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POLITICAL.

SPEECH

OF THE
HON. JAMES M. MASON,
OF VIRGINIA.

On Non-Intervention; delivered in the Senate of the United States, April 6, 1852.

"It is a natural policy for a nation that studies to be neutral, to consult with those nations engaged in the same studies and pursuits. At the same time that measures ought to be pursued with this view, our treaties with Prussia and Sweden, one of which is expired, and the other expiring, might be renewed."

This recommendation was speedily followed up by the nomination of his son, John Quincy Adams, afterwards President of the United States, as minister to Prussia, having first by his message suggested the idea that it was important to institute a mission to Prussia, for the purpose of consultation with other nations, engaged in the "same studies and pursuits," to wit, the study of neutrality, and the pursuit of peace. When the nomination came in, it was strongly and sternly resisted by the Republican party; those were the days, Republicans, and Federalists. A motion was made in executive session—the injunction of secrecy has been removed, and the journals have been published—that "in the opinion of the Senate, no present occasion exists that a minister should be sent to Prussia." The debate that followed, and that the question divided, was, whether, by instituting a mission to Prussia, under the auspices of the message, there would be a precedent of forming an alliance with Prussia, even for the purpose of neutrality, and the years and days were wasted upon that motion, and stood—years 11, says 18; and amongst the years—and I call the attention of my friend, the distinguished Senator from Michigan [Mr. Cass] to the fact—were all the Republican members of the body.

I come now to the next epoch, the next starting point in the history of the country, which affected our foreign relations. It was the Spanish American question. Where were we then? Upon our own continent. The colonies of Spain were in revolt against the mother country; and the relations of your government with the mother country were those of peace. Notwithstanding every effort was made to induce the country to change those relations, that peace was preserved, and never departed from. It was for a long time a matter of doubt whether the provinces of South America would be able to establish their independence; but this government refrained from interfering in the slightest degree, and in any form whatever, until we were satisfied that the dominion of Spain was gone forever; then, as we had not only a right, but as it was our duty to do, in the year 1822 we recognized the independence of the colonies. To show the policy of the country at that day, I have taken an extract from a letter of the Secretary of State—Mr. Adams—to the minister of Spain, who complained of what had just then taken place, namely, the recognition on the part of our government of the independence of certain of the South American colonies. The Secretary says, under date of the 6th of April, 1822:

"In the conflicts which have attended these revolutions, the United States have carefully abstained from taking any part, respecting the right of the nations concerned in them, to maintain, or new organize, their own political constitutions, by observing, wherever it was a contest by arms, the most impartial neutrality. But the civil war in which Spain was for years involved with the inhabitants of her colonies in America, has, in substance, ceased to exist.

"This recognition is neither intended to invalidate any right of Spain, nor to affect the employment of any means which she may yet be disposed or enabled to use, with the view of reuniting those provinces to the rest of her dominions. It is the mere acknowledgment of existing facts, with the view to the regular establishment with the nations newly formed, of those relations, political and commercial, which it is the moral obligation of civilized and Chris-

tian nations to entertain reciprocally with one another."

The Secretary of State there shows that the United States felt it their duty to abstain from all interference whatever between the parent country and her colonies, although those colonies were at our very door; and he very strongly and lucidly shows, that the recognition of the independence of those colonies was no interference; for if Spain could again reduce them, she would be allowed to do so without any hindrance on our part. England had not at that time, recognized the independence of the South American republics; but she stood toward them, notwithstanding, in relations of very close connection. A very large commerce, it appears, had grown up between England and South America. The people of England had embarked large sums of money in the mining interests of that country, so that the attention of England was strongly attracted to that quarter and it became important to her, to have a responsible government to deal with; but England had alliances upon the continent which disturbed and embarrassed her not a little, in deliberations on the South American question; and it was while England was halting, thus between her allies and her interests, that the government of the United States proclaimed to the world, that there should be no intervention by any foreign power, in the contest between Spain and her colonies on this continent. I refer, sir, of course, to the celebrated message of President Monroe, at the December session of 1823.

It had been made known to the government in a manner presently to be stated, that the allied powers of Europe had it in serious contemplation to come to the aid of Spain in reducing to submission her revolted colonies in America; and the President seized the occasion to make it known that no such interference would be tolerated on this continent. I quote from the message:

Extract from President Monroe's Message, December 2d, 1823.

"We owe it, therefore, to candor, and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers, to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered, and shall not interfere. But with the governments who have declared their independence, and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other light than as the manifestations of any unfriendly disposition towards the United States.

"In the war between those new governments and Spain, we declared our neutrality at the time of their recognition, and to this we have adhered, and shall continue to adhere, provided no change shall occur which in the judgment of the competent authorities of this government, shall make a corresponding change on the part of the United States indispensable to their security.

"Our policy in regard to Europe, which was adopted at an early stage of the wars which have so long agitated that quarter of the globe, nevertheless remains the same, which is, not to interfere in the internal concerns or any of its powers.

"But in regard to these continents, circumstances are eminently and conspicuously different. It is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent, without endangering our peace and happiness, nor can any one believe that our Southern brethren, if left themselves, would adopt it of their own accord.

"It is equally impossible, therefore, that we should behold such interposition in any form with indifference."

The ground upon which President Monroe based this deliberate declaration was, as will be seen, that the allied powers could not extend their political system to any portion of the continent of America without endangering our peace and happiness.—

That was the distinct, independent, and sole ground on which he justified this ostensible departure from the established policy of the country. It was boldly and wisely done, and was sustained by the American people. This declaration went upon the principle, that whilst this government disclaimed all right to intervene in controversies between foreign powers, yet such disclaimer was obviously limited to controversies which could not affect our own people; when by any such controversy a different aspect was presented—the safety and interest of our country became our sole guide.

It becomes interesting, and will be illustrative, to ascertain how this celebrated declaration was brought about. The Senator from Louisiana has brought to the attention of the Senate a conference which had taken place a short time previously in London, between Mr. Rush, our then minister at the Court of St. James, and the British secretary for foreign affairs. The view taken by the honorable Senator was, that Mr. Rush had been charged by his government to negotiate with England on the subject of the recognition of South American Independence.

Spaking of Mr. Rush's interviews with Mr. Canning, &c., the Senator says:

"Among the important negotiations intrusted to his skill and management, was that of obtaining from England a recognition of independence for the Spanish colonies. He approached the subject with inexpressible address and delicacy, and soon brought the British minister to his views by suggesting a declaration of the principles upon which that independence should be vindicated."

If I construe the Senator aright, and he meant to say that our minister had been charged by his government to sound the British cabinet on the policy of "a joint declaration of the principles upon which that independence should be vindicated," I concede, if it were so, that it would have formed a striking departure from our previous policy of refraining from all political connection with any foreign power. The Senator refers for this, to the very interesting book subsequently published, by the minister, on his "Residence in London." I have carefully examined the work, and do not find that the minister had been instructed by the government to negotiate at all, or for any purpose, upon the subject of South American Independence.

Mr. Rush was the minister of the United States, resident in England, where he had been for some years, and, in this connection, says, that he had recently, before that time, received dispatches from home, committing to him five several subjects, upon which he was to open negotiations with the government of England; and he received, with those dispatches, specific and minute instructions upon every point. He states what those subjects were. The first related to commercial intercourse between the United States and the British colonies in America; the second, to the suppression of the slave trade; the third, to the unsettled boundary between the two countries; the fourth to the admission of consuls of the United States into the commercial ports of England; and the fifth, to the fisheries of Newfoundland; every one being utterly alien to anything connected with the recognition of South American independence. Nor do I find anywhere, that he had been commissioned by his government to hold any conference whatever, with the government of Great Britain on that subject.— He says, further, that this commission, he sought an interview with the British minister, Mr. Canning, for the purpose of consulting him upon the subjects of negotiation thus committed to him; and at page 309 of his book, speaking of this interview, he says:

"The proper object of it over, I transiently asked him whether, notwithstanding the late news from Spain, we might not still hope that the Spaniards would get the better of their difficulties?"

Such was the question he put to the British minister, in an interview, which had been obtained for a totally different object, which he did not put until the business of the meeting had ended; and it was then, as Mr. Rush expresses it, a transient inquiry.—

That transient inquiry found the British minister fully charged with the whole subject of the Spanish question, and it came upon him like a torch thrown into a magazine. It opened his eyes in an instant, as it would seem, to the prospect of obtaining an ally upon this continent, upon the very embarrassing question which was about to separate his country from her allies upon the European continent. Mr. Canning answered the question so far as it went, as to the probable effect of the late news from Spain; but showing an interest in it, he pursued the subject in a series of unofficial or private notes, for several subsequent days, with a view to learn from Mr. Rush whether the government of the United States would join England in a concerted declaration. So that the proposition for the joint action of the two governments came from the British minister to Mr. Rush, and not from Mr. Rush to the British minister. That interview took place August 16th, 1823. The United States had recognized the independence of the South American republics in the preceding year. Thus, the relations between this country and the South American republics were established; those between England and those republics were not. Nor does it appear that Mr. Rush was authorized to negotiate with the British government to any extent, as to the principles upon which that recognition, by either government, or by both governments, if made by England, should be vindicated. Because, of her 'entangling alliances' on the continent of Europe, the policy of England in reference to the South American colonies had not yet been matured. The British cabinet say that the time was approaching when England must stand committed in reference to those colonies; and they saw, that the very first decided step England took in recognizing the independence of the colonies, would be followed by a declaration of war against her on the part of the allied powers of Europe.

The government of Spain was then in a most unsettled condition.— Spain had passed successively in revolution, through every form of government; from a provincial junta to a central junta, then to a regency, then a cortes with a constitutional monarch, from which the king, held in a state of pupillage by the cortes, was appealing to his allies for aid. England was one of those allies, and England was placed in a position in which she must either abandon the whole policy of her people in reference to the Spanish question, or provoke a war with her continental allies. The fear was—and there was great reason for the fear—that the allied powers of Europe would go to the aid of Spain. The governments of France, one of the allied powers, had marched an army of one hundred thousand men into Spain to restore Ferdinand, who was one of the Bourbons. Military occupation was thus taken of Spain by France. The other powers of Europe were at the back of France, sustaining her in that movement; and England saw that a critical moment had come, in which she must definitively announce her position on these embarrassing questions. It was at that very juncture that the question was put to Mr. Rush by the British minister, whether England would find an ally in America, if she took the decided step of recognizing the independence of the South American colonies.— Mr. Rush, who conducted himself with a degree of ability which fully justifies the deserved eulogiums which have been passed upon him by the Senator from Louisiana, was placed in the delicate and responsible position of acting on so momentous an occasion, without authority from his government.

The American minister, however, availed himself of the occasion to press upon Mr. Canning the decisive step on the part of England, to recognize the independence of those colonies. Not because he had any instructions from his government to do so, but because Mr. Canning had opened the door to it, and because he knew how important it was to those colonies, and how grateful it would be to his own country, that her example in this respect should be followed by so important a power as the British government.

But he explicitly declared that he

had no power from his government to express its views, far less to commit it to the proposal of Mr. Canning, that the two governments should unite in a joint protest against all foreign intervention.

This conference was continued by correspondence for several days, until eventually, Mr. Rush, in the absence of all instructions, boldly assumed the responsibility of assenting to Mr. Canning's proposal for a declaration of the two governments, provided, Great Britain, as a preliminary, would recognize the independence of those colonies.

In his letter to the Secretary of State, communicating the determination thus formed, he said that he had been led to it, on being distinctly informed by Mr. Canning that—

"He had received notice of measures being in projection by the powers of Europe, relative to the affairs of Spanish America, as soon as the French succeeded in their military movement against Spain."

But he told the Secretary further, that—

"Should the issue of things be different, and events notwithstanding arise, threatening the peace of the United States, or otherwise seriously to affect their interest in any way, in consequence of such a declaration by me, it would still remain for the wisdom of my government to disavow my conduct, as it would manifestly have without its previous warrant."

Eventually Mr. Canning withdrew his proposition, on the ground of Mr. Rush's want of power to commit his government. Of course, the whole matter was immediately communicated by Mr. Rush to his government.

As Mr. Canning had withdrawn his proposition, it became unnecessary for the government of the United States to disavow what he had done. But the fact remains that no such power was thereafter given. And as the best evidence that our government determined to keep itself free from all connection with England in the matter, the President availed himself of the meeting of Congress, then near at hand, to make that declaration separately, on the part of the United States, which Mr. Canning had proposed should be made jointly with England.

NOTE.—It may not be uninteresting to hear the English account of this conference between Mr. Rush and Mr. Canning; it conforms entirely to that given by Mr. R., and will be found in 'The Political Life of Canning,' by Stapleton.

[EXTRACT.]
"It was with this view that towards the latter end of August, 1823, Mr. Canning sounded Mr. Rush, the then Minister of the United States in this country, as to whether, in his opinion, the moment were not arrived when the two governments of Great Britain and the United States might not come to some understanding with each other, on the subject of the Spanish American colonies; and whether, if they could arrive at such understanding, it would not be expedient for themselves, and beneficial for the world, that the principles of it should be clearly settled and avowed."

"The English government said Mr. Canning had nothing to disguise on the subject.

1. 'It conceived the recovery by of the colonies by Spain to be hopeless.

2. 'It conceived the question of the recognition of them to be one of time and circumstances.

3. 'It was, however, by no means disposed to throw any impediment in the way of any arrangement between them and the mother country by amicable negotiations.

4. 'It aimed not at the possession of any portion of them for Great Britain.

5. 'And it could not see any part of them transferred to any other power with indifference.

"These were its opinions and feelings; and if they were shared by the Government of the United States, why," asked Mr. Canning, "should they not be mutually confided to each other, and declared in the face of the world?"

"Was Mr. Rush authorised to enter into any negotiation, and to sign any convention upon the subject? or would he exchange ministerial notes upon it?"

"A proceeding of such a nature, continued Mr. Canning, 'would be at

once the most effectual and the least offensive mode of imitating the joint disapprobation of Great Britain and the United States of any project which might be cherished by European power, of a forcible enterprise for reducing the colonies to subjugation on the behalf, or in the name, of Spain, or the acquisition of any part of them to itself by cession or by conquest."

"This was the substance of the confidential communication made by Mr. Canning to Mr. Rush.

"As that gentleman's answer is written in the same spirit of confidence, it will not be right (and fortunately it is not material) to state the nature of that answer, further than to say that in every respect it was highly creditable to its distinguished author, who, unfortunately, was not furnished by his government with instructions which would justify him in committing it to an expression of its sentiment, which was to be formerly recorded in writing.

"Had Mr. Rush felt himself authorized to have entertained any formal proposition, and to have decided upon it without reference to his government, and eminently beneficial practical result might have been produced by the correspondence; but as he had no specific powers," Mr. Canning found that, in the delay which must intervene before he could procure them, the progress of events might have rendered any such proceeding nugatory, and the being engaged in a communication with the United States, in which a considerable time must have been consumed before it would have been possible to have arrived at a conclusive understanding with them, would have embarrassed any other mode of proclaiming our views, which circumstances might have rendered it expedient to adopt.

"Mr. Canning, therefore, allowed the matter to drop; but what was done in it was far from proving wholly useless, as will be seen hereafter.

"I think, then, if this were to prove anything whatever, it would prove, in the first place, that the proposition came from the British government to this government to unite with her in this important act in reference to the South American republics; and, in the next place, that this government declined to do it. None doubt at this day, that the allied powers of Europe had it in serious contemplation to lend their aid to Spain to enable her to reduce to submission her revolted colonies in America. Great Britain knew it. Our government knew it. It was communicated to our government, as well by Mr. Rush as by our charge at Paris. Great Britain, as I have said, felt that whenever that was done, she must take a step which would implicate her in war, and break off her continental alliance. Mr. Canning, the secretary of foreign affairs, and one of the ablest statesmen of his day, looked at once to the avenue which he thought had been opened by Mr. Rush, to obtain a new ally on this continent; but his proposition was not mot. The American government took the lead, without any communication with England, or with any foreign power whatsoever. The President of the United States, in recommending to Congress such measures as he thought the condition of the country required, made the declaration to which I have referred, and based it altogether upon his opinion that the peace and safety of our people, required it. It was not because we sympathized with those colonies in their revolt; not because any speculative philanthropy required of us to go to their aid; but it was because this foreign intervention would endanger the safety of our people, that he put forth that celebrated declaration. To prove that such apprehension was not without foundation, I have taken an extract from the diplomatic records of that day, showing that after King Ferdinand was restored to his throne, by the armed intervention of France, he solicited his allies to come to the aid of Spain, in suppressing the revolt of the South American colonies.

It is taken from a despatch addressed by the Conde de O'Falia, as prime minister of the King, to his Majesty's minister at Paris, St. Petersburg, and Vienna, dated the 26th December, 1823, and communicated by the Conde, to Sir William Court, the British ambassador at Madrid:

"The King, our sovereign, being restored to the throne of his ancestors, in the enjoyment of his hereditary rights, has seriously turned his thoughts to the fate of his American dominions, distracted by civil war, and brought to the brink of the most dangerous precipice. These reflections powerfully animate his majesty to hope that the justice of his case will meet with a firm support in the influence of the

powers of Europe. Accordingly, the King has resolved upon inviting the cabinets of Great Britain and France to establish a conference at Paris, to the end that their plenipotentiaries, assembled there, along with those of his Catholic Majesty, may aid Spain in adjusting the affairs of the revolted countries of America.

"His Majesty, confiding in the sentiments of his allies, hopes that they will assist him in accomplishing the worthy object of upholding the principles of order and legitimacy, the subversion of which, once commenced in America, would presently bring misfortune to Europe; and that they will aid him, at the same time, in re-establishing peace between this division of the globe and its colonies."

"When this paper came to the knowledge of Mr. Canning, he answered forthwith, on the part of his government, that the first step taken by the allied powers this intervention, would be followed, on the part of England, by the immediate recognition of the independence of the South American colonies. We have the very authority of Mr. Brougham, then a member of the British House of Commons, that the declaration of Mr. Monroe, made thus in the same year, had the effect of deterring the allied powers of Europe from the threatened intervention. I read from the Parliamentary Debates, an extract from the speech of Mr. Brougham, in the House of Commons, in 1824:

"The question with regard to South America," said Mr. Brougham, "was now, he believed, disposed of, or nearly so; for an event had recently happened, than which no event had ever dispersed greater joy, exultation, and gratitude over all the freemen of Europe; that event which was decisive on the subject, was the language held with respect to Spanish America in the speech of Mr. Monroe, in the House of Commons, in 1823."

Mr. Brougham then proceeded to state, as an indisputable fact, that "Ferdinand had been promised by the Emperor Alexander, that, if the King of Spain would throw off the constitutional fetters by which he was trammelled, he would assist him in recovering his transatlantic dominions."

It is thus seen that this threatened intervention by President Monroe was placed distinctly on the ground that it was necessary, and due to the interests and safety of our own people. That declaration had its effect—an effect recognized by the statesmen of England, and best proved by the fact that, although Spain demanded the assistance of her allies, she never received it.

It will be seen, Mr. President, that the term used by President Monroe, in this potential protest, is the same that is found in the resolution of the honorable Senator from New York, that the United States cannot see, &c., "with indifference." But how was it construed in the British Parliament? Why, it was construed as a determination, that if the declaration should be disregarded, the United States would sustain it by force. The declaration had its effect, and warded off the threatened intervention.

But the honorable Senator from Michigan, for whose opinions upon all subjects, and more especially upon those connected with the foreign relations of the country, I have the most profound respect, has cited a number of instances from the modern history of Europe, tending to show that these protests are not unusual things—that they have been made over and over again by one European power to another, and have been habitually disregarded; and yet that no war followed. It would appear, then, that the best reason which can be assigned, for the proposed expression of purpose, in regard to this Hungarian interference, is, that it will not be regarded, and therefore, no serious consequences can ensue. Now, I appeal to the American people—and I make the appeal with confidence; I have no fear of their answer—that whenever their government takes a position, and expresses a purpose, in its relations with foreign powers, that they will look to the government to make it good. I appeal further to the American people, that they will countenance no declaration of intention on the part of their government, which they do not intend to maintain. Why, how was the declaration on the part of Mr. Monroe considered by Mexico? If you will look at the correspondence between the minister of the United States in the city of Mexico and the government of Mexico, after that declaration was made, you will find that the minister of the United States said to Mexico, (in reference to Mr. Monroe's declaration,) that "the United States had pledged themselves not to permit any other power to interfere, either with their independence or form of government;" and again, "in