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CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

Mr. CAMPBELL's SPEECH

ON THE

Resolution for authorising the President under certain conditions to suspend the Embargo law.

(CONTINUED.)

A distinction has been attempted to be taken on this subject, also, between a limited and an unlimited embargo. There will be nothing substantial found in this distinction. It is indeed an exertion to shew a distinction when there is no real difference. A limited embargo can only mean an embargo that is to terminate at some given time; and the length of time, if an hundred years, will not change the character of the embargo; it is still limited. If it be constitutional to lay it for one day it must be equally so to lay it for ten days, or a hundred days, or as many years; it would still be a limited embargo; and no one will, I presume, deny that an embargo laid for such a length of time, and one laid without limitation, would in reality, and to all practicable purposes, be the same. This then clearly shews there is not the slightest foundation for the distinction taken between a limited and an unlimited embargo. If we have power to impose it, we have the power to continue it until it shall be considered the interest of the nation to remove it.

We have been told by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. R.) that he is very much alarmed at the rapid strides this government is making, in assimilating itself to a monarchical form. The government is represented, (in the chimerical fancy only, I presume, of that gentleman,) as being already a kind of monarchy; and the President as the sun around which the officers of government and others, revolve as satellites. It might be sufficient to enquire from whence proceed all those alarms, and to wait for the gentleman to give an answer, for he has not stated even a plausible pretext for them. I know of no foundation for such alarms; and I firmly believe there is none. It has not been proposed during the present session to vest in the President powers which had not heretofore been possessed and exercised by other Presidents, as well as by him, to a much greater extent than is now proposed. Why then such alarms should be attempted to be raised with respect to the powers vested in the President, is indeed extraordinary. There appears not the slightest ground to justify them. I know not who the gentleman supposes revolve round the executive as satellites; he did not choose to name them; so far as regards myself, there certainly never has been an act of mine which would justify such an insinuation. I have acted from motives which no man can with truth impeach, and which no gentleman shall impeach with impunity; and I trust those with whom I have had the honor generally to act, have done the same. Why then attempt to make an impression on the public mind, without a single fact to justify it, that the executive is the sole mover of all the proceedings of the legislature? There may be some secret design in all this, which is not expressed or perceivable; but I feel very confident no real good to the nation can arise from such a course of proceeding. But further, you are told your government is a masked monarchy. What the gentleman meant by this expression is equally mysterious with his other allusions. Are there any acts of the executive which prove that he is acting the monarch under disguise, or that he has any disposition to promote in this country the principles or practices of monarchy? If there are, let them be made known to the public. I know of no such acts. I do not believe they exist. With what propriety or correctness then can this government be called a masked monarchy? There does not appear to be any foundation for the assertion; and I am therefore authorised to conclude there is none. I consider it proper in this place to correct some misrepresentations of what I said on a former occasion, made by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. R.) which I suppose were occasioned by his misunderstanding me. That gentleman informed you when he was up, on this subject, that a gentleman, (alluding I presume to me) who a few days before considered that a peace in Europe would produce difficulty to this country, now conceived that a general peace or the removal of the orders and decrees of the belligerent powers, would authorise the removal of the embargo. To understand this correctly, it will be necessary to advert to what produced the remarks made by me. The gentleman from Virginia had said, as I was informed, (for I happened to be out of my seat at that moment) that we were in a state of security, which arose from the pressure the two great belligerent powers made upon each other, and which prevented them from making war upon us. I did not hear the gentleman say this, but was told he had said so. In answer to this argument I stated, that if that was the case at this moment, and afforded us temporary security, which however was not admitted, it was uncertain how long this equal pressure would continue; that one or the other must prevail, unless an accommodation took place, and that when either was relieved from this supposed pressure, it would then be at full liberty, if disposed, to attack us; and that therefore we would not rely on such a state of things, even supposing it to exist at this time, as affording us sufficient security. I certainly did not say that peace in Europe would be dangerous to us, or would increase our difficulties; but that under existing circumstances, and supposing the gentleman's argument to be correct, it ought not to be relied upon, so as to render preparations for defence unnecessary. For if those powers were only prevented from attacking us, by the pressure with which they bore upon each other, the moment that pressure was removed, they would be at liberty to act as their inclinations should direct them, and might therefore then wreak their vengeance on us. The gentleman, however, corrected the mistatement made to me of what he had said. He informed the House that he did not say that these powers pressed so hard upon each other as to render us safe, but that they pressed so severely, and yet equally upon us, as to produce such a security on our part against being attacked by either, that it was unnecessary to make preparations for defence against either. I confess I could not well understand the force of this reasoning, unless it was intended to shew that these powers pressed so equally upon us, that we would not determine which to resist, and that it was entirely out of the question to resist both. If this was not what the gentleman meant to establish, I cannot comprehend very clearly what he had in view. It is not easy to see how those powers pressing with equal yet great severity upon us, should render it unnecessary to prepare the nation for defence. If it be necessary to make preparations to a certain extent for defence when threatened by one power, it will certainly be necessary to encrease those preparations, when threatened by another power of perhaps equal force, and with equal appearance of hostility. There can be no mistake in this argument. If the gentleman therefore took this position, it cannot certainly be correct. [Mr. Randolph said, that had happened in this case which frequently happened, that the report of what was said could not be relied on as correct. He frequently observed it to be the case with printed reports, and it was much more likely to be so with hear-say. The gentleman from Tennessee not having heard me state what I did say, observed Mr. R. I will repeat it, not by way of explanation, but that the gentleman may have my argument before him and exercise the whole power of his talents upon it; and I shall give it up to his mercy. I stated that if we had cause of difference with one of the belligerents only, the probability was that we might be involved in war with that one and in amity with the other. But having differences of such vast and equal magnitude with both, their equal pressure upon us not only would but had kept us in a position of neutrality towards both, being equally repelled by both from either. That accordingly our government had taken that position and determined to adhere to it; that therefore the probability was that each of those powers seeing we were driven into the arms of neither would begin to relax in order to induce us to associate with that which relaxed most in our favor; and such being our situation, that invasion was not to be apprehended, because either party invading would see that she would throw us into the arms of the other: therefore that there was no necessity for a standing force against invasion; but it was no reason why we should not take measures of general defence against all. That was my argument.] Mr. Campbell said he was perfectly satisfied to understand the argument of the gentleman in his own way, who had explained before but not to the same extent. The difference between us, said Mr. C. is the same which has existed during the whole discussion on the army bill, and will result at last in this: that, the gentleman admitting that both those powers press severely upon us, yet is of opinion that as both press equally, each is afraid to increase the pressure so as to force us into war; and that therefore preparations for defence are unnecessary; while I am of opinion that such pressure on the part of both those powers, so far from being a cause for us to relax in making preparations for defence, ought to stimulate us to redouble our preparations to defend ourselves against both or either. This is the true state of the arguments, and the House will judge which is the most correct. The gentleman's argument has some plausibility at first view, but it does not in my opinion present such ground as will satisfy the nation that no preparations for defence are necessary. For, if the conduct of each would justify us in going to war, it certainly ought to induce us to prepare to meet it, in case it should be forced upon us—and it cannot be sound policy to repose in security on the relative situation alone of those nations with regard to each other and to us, having strong evidence that their disposition towards us is not friendly, and no assurance that such situation will remain unchanged a month, a week, or even a day. I do not therefore believe that this argument as explained, though more plausible than as before understood, will support the ground taken. But it was not my intention to enter into the discussion of this point, and I only mentioned it to correct the error of the representation made by the gentleman of my argument.

The same gentleman enquired whether this resolution *was* intended as a means to get rid of the embargo, as being a measure of which we are tired and perhaps ashamed to acknowledge it. Now, sir, (said Mr. C.) I can inform that gentleman, that it is not my object to get clear of the embargo on any terms short of those stated in the resolution before you, and that, so far as regards my conduct respecting the embargo, I never have been tired of it, having done only what I considered my duty on that subject; nor am I now, nor have I ever been ashamed of it. If I had opposed every measure that had been proposed, calculated to defend my country from foreign insult, and to vindicate its violated rights, I might indeed feel the *blush* of *shame* and the *sting* of conscience; but having to the utmost of my power endeavored to put my country in a state of defence against impending dangers I am harrassed by no such feelings; I have an approving conscience that rests in quiet. If I had entertained doubts on the subject of the embargo, they would have been removed by the united voice of the people of America which would have been sufficient to convince me, that in this respect, my conduct was correct. From every quarter of the union you are informed that at the same moment the people feel the effects of the embargo, they approve the propriety and wisdom of the measure, and declare their willingness to submit to the privations it may occasion, until those powers whose conduct produced it, and on whom it was intended to operate, shall be induced to do us justice. And they do not wish that the embargo should be removed until such event takes place, unless it be for the purpose of taking a stronger ground, and then it might be unnecessary. But they would in such case, with their lives and fortunes, vindicate the violated rights and honor of their country, and wrest from those nations by their courage, that justice, which they have refused to grant them by any other means. This is the sense of the nation—19 out of 20, nay 99 out of 100, I might say, are of this opinion. They say to us in strong terms, "you are not to retract, we will go with you and support your measures, as far as may be necessary to repel encroachments on our rights, resist the injuries we have received, and secure us against further aggressions." We have therefore, sir, no cause to be ashamed of the embargo, and no man, it is believed who voted for it, has since regretted giving such vote; on the contrary many who honestly opposed it in the first instance, and did not think it essentially necessary, are now convinced that it was the salvation of your seamen, and of a vast proportion of your property—that it was the only measure that could and did preserve from capture an immense proportion of your commerce that was afloat upon the ocean, that is now secure in your country, and would otherwise have fallen a sacrifice to the orders and decrees of the belligerent powers. We are now in a state that enables us to take any ground that circumstances may require, and a few months may put it in our power to decide whether or no we must exchange the pursuits of peace for the bloody scenes of war, and this we ought to do with great reluctance. The idea that the embargo was to be a permanent measure has not been held out by any one friendly to the measure; but that it should continue until circumstances would authorise its removal, has been insisted on and ought to be supported by every friend to his country.

You are told that the embargo ought to be removed and that you ought to authorise your merchant vessels to arm in their own defence. I am not disposed to examine at large what might be the consequences of this measure. I do not say that the time may not arrive when it may be necessary; but at this time it would, in my opinion, be extremely impolitic and dangerous in its consequences. By abandoning the embargo, you would shew a want of perseverance in the measures you adopt, whilst that which you would substitute in its place, would, if alone relied on, prove feeble and inefficient, and also put it in the power of interested merchants to chuse who should be your friends and who your enemies. Arm your merchant vessels, send them to sea, and with them it will rest to say with which of the belligerent powers they will involve you in war. Nothing would be more easy than for them to embroil you with which they pleased of those powers, and fan the already kindling sparks of discontent into the flames of open war. I am not willing to lay open so wide a field for the effusion of human blood. The people of America would be justly alarmed, if they were told that a few interested, and perhaps many of them foreign, merchants, had it their power to provoke a war, that might hazard the fate of the nation and involve the blood of thousands—I will not authorise the merchant vessels to arm until you determine what power we are to resist by force, and can tell them that they shall arm against that power and that alone. We ought to distinguish our friends from our foes, & not put it in the power of any small portion of individuals to put the whole civilized world in arms against us; and it is evident this might be the consequence of such a measure.

But you are told by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Key) that you ought to repeal the embargo laws, and the reason he gives for it, is that you have already tried the experiment for five months and that it has failed. Let us examine the correctness of this statement, as to facts, and also with regard to the conclusions drawn from them. The embargo was laid on the 22nd December last, and our months have not yet since elapsed. It was not known in Great Britian, one of those nations on which it was intended chiefly to operate until about the 11th of February, and the last accounts we have seen from that country come down only to the 25th of the same month. The only experiment therefore that can be alleged to have been made is only for the space of about 12 days—and the information we possess with regard to the manner in which the embargo was received in England is not very particular and may not be very correct. However as far as it goes, it certainly does not support, but contradicts the gentleman's assertion that the experiment has failed. But will gentleman pretend to say that it could have a fair experiment or be expected to produce the desired effect in the space of 12 days—this cannot be insisted on by any candid man of reflection. But, sir, it is somewhat extraordinary, that gentlemen on this floor should assert that the embargo presses so severely on your own citizens that you must withdraw it, and that after the experiment has been made, it has failed in the object intended to be attained by it, when almost the whole nation, as far as we can assertain the general opinion, contradicts the statement, and, in a voice that cannot be mistaken assures you, that they approve the measure & will support you in it, until a fair experiment be made, until the intended object shall be obtained. This does not proved its failure.

It has been stated on this floor that you have abandoned your commerce to Great Britain, and done the very thing, and all she wished you to do—gentlemen change their positions with respect to this subject, and the grounds of their opposition to it as often as the polypus changes its color—so that it is extremely difficult to fix them to any point or principle on which they rely, or to assertain any precise object they have in view. At one time the embargo is to Great Britain a just cause of war—at another it is the very measure she desired. I leave it with gentlemen to prove to the nation the consistency of those *seemingly very inconsistent* objections; it will probably require the exertion of all their talents. It is true, sir, we have abandoned our commerce *with* Great Britain, but not *to her*—we have retired from the ocean, and in retiring have carried with us almost the whole commerce of the European world. The belligerent powers cannot carry on commerce with each other and there are no neutrals in Europe with which they can trade—what commerce then is abandoned by us to Great Britain? There is scarcely a merchant vessel that sails the ocean—she can hardly find a solitary ship to pursue—we had carried on almost the whole of the neutral trade—we were forced to abandon it—we did so—we retired and left the great Leviathan of the ocean to roam about without a solitary object upon which to prey. Let gentlemen then inform us what commerce Great Britain has acquired by this measure—they can point out none—they cannot designate a single branch of trade of any importance which Great Britain has got by our retiring. But let us notice what the first statesmen in that country say on this subject—and they seem to have furnished the full to what was said on this floor, (as has frequently been the case) with only this difference, that they stated the whole case, whereas a part only was stated here. They say that in consequence of *their* orders of council, you have abandoned your commerce as you ought to have done, and yet they enquire, what is the commerce thus abandoned? They admit they have all that is left, but they enquire what that is; they cannot ascertain it—they say there is none—and in this they are correct. With regard to the effect of the embargo, they state what has been before in substance stated on this floor, what was always considered, and so stated, would be the effect of this measure. They say the French West India islands will starve; but supposing this to be the case, they inquire what will become of their own islands, whose sole dependance for subsistence is on the commerce and productions of America? They say *they* must also starve—they inquire if a famine must be produced in England in order to supply their island with provisions, which they could not even then effect. They pursue the picture, which every one must have seen; they describe the distresses that must be produced in Great Britain itself as well as in their Islands; and ascribe the whole of these misfortunes to the orders of council of their own government. This does not go to prove that the embargo was the very measure which