to particular manufactures, and with an entire disregard to all the considerations of revenue; and, instead of laying such imposts as would best answer the purpose of raising a revenue, with the least burden on the public, carrying the impost on certain articles to a burdensome excess, with a full knowledge that the increase of duty will diminish the amount of revenue raised.

It would hardly be contended, that Congress possessed that sort of general power by which it might declare that particular occupations should be pursued in society, and that others should not. If such power belonged to any Government in this country, it certainly did not belong to the General Government. The question was, therefore, and he thought it a very serious question, whether in laying duties under the authority to lay imposts, obviously given for the purposes of revenue, Congress can, reasonably and fairly, lose sight of those purposes entirely, and levy duties for other objects. Congress may tax the land, but, it would be a strange proposition, if Congress should be asked to lay a land tax for the direct purpose of withdrawing capital from agriculture, and sending those engaged in it to other pursuits. The power, however, exists in one case as much as in the other. It is not easy, it must be confessed, to draw a limit in such cases, and therefore, perhaps, it must be presumed, in all cases, that the power was exercised for the legal purpose, the collection of revenue: and, that whatever other consequences ensued, must be regarded as incidental and consequential to the exercise of the power. Still, it was a question very fit, in his judgment, to be considered by Congress, whether it was a fair and just exercise of power, to elevate the incidental far above the primary object, or, to speak more properly, to pursue the latter in utter disregard of the former.

But, admitting the right of Congressional Legislation over these subjects, and for these purposes, to be quite clear, the inquiry was, is it *expedient* to increase the duties or imposts to the extent proposed in this bill? The inquiry was not whether some change might not usefully be made,—There was no objection, he presumed, to a revision of the table of duties, upon the common principles of such revisions, now, or at any time. But the House of Representatives had put it fairly to the people of the United States, whether a new Tariff, to the *extent* proposed, and on the *principles* proposed, should be established. And he hoped the people would give a distinct answer to this question. The principle of the measure he understood to be, that we should encourage the manufacturers proposed most to be benefited by the bill, principally those of woollen and cotton cloths, by prohibitory duties. That restrictions, such as we have never before imposed, shall be laid on commerce, by way of bounty on particular manufactures. For his own part he had supposed that restrictions on trade and commerce, in order to benefit particular classes of manufactures, were now very generally understood to be mischievous, and inconsistent with just notions of political economy. They were of two sorts, such as arises from treaty stipulations between nations, and such as each nation may create for itself by its duties on importations.—The understanding between England and Portugal, relative to the importations of the wines of Portugal into England, was an instance of the first sort—the prohibition of French silks into England, an instance of the latter.

Both these, and all other modes of giving great preferences to some occupations and some modes of investing capital, over others, he believed had almost universally proved detrimental. They not only restrain private enterprise, but often exceedingly embarrass the operations of government. In the instance above mentioned, the English Government at this moment experiences the bad policy of such measures. Notwithstanding the general peace of Europe, the commerce between England and France is understood to be almost a nullity. Why? Because England cannot agree to receive on a fair terms, and in exchange for her commodities, such principal articles as France produces for exportation, viz. silks and wine: And why cannot she agree to receive these from France? Because, as to wine, there is the old treaty with Portugal—and, as to silks, the manufacture of that article has been unnaturally forced by high bounties at home, and, if those bounties should now be withdrawn, some thousand of persons would be thrown out of employment. So that the particular agreement with Portugal, and a concern for the silk manufacturers of Coventry, completely tied up the hands of Government on subjects supposed to be of the highest national importance.—To individuals, this policy is as injurious as it is to Government. A system of artificial government protection, leads the people to too much reliance on Government—if left to their own choice of pursuits, they depend on their own skill, and their own industry. But if Government essentially affects their occupations, by its systems of bounties and preferences, it is natural, when in distress, that they should call on Government for relief. Hence a perpetual contest is carried on between the different interests of society. Agriculturists taxed to-day to sustain manufacturers—commerce taxed to-morrow to sustain agriculture—and then were impositions perhaps on both manufactures and agriculture, to support commerce—and, when Government has exhausted its invention in these modes of legislation, it finds the result less favorable than the original and natural state and course of things. He could hardly conceive of any thing worse than a policy which should place the great interests of this country in hostility to one another—a policy which should keep them in constant conflict, and bring them every year to fight their battles in the Committee Rooms of the House of Representatives at Washington.

We see the most enlightened nations, which have adopted this artificial system, are tired of it. We see the most distinguished men in England, for instance, of all parties, condemning it. The only difference of opinion is, whether the disease is not so inveterate as to yield to no remedy, which would not produce greater evils. The only difference is, whether it be an evil, grievous, but to be borne; or a grievous evil not to be borne. He alluded to England because her example had been so often quoted as a model for our imitation. But why should we adopt on her example, what she herself laments, and would be glad to be rid of? We hear the first minister in Great Britain give his opinion emphatically, that England has become what she is, not by means of this system, but in *spite of it*. Why then are we so eager to adopt a system which others, who have tried it, would be glad to repudiate? Can any thing, he would ask, in this general view of the subject, be more unwise than that this country should adopt such a course of policy? A policy, of which he would say, that no nation had entered upon and pursued it, without having found it to be a policy which could not be followed without great national injury—nor abandoned without extensive individual ruin.—To leave men to their own discretion—to conduct their own concerns by their own skill and prudence, and to employ their capital, and their labor, in such occupations as they themselves found most expedient, has been found the wisest, as it is the simplest course, of political legislation. As there is an order in the natural world, which holds all things in place—as the air we breathe is wisely combined, and compounded for our use by the course of nature—so there is a principle of regulation, a sort of *vis medicatrix naturæ*—in the social world. Excess corrects itself.—If there is too much commerce, it will be diminished—if there be too few manufacturers, they will be increased, with but ordinary care, and protection. For his part, he believed that, however derided, the principles of leaving such things very much to their own course, in a country like ours, was the only true policy—and that we could no more improve the order and habit and composition of society, by an artificial balancing of trades and occupations, than we could improve the natural atmosphere by means of the condensers and rarifiers of the chemists.

Mr W. proceeded to observe, that the various propositions before Congress, at the last session, appeared to him to be equivalent to a direct declaration of the expediency of abolishing the foreign trade; or, at least, of most most materially diminishing it. He did not perceive how any man could understand it otherwise. The new duties proposed, and the bills to repeal the law respecting credits at the custom-house, and drawbacks, were to be considered a part of one system. As to allowing credits for duties, it had prevailed from the commencement of the Government.—It had been thought to have been productive of much good. A few merchants of the richest class, might no doubt be benefitted by repealing this system, because such a repeal would tend to give them a sort of actual monopoly in importation.

But to the merchants of small capitals, the change must be most destructive. On some articles, such for instance, as teas, the duties to be paid here equal the first cost. If, therefore, the duties must always be paid before a sale here, the business would require two capitals, one in China, to purchase the articles, another here to pay the duties. This might be very well for the chairman, (Mr Gray,) and a few other gentlemen—but he (Mr W.) well knew that both the Chairman and these gentlemen saw too well how this would effect the enterprise of young, merchants, to give it their countenance or support. As to the punctuality and certainty with which the duties had been paid, under this system, they were wonderful, The loss from 1789, was most inconsiderable. The curtailing of the privilege of drawbacks, Mr W. thought equally objectionable. He could account for the proposition only on the supposition that the intention was greatly to diminish, if not, indeed, to abolish the foreign commerce of the country.

Other nations had deemed it an object of importance to make their country an *entrepot* of commerce, and, for this end, to encourage the importation of such articles as were likely to be again exported.—Such also had been our system heretofore. It was very obvious to what extent foreign commerce was encouraged, by allowing drawbacks; and, if the object of the present proposed measures be what he had supposed, he admitted that this, among others, was a means fitly chosen to produce the end. There was many gentlemen present, who knew much better than he did, to what extent our foreign trade consisted, at the present moment, of foreign articles imported into this country, and again exported. It was certainly very considerable. He found, by a reference to Mr Seybert's tables and statesments, to the average value of foreign merchandise exported from the United States from 1795 to 1817, amounted to 42-100ths of the whole exportations. In some years the exportation of foreign had exceeded that of domestic produce. It had been stated, and was doubtless true, that, in some years, notwithstanding the quanty of India goods consumed in this country, the amount of sales of those exported, within the year, exceeded the amount of all the purchases in India an important fact, by the way, for the consideration of those who consider the East India trade so destructive. Mr W. said he hoped he had misapprehended the object of those who proposed these measures. He hoped they saw a mode in which to reconcile them with the existence, and the fair rights of commerce; but, he confessed, he had himself perceived no such mode.—He found that, on introducing and recommending the bill, the sentiments of the Committee were thus expressed by its Chairman; "Commerce has been too long a pet, the spoiled child of Government, to think there are any other interests worth protecting. The mere creature of legislation, raised to importance by our laws, and the expenditure of a great portion of our revenue for its support, commerce has presented herself as the Atlas which supports the Government, the country, and all its great interests—now it seems she cannot support herself."

He (Mr W.) begged to differ most widely from these opinions. He by no means agreed, that the commerce of the country was the mere creature of Congressional Legislation. The commerce of the country was older than Congress—older than the present Government. This Commonwealth had a great and profitable trade, notwithstanding its embarrassments, before Congress had the power to legislate upon the subject. The county of Essex alone, possessed more tons of shipping before this Government was framed, than belong to the whole of England, in the reign of Elizbeth—at the time of the repelling, by her fleets, of the Spanish invasion. Before the organization of the present Government so considerable was the commerce of the States, that the amount of importations, for some years, rose to several millions; in one year, indeed, it fell little, if any, short of twenty millions of dollars. It was certainly true that the Government, during the greater part of its course hitherto, had shown a just, but no more than a just, care for the protection of commerce. He thought the Government had done no more for commerce than commerce had done for Government. Commerce in his opinion, had been the main support of the public revenue. He did not, in saying this, mean than any particular class of persons—the merchants—the ship-builders—or the ship-owners, for instance, had been the principal support of Government, or had done more than their part towards that support.

But commerce, by acting upon, and enriching the agriculture of the country, by calling into activity all the capital, and exciting all the industry and enterprise of the country, had given to the whole people an ability to contribute to the revenue; and it had also afforded an easy and convenient mode for the collection of the revenue.—Since the commencement of the Government, three hundred and fifty million of dollars have been paid into the Treasury through the custom-house—thirty-four or thirty-five millions alone have been obtained from all other sources of revenue—and this, not without much discontent, and more than one rebellion. This does not prove, indeed, and is not stated to prove, that any one part of the community has borne more than its portion of the public burdens. But it is stated, to show that the country has been able to do that, which there is no reason to believe it could or would have done, without commerce.

The commerce of the country, so far from being the mere creature of Congressional Legislation, was one of the principal causes of calling Congress itself and the Government into existence.

It is well known as matter of historical fact, that of the causes which led to the establishment of the present Government, a very prominent one was the desire to establish uniform duties and imposts through the several States, and, by means of such uniform duties and imposts, to enable the country to provide for the payment of the Revolutionary debt.

Not to dwell, however, longer on this part of the subject, he wished to call the attention of the meeting to the immediate effects, should the proposed duties be laid. And, in the first place, it is admitted that a great falling off of revenue must be expected. No one, as far as he knew, had computed this loss of revenue at less than five millions a year. How is this loss to be supplied? The inquiry was very natural to the Government as well as to the people.

In truth, every man in the community, not immediately benefitted by the new duties, would suffer a double loss. In the first place, by shutting out the former commodity, the price of the domestic manufacture would be raised. The consumer, therefore must pay more for it. And, in so much as Government will have lost the duty on the imported article, a tax equal to that duty must be paid to Government.—The real amount then, of this bounty, on a given article, will be precicely the amount of the present duty added to the amount of the proposed duty, at least, so it appeared to him, (Mr W.) and, if any calculation could make it otherwise, he would be glad to see it. Again: It is proposed to raise the duties on salt and brown sugar; these are articles of very general consumption, and the duty on them is raised probably with a view of supplying, in some degree, the loss of the Treasury arising from excluding other articles. This is the tax, then, imposed, to enable the Treasury, in some measure, to bear its other losses. In other words, sugar and salt are taxed, because cotten and woollen cloths are to be taxed so high as to prevent their importation—there is a tax on *food*, in order that there may be a tax on *clothing*.

And, after all, how few of all the members of society are to be benefitted by this system, so artificially and elaborately constructed. Certainly not all manufacturers, nor all mechanics—but a perticular class only.

All those manufacturers who have now the home market in their possession, and export more or less of their wares—the manufacturers, for instance, of shoes, nails, cabinet furniture, carriges, &c., all these are injured, not benefited. They feel the burden, without partaking the profit. We might add to these at once, all the numerous classes whose occupations are connected, directly or indirectly, with navigation and commerce. It is said, to lull the alarms in the Treasury, that the deficit of five millions in the revenue, made up by an excise on domestic manufactures, when the foreign article should be excluded: But on *what* manufactures? On cotton and woollen alone, or principally? Certainly not: On others, as much or more, than on them. On carriges, for example among the first. This is a tax, which, like many others, always diminishes the demand for the article. It takes away, then at once the employment of the artist, who works in this line. He is a manufacturer, therefore, not benefited, but likely, in the end, to be ruined.

And yet he (Mr W.) had understood that, in making out the new census, coachmakers, and all other handcraftsmen or tradesmen, were denominated *manufacturers*—and this would show a great number of manufacturers in the census, appearing to be benefited by protecting manufacturers. The case he had alluded to, might suffice for an instance or example of many; and, when the whole should be investigated, it would be found that the sorts of manufactures to be benefited by the proposed measures, were very few. An appeal had been made to the patriotic feelings of the nation.

—It had been said we are not *independent* so long as we received these commodities from other nations. He could not see the force of this appeal. He did not perceive how the exchange of commodities between nations, when mutually and equally adventageous, rendered one dependent on the other in any manner derogatory to its interest or dignity. A dependence of this sort exists every where among individuals as well as nations. Indeed, the whole fabric of civilzation, all the improvements which distinguished cultivated society from savage life, rest on a dependence of this kind. He thought the argument drawn from the necessity of providing means of defence in war, had been pressed quite too far. It was enough, that we had a *capacity* to produce such means, when occasion should call. The reasoning assumes, that, in war, no means of defence or annoyance, can be probably obtained, or not without great difficuilty, except, from our own materials or manufactures. He doubted whether there was much ground for that assumption. Nations had hitherto obtained military means, in the midst of war, from commerce. But, at any rate, as it was acknowledged on all hands that the country possesed the *capacity* of supplying itself whenever it saw fit to make the sacrifices—and he did not see why the necessity of making it should be anticipated—why should we *now* change our daily habits and occupations, with great loss and inconvenience, merely because it is possible some change may hereafter become necessary? We should act equally wisely, he thought, if we were to decide that, although we are not quite well, and with very good appetites, yet, as it was possible we might one day be sick, we would, therefore, now sell all our food and lay up physic.

There was, however, Mr W. observed, one part of our national defence, which the advocates of the new measures appeared to have quite overlooked or forgotten. He meant the Navy. If the commerce of the country should cease, the Navy must cease with it. This he thought too plain to be questioned. A country with a powerful Navy and little or no commerce, would be an anomaly in history. The great object aimed at, seemed to be, either to annihilate or greatly diminish our foreign trade. Where, then, are our seamen to come from, for the Navy? By reference to the amount of American tonnage in 1810, the year when its amount was greatest, it will be seen that there were employed in the foreign trade, 984,000 tons; in the coasting trade, 371,000. The proportion of seamen to tonnage, is, of course, greater in the larger vessels; so that probably three-fourths of the seamen of the United States were employed in the foreign trade. The coasting trade itself would be immediately diminished by the curtailment of the foreign trade—and if it should afteward revive and be even increased, and extended, there was no reason to suppose that it would supply seamen, in sufficient numbers, for the Navy. Besides, the seamen ordinarily engaged in the coasting trade, are not a class of seamen the most fit for naval service. In this trade, the voyages are short; the number of hands small—not always exclusively seamen. There are not the habits of subordination, the attention to self-preservation, the exposure to danger and hardship, which form the value of the character of good seamen. No part of national defence is so impossible to be suddenly procured as good seamen. Yet, without them, all attempts toward establishing a commanding naval power are entirely vain; as the history of more than one modern nation has shown.

Let those, then, who would abridge commerce, on the ground of a more independent provision for national defence, declare whether they esteem a *navy* to be among our means of defence. If they do not, their argument may be consistent; if they do, it is a fallacy. Mr W. said he would add a few observations upon a more general view of the subject. We must regard the proposed measures either as intended to be temporary, or as intended to be permanent. If they were to be but temporary the manufacturers would be ruined by their repeal. We must look upon the proposed duties, therefore, as intended to be permanent: if not permanent at the same rates, yet permanent at such rates as shall preserve the system of manufacturing for ourselves. we are bound, therefore, to regard future consequences and the state of things which may ultimately arise, if this system should be adopted and established. It was the part of true wisdom to look to the end.

For his part, he did not consider a great manufacturing population a benefit to be purchased with so much cost.—He thought there were great evils in it. When it shall come, naturally, and in the progress of things, we must meet it. But, why hasten it? What we see of it elsewhere did not recommend it to us. The great object of good Governments was individual happiness, and this, to be general, required something like an equality in condition.

He was not advancing any agrarian notions, but he considered that those employments which tended to make the poor both more numerous and more poor; and the rich less in number, but perhaps more rich, were not employments fit for us to encourage by taxing other employments. And thus he believed would be the tendency of the manufacturing system, pushed to excess. At present it was probably true that the manufacturing capitals being, generally, corporate property, were holden in many hands. But if the capital now employed in commerce, were also to be put into manufactures, it would, in the end, he should think, get the ascendancy, because it would be individual capital, and, according to our experience, would be, therefore, better managed.

Manufacturing capital comes, in the end, to be owned but by few. It does not therefore, encourage industry, like capital employed in some other pursuits. The case of the establishment mentioned in the Report was in point to this argument. Half a million of dollars gives employment to 265 persons, and those principally women and children. Now, what employment of that sum, in almost any other pursuit, could fail to demand and require more human labor? If vested in agriculture, the sum would command good and productive land sufficient to employ, he might almost say, all the spinners in the United States.

And how would it be in commerce, suppose it were in the freighting business? A commercial friend had furnished him with a statement which would show the result: A ship fit for that service may cost $15,000—she will require in her immediate service on board 15 hands. Then, full occupation for one man is found here on a capital of $1000. But in the manufacturing establishment, two thousand are required. In the first case however, it is not the immediate employment of the navigators that is demanded and paid.—he who furnished the timber—he who built the ship—all the classes connected with commerce and navigation, are employed and paid. Or suppose we look to the West India trade, as we have sometimes enjoyed it. That is a trade favorable to small capitals and to personal labor. It is a trade of short voyage and quick return; a trade which transports gross commodities both ways, and requires, therefore, many vessels, and those small.

Hence, we have seen respectable towns growing up and kept in activity, and proceeding to wealth, almost by that trade alone.

It must be obvious to every one, how much more, capital thus employed, encourages industry, by finding employment, and, therefore, by raising wages, than capital employed in large manufactures.

Between agricultural employments and manufacturing operations no one could hesitate, he thought, as to their effect on individual respectability and happiness.—