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Congress

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WEDNESDAY, January 29

Mr. JACKSON called for a consideration of the unfinished business of yesterday, viz: the motion of Mr. Smilie to discharge the committee of Ways and Means from the further consideration of so much of the President's message as relates to the invasion of neutral rights by some of the belligerent powers.

On taking up this business the House divided—Ayes 57—Carried.

The motion having been submitted from the chair—Mr. Dawson opposed it. He said the wish of the gentleman from Pennsylvania to bring this subject under the view of the committee of the whole on the state of the union might at any time be gratified by going into that committee and moving any resolution he might see fit, as the message generally was referred to the committee of the whole on the state of the union. He believed, however, that the floor of the House was not the proper place to make declarations of what is the law of nations. He believed that a volume of such declarations would be of no avail; it was their duty to act and not to declare on such subjects; and whenever the gentleman from Pennsylvania or any other gentleman would bring forward measures calculated to prevent an infraction of our neutral rights, they should receive his support. At present he must be against adopting the resolution.

Mr. SMILIE said he did not expect any opposition to the motion he had made. If the committee of Ways and Means should be discharged from the business, it would consequently come before the committee of the whole on the state of the union without any motion, as the message was generally before that committee.

In reply to the remark that this motion would be treating the committee of Ways and Means with disrespect, Mr. Smilie said, he thought the ground on which he had placed the business would have removed every idea of the kind. He did not say the committee of Ways and Means were not as competent to the business as any other select or standing committee; but he had declared from the beginning that in his opinion, in point of principle, the reference ought to have been made to the committee of the whole. This is the ninth week of the session, and gentlemen charge us with having done nothing. Do not gentlemen see, from the deranged state of the committee of Ways & Means, that this course has become absolutely necessary? Shall a business of the first importance that can occur during the session, be neglected on this account? Not only the eyes of all America, but likewise of all Europe are looking with anxiety on the steps which we shall take in this business. For all the maritime powers of Europe are interested in this great question relative to neutral rights. Are we, then, in consequence of the deranged situation of a select committee, to remain with our hands tied up? For myself I do think, that the interests of our country call upon us to take immediate steps. I repeat it, that on a similar occasion with this, a similar course was pursued. Gentlemen will remember, that in the third congress, when we before suffered from the misconduct of Great Britain, certain resolutions which became the subject of discussion originated in a committee of the whole House.

What, indeed, are we to expect from the committee of Ways and Means? Are they in possession of the general sense of the House on this subject, as a guide in making their report? This is not the case, as we have had no discussion of the subject; and until it shall be brought under a view of a committee of the whole House, it is impossible to tell in what the opinions of members will centre.

Mr. JACKSON. I have but a single observation to make in addition to those which have fallen from the gentleman from Pennsylvania. So far as relates to myself, it is not my object to discuss in committee of the whole, the abstract question of the law of nations, but to adopt measures for the effectual resistance and punishment of the infraction of those laws, as far as we can. If, according to the course pointed out by my colleague, any resolution should be submitted on this subject in committee of the whole, it will be objected that the subject is before a standing committee, and it will be said to be disrespectful to act on it until they shall have reported. If my colleague, therefore, be of opinion, that we should adopt any efficient and prompt measures, the better and speedier way will be for him to join in the motion. I hope that motion will prevail. In the name of Heaven, if we are not disposed to do any thing, let us tell the people so.

Mr. CROWNSHIELD. From the beginning I was opposed to referring this subject to the Committee of Ways and Means. I saw no reason for its going to a standing committee. Without meaning to cast any censure on the Committee of Ways and Means, I am in favor of the motion. We have been in session seven or eight weeks—the reference was made as early as the 6th of Dec. and we have yet no report. The question is perhaps as interesting a one as has been presented since the establishment of our national government. What is our situation? Our ships are plundered in every sea, our seamen are impressed, 3,000 of them are in the service of one nation. We are a neutral nation, and it is not proper that any belligerent nation should employ them in this manner. Like the gentleman from Virginia, I am ready to act—I want no report to guide my decision. I am prepared—not for war measures, but for a non-intercourse act with Great Britain. I am willing to suspend all intercourse with Great Britain until she shall give back the ships she has stolen from us, and seamen she forcibly detains. I shall not be more ready to take this step after a report from the Committee of Ways and Means than I am now. The simple question is, whether we shall abandon trade altogether, or resist the unjust aggressions made upon it. But it was not my object in rising, to go any length into the subject; I only rose to express my opinion in favor of the course pointed out by the motion. The Committee of Ways and Means is deranged, disorganized; two members are absent, and the Chairman unfortunately is sick.—We have no expectation of a report; it may not come till the end of the session.

Mr. GREGG. I rise to express a similar opinion with the gentleman just set down. I am in favor of the motion for the reasons which he has assigned, and for another reason; for the sake of consistency. Though the subject be referred to the committee of Ways and means, it is likewise referred to the committee of the whole on the state of the union. The memorials from the merchants of New York and Philadelphia have taken this latter course. This brings the subject before a committee of the whole. We are under the same obligation to take up the business of our constituents as the message; and as the business is of the greatest importance I hope the whole subject will be referred to a committee of the whole.

Mr. BIDWELL. The gentleman from Pennsylvania has anticipated me in an idea which I meant to have expressed. As the principal document on this subject is the message of the President, I think it proper that that should be placed with the same committee charged with the memorials of merchants of different towns. Another reason may be mentioned in favor of this course of procedure. At the commencement of the session there was a strong reason for referring the subject to a special committee. It was a principal object at that time to enquire into the extent and degree of the injuries received from belligerent nations; as since that time we have received full information on these points from the executive department, that reason is done away, and there is no necessity for any investigation by a select committee.

The motion to discharge the committee of Ways and Means was then agreed to; Ayes 68.

On motion of Mr. Smilie, the select committee to whom was referred so much of the message of the president of the U. States of the 17th inst. as relates to the impressment of our seamen, was discharged from its further consideration, and the subject referred to a committee of the whole on the state of the union without a division.

On motion of Mr. Thomas, the Committee of Ways & Means were discharged from the consideration of so much of the message of the President as relates to deprivations committed on our colonial trade, and the subject referred to a committee of the whole House on the state of the union without a division.

NON IMPORTATION WITH GREAT BRITAIN.

Mr. GREGG said, that he considered the insults offered to our government, and the injuries done to our citizens by some of the belligerent nations, to be of such a nature, as to demand the interposition of government to obtain redress. It appeared from the memorials and remonstrances of the merchants of New York, Philadelphia, and other of our seaport towns, now on our table, as well as from executive communications, that vessels the bona fide property of citizens of the United States have been seized by their cruizers, and they and their cargoes condemned, contrary to our rights as a neutral nation, and to what has long been considered as the law of nations on this subject. Great numbers of our fellow citizens have been impressed, and notwithstanding our repeated remonstrances, they are cruelly retained in bondage, and compelled to act in a service, perhaps very abhorrent from their feelings, far from their country and their friends. To these insults and injuries, said Mr. G. we can no longer submit, unless we are willing to surrender that independence which has been, and I trust always will be our pride and our boast. So great are these injuries and aggressions, and so unrightfully are they persevered in, that I do not know but they might be considered as a sufficient cause, on which to ground a declaration of war. That however is not

my object. I deprecate war, and will not agree to resort to it, until other means which we have in our power, are tried in vain. We do, I think, possess means, which if properly used, cannot fail of accomplishing the object. To these I hope we will now resort, and for the purpose of bringing them into view, I will submit a resolution to the consideration of the House, reserving any farther observations on the subject until the resolution shall be taken up in committee of the whole on the state of the union, to which I intend moving its reference.

Mr. GREGG then offered the following resolution:

Whereas Great Britain impresses citizens of the United States, and compels them to serve on board her ships of war and also seizes and condemns vessels belonging to citizens of the United States, and their cargoes being the bona fide property of American citizens, not contraband of war, and not proceeding to places besieged or blockaded, under the pretext of their being engaged in time of war in a trade with her enemies which was not allowed in time of peace:

And whereas the government of the United States has repeatedly remonstrated to the British government against these injuries, and demanded satisfaction therefor, but without effect, Therefore, Resolved, That until equitable and satisfactory arrangements on these points shall be made between the two governments, it is expedient that from and after the day of no goods, wares, or merchandise, of the growth, product, or manufacture of Great Britain, or of any of the colonies or dependencies thereof ought to be imported into the United States. Provided, however, that whenever arrangements deemed satisfactory by the President of the United States shall take place, it shall be lawful for him by proclamation to fix a day on which the prohibition aforesaid shall cease.

The House having agreed to consider this resolution,

Mr. THOMAS said he had seconded the motion of the gentleman from Pennsylvania and should give it his decided support.—It would however have suited him better, had it gone still further, and interdicted all commercial intercourse with that nation, until she should cease to commit depredations on our commerce, impress our citizens on the high seas into her service, and abandon the new principles which she had lately interpolated in the maritime code, and which he considered as unjust as they were unauthorised by the acknowledged law of nations.

But as unanimity in the legislature of the nation was desirable at all times, and particularly so on great national questions, he was disposed, in order to produce that result on the present occasion, to yield a part of his own opinion to meet the views of other gentlemen.

The present was an important question, and he hoped the honorable mover would consent that it should lie a day or two for consideration, and moved that it be printed.

Mr. GREGG said his wish was to refer the resolution to a committee of the whole on the state of the union, and made a motion to that effect which was agreed to without a division, and the resolution ordered to be printed.

On motion of Mr. Thompson the house again resolved itself into a committee of the whole—Mr. J. C. SMITH in the chair—on the report of a select committee in favor of authorising the erection of a bridge over the Potomac.

Messrs. Thompson, Clark and Elmer advocated; and Messrs. Early, Sloan and Findley opposed the report; when the committee rose, without coming to a decision, and obtained leave to sit again.

A message was received from the President of the United States, enclosing a memorial from the merchants of Baltimore, on the deprivations committed on the commerce of the United States which was referred to a committee of the whole on the state of the union.

The Speaker laid before the House a letter from the treasurer of the United States, rendering a general statement of the civil accounts, as well as those of the navy and war departments, from October 1, 1864, to October 1, 1865.

THURSDAY, January 30.

Mr. J. RANDOLPH said it would be recollected that, very early in the session, so much of the message of the President of the U. S. as relates to the invasion of neutral rights by belligerent powers, had been referred to the Committee of Ways and Means. It would also be recollected that another message, on the same subject, or on one connected with it, had been referred to the same committee of Ways and Means. I understand, said Mr. R. (for my indisposition has not permitted me for some days past to attend to the duties of my seat) that a motion has prevailed to discharge the committee of Ways and Means from the consideration of that subject. Inasmuch as this discharge may have been effected under an impression that the committee have been delinquent in executing the duty devolved upon them, I feel it my duty, before I surrender the papers connected with this subject, to give some account of the proceedings of the committee. On the 14th of Dec. the committee instructed their chairman to write a letter to the secretary of state, which I will read. Mr. R. here read the letter as follows:

COMMITTEE ROOM, Dec. 11, 1866.

SIR, The Committee of Ways and Means have instructed me to request you will cause to be laid before them such information on the subject of the inclosed resolution as the department of state can furnish.

The peculiar objects of our research are—

- 1. What new principles or constructions, of the law of nations have been adopted by the belligerent powers of Europe, to the prejudice of neutral rights?
2. The governments asserting those principles and constructions?
3. The extent to which the commerce of the U. S. has been thereby injured?

I am, with very great respect,

Yours, JOHN RANDOLPH.

The Secretary of State.

On Saturday night the 25th instant, the Committee of Ways and Means received an answer to this letter, which I will deliver to the clerk, in order that it may go to the new committee, to which this business has been referred. It is unnecessary for me to add any thing more. The House must be sensible that while the Committee of Ways and Means were in the dark, they could not proceed in the discharge of the duties assigned them, and that after receiving information from the secretary of state, so late in the day, it was impossible for them to have made a report by this day; and if I am not mistaken, the motion to discharge the Committee of Ways and Means, was made before the answer of the secretary of state was received.

The Clerk accordingly read the letter of the Secretary of State, as follows: ANSWER.

The Secretary of State presents his respects to Mr. Randolph, and has the honor to transmit him a copy of a report this day made to the President of the United States, respecting interpolations by foreign powers, of new and injurious principles in the law of nations. This report, with the communications made by the President to Congress, particularly that of the 17th inst. will, it is hoped, afford the information requested, for the Committee of Ways and Means, by Mr. Randolph's letter of the 11th instant.

Department of State, January 25, 1866.

When on motion of Mr. J. Randolph, the papers, laid by him on the table, were referred to a committee of the whole on the state of the union.

The Speaker laid before the House the following letter from the Secretary of the Navy, addressed to the House.

SIR, In obedience to the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 27th inst. directing the Secretary of the Navy "to lay before the House a report on the condition of the frigates, and other public armed vessels, belonging to the U. S. distinguishing the frigates fit for actual service; distinguishing such as require repair, and the sum necessary for repairing each; and distinguishing also such as it may be the interest of the U. S. to dispose of rather than repair," I have the honor to state,

That the frigate Constitution is now in a state of thorough repair, and in all respects prepared for service.

That the frigate Chesapeake has lately been repaired and is fit for service.

That the frigates Adams, Essex, and John Adams are also fit for service.

That the brigs Siren, Hornet, Argus, and Vixen, the schooners Nautilus and Enterprize, the bombs Spitfire and Vengeance, and all the gun boats are fit for service.

That the frigates President, United States, Congress, Constellation, New York and Boston, require to be repaired; but it is utterly impossible to form an accurate estimate of the sum necessary for repairing each.

I know of no vessel belonging to the navy, which I consider it would be "the interest of the United States to dispose of, rather than repair."

On the motion of Mr. J. Randolph, the 1st and 3d sections of the bill to repeal so much of an act as authorises the evidences of the public debt to be received in payment for public lands, and for other purposes, was referred to a committee of the whole House.

The discussion which ensued on the details of this bill occupied nearly the whole of the residue of the day, of which we shall hereafter take a more particular notice.

The committee having reported the bill, with sundry amendments, it was ordered to a third reading to-morrow.

Mr. STANFORD reported a bill for altering the time for holding the circuit court for the district of North Carolina, which was referred to a committee of the whole to-morrow.

Mr. CROWNSHIELD presented an energetic and comprehensive memorial from the merchants of Salem, Mass. representing the embarrassed situation of trade; their deep anxiety at the impressment of American seamen; the severe injuries received from the recent principles assumed by Great Britain, and pledging their lives and property in support of such measures as may be taken by the government to defend and protect their rights.

Referred to a committee of the whole on the state of the union.

MESSAGE.

From the President of the United States, communicating the report of the Director of the Mint, of the operations of that institution, during the last year.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, I communicate, for the information of Congress, the Report of the Director of the Mint, of the operations of that institution during the last year.

THE JEFFERSON.

January 15, 1866.

To the President of the United States, Agreeably to former practice, I have the honor, at the commencement of the

present year, to lay before you a statement of the issues from the Mint of the United States; and the expenses of the institution during the past year; and conceiving, that it might not prove unacceptable, the treasurer has, at my request, drawn up, and exhibited, in one comprehensive view, (schedule, No. 4) a statement of all the gold, silver and copper coins, struck at the mint, from the commencement of its operation, till the present time.

From this statement it appears that of gold coins issued from the mint, the whole amount is 2,613,972 1-2 dollars; of silver coins 1,933,917 3-4 dollars; and of copper coins 179,453 dolls. 47 1-2; making the total amount 4,747,343 dolls. 72 1-2 cts. and the total number of pieces 22,594,832.

During the last year, as will appear in particular detail from schedule No 1, there have been struck at the mint, of gold coins 34,964 pieces amounting in value to 170,367 1-2 dollars; of silver coins 469,496 pieces, value 149,067 1-2 dollars; and of copper coins 1,755,580 pieces; value 13,483 dollars 48 cents; making the total number of pieces of the precious metals 304,476, and of copper coins 1,755,580, and the total value 332,018 dollars 48 cents. This amount is indeed somewhat less than that of the preceding year, (dolls. 371,827 94 cts.) yet the number of pieces is much greater, being all of the smaller coins; and this latter circumstance will readily account for the small differences in value; since the labour and time necessary to prepare and strike an equal number of large and of small pieces of coin will be nearly equal.

Of the precious metals, the number of pieces coined in the last year, far exceeds that in any former year, since the establishment of the mint; indeed it is considerably more than double of what it has been, in any one of the four last years.

The striking of small coins is a measure which has been adopted to accommodate the banks and other depositors, and at their particular request; both with a view of furnishing a supply of small change, and to prevent the exportation of the specie of the U. States to foreign countries.

I am authorised, Sir, to assure you, that the Bank of the U. S. (with perhaps the other Banks in this city) will furnish the mint an ample supply of bullion, during the current year and to avoid, as far as practicable, all inconvenient delay in the issue of coins, I am, with your approbation, about to employ a few additional workmen. The utmost economy; however, in the expenses of the institution, will be carefully observed.

The schedule No. 3, exhibits an abstract of the expenditures of the Mint during the last year.—From this, it will be observed, that the contingent expenses in the last six months, have been pretty considerable. This has arisen from sundry repairs, particularly of the stable, coal house, a pair of rollers, and one of the coining presses, which could no longer be dispensed with; but which will not again occur in many years.

Schedule No 2, exhibits a general statement of the gain on the copper coinage, for the last year amounting to dolls. 2,187 68 cts. exclusive of dolls. 51 96 cts. spoiled planchets, used in the alloy of the precious metals. This gain would have been still greater, had not the planchets, proved to be somewhat overweight—though the late director had given the most particular charges and instructions on this head to the person of whom they were purchased.

I have, sir, the honor to be, With the greatest esteem, Your most obedient servant, ROBERT PATTERSON, Director.

Mint of the United States, Philadelphia, 3d January, 1866.

LETTER

From ANNET BASHAW to the President of the United States, (Accompanying a message from the President of the United States of the 13th January, 1866.)

EXCELLENCE, For nearly eleven years, I have been laboring under the weight of misfortune; but, notwithstanding which, my distress was never equal to that which the actual combination of circumstances has made it. My residence was near Cairo, when there arrived in Alexandria, a brig, commanded by Capt. Hull, in company with Gen. Eaton, who came recommended to Mr. Briggs, H. B. M. consul, and enquired of him where I could be found. My place of abode being made known, a courier was dispatched for Cairo, by order of the general, and on his arrival at Razid, a second one, which came to Cairo, directed to the house of Tursuf Bashaw, an officer of the Ottoman Porte, who received a letter in which he was requested to suffer me to pass without interruption, in order that I might co-operate with the Americans to take Tripoli. These things being communicated to me, caused me to reflect seriously, whether they could be true or not. All doubts were dissipated by Gen. Eaton meeting in Cairo, my secretary, named Mahuman Mezzalana, to whom he consigned another paper, and in company with two Maltese arrived at Sadi, my place of residence, and delivered to me a dispatch urging me to leave that place immediately, in order that we might have a meeting (as really happened) in the city of Damietta, where the general was made known to me, as one who had been sent thither by your excellency for the conquest of the kingdom of Tripoli. I felt