

FREE AND UNLIMITED COINAGE OF SILVER.

S P E E C H

OF

HON. HARRISON KELLEY,
OF KANSAS,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

JUNE 24, 1890.



WASHINGTON.
1890.

SPEECH
OF
HON. HARRISON KELLEY.

The House having under consideration the bill (H. R. 5381) authorizing the issue of Treasury notes on deposits of silver bullion—

Mr. KELLEY said:

Mr. SPEAKER: It seems to me that this debate is the culmination of a debate that has been going on in this country for twelve or fourteen years; in other words, we are about to reach the crisis of a discussion that has had its effect upon this House and the other branch of Congress. From the remarks which have been made on this question to-day and heretofore I apprehend that most of us have learned something about this question. But many of us, after listening to the remarks of one or another gentleman, have, when he has taken his seat, come to the conclusion that upon the question of silver he knew nothing, not because he did in fact know nothing, but because we knew so much more than he did.

I have observed another thing in this controversy. Some men seem to think that because they are bankers, because they have handled a great deal of money, because they know how to collect interest and how to squeeze as much interest as possible out of the fellow who borrows the money, therefore they are financiers, they "know it all," and the man who makes the money, who produces the product, is not supposed to know anything. With that idea, Mr. Speaker, I can not agree.

Now, as a preliminary remark, I wish to say that I represent a district that does not produce a single ounce of silver. It would not be fair to accuse any one representing a district of that kind of being influenced by the bullion-producers or the bullion-holders. But, sir, I represent a district that produces other things than silver; and, in my judgment, the result of the discussion that has been going on, not only in that, but in every other district in the State of Kansas and almost every other district of the West, has been to bring the minds of the people there to the conclusion that in the demonetization of silver in this country in 1873 a great wrong was done to the producers. The people there are confident that this is so. They have discussed the question in their school-houses, in their debating societies, and upon the stump, and, in my judgment, they have discussed it as intelligently as it has been discussed in either branch of Congress. Having come to that conclusion, another conclusion has naturally followed, that if they have been wronged—if the people of this country who are producers have been obliged since that time to take less for their products

and thus have been wronged—it is no more than right now, after the fraud and theft have been perpetrated upon them for seventeen years, that justice should be done.

This, Mr. Speaker, is the conclusion of the people of the Western States almost unanimously, and it is folly to undertake to prove to the people, the Grangers and the Alliance men of the West, who have organized themselves upon this basis, that anything else is the case.

Mr. CUTCHEON. Will the gentleman yield for a question?

Mr. KELLEY. Presently.

Some gentleman, two or three, in fact, I believe, on that side, has presented the idea that now to remonetize silver would be simply giving to the bullion-holder or the bullion-producer 100 cents for 80 cents of silver. In reply to that proposition I want to say that you have not only stolen from the bullion-producer for the last seventeen years that 20 cents on the dollar, but you have stolen from the corn-producer, from the wheat-producer, from the oats-producer, and from the pork and beef producer the same sum during all of these years.

Now, the people I represent and the people that many other gentlemen represent, who represent Western constituencies, while they are producers, have also been induced—for the purpose, you may say, of speculation, but really for the purpose of improving their condition and enhancing the value of their property, making their homes better, improving the value of their lands, and building up their fortunes—they have seen fit when silver was equal with gold in 1873 to go in debt. They have issued their county bonds for the purpose of building railroads. They have issued State and city bonds for the same purpose, and in order that their children upon the Western frontiers may have equal advantages and school facilities with the children of the older States, they have issued bonds for the construction of school-houses. This was done when silver and gold were at a parity; but the moment you demonetized silver you made these bonds which they issued in payment of these various things payable in gold or its equivalent, and therefore made the interest as well as the principal of the bonds relatively worth more to the holder than they were before. And here is a continuance of that proposition to-day. The men who hold the bonds, the men who hold the mortgages, who hold the securities are all opposed to this thing, and would defeat it if they could on the theory and principle that their pocket-books would suffer, because they are opposed to making their money worth less than it is. And I am frank enough to say, Mr. Speaker, just here, that so soon as this silver is remonetized all money will be worth less and all products will be worth more than they are now.

All bonds, all mortgages, all notes, all securities, national, State, county, township, school district, or private individual, will be worth less, not because the payment, interest or principal, is any the less sure to be made, but because it is to be paid in money that is worth less, and worth less because the volume of money is greater, or to be greater; and for the same reason, Mr. Speaker, the product of the farm, the shop, the mine, the factory will be worth more—more dollars—will pay more interest on the note, on the bond, on the mortgage. In short, Mr. Speaker, this bill as it comes from the Senate in favor of free coinage is a bill in favor of the debtor class, the class that has been swindled for the last seventeen years, and the results of that swindle have been handed over to the creditor by the demonetization of silver.

Mr. Speaker, it has been common for the last few years to hear the

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Senate of the United States spoken of as the "Millionaire Club," and the feeling among the common people has been growing that the Senate was their enemy. I am very glad to be able to say that the act of the Senate in passing this bill for free coinage of silver has done more to remove that sentiment among the common people than any act that has passed the Senate for fifteen years. The Senate has had its ear to the ground, and has heard the voice of the people, and has heeded it. I hope this House will be wise enough to do likewise and give to the people what they so much need, and what they know is theirs by right. Pass this bill and it will bring joy, not only to the agriculturists of the West, but to the agriculturists of the whole country. It is heavier freighted with joy and relief in a material sense than any bill of any kind that has been considered by Congress for a decade of years.

This bill will wrong no one, it will relieve many. I beg of you to not miss this great opportunity to relieve a wronged and suffering people. I beg of you to heed not the voice of Shylock, but heed rather the voice of patriotic justice, that voice that crieth from the wilderness, "Make ye the crooked paths straight."

I say that the people who from a material standpoint are opposed to the proposition of the bondholder, the mortgage-holder, the note-holder, and the scrip-holder are the men and women who must pay the interest on the bonds and eventually must also pay their principal, are the people that are to be benefited by free coinage after seventeen years of injustice and wrong.

Now I yield to the gentleman from Michigan.

Mr. CUTCHEON. My question would have come in more properly where I first interrupted the gentleman. You stated that in the demonetization of silver in 1873, in your opinion, a great wrong was inflicted upon the producing class.

Mr. KELLEY. I did.

Mr. CUTCHEON. I wanted to ask you to state the total amount in silver dollars that has been coined by this Government from its foundation down to 1873.

Mr. KELLEY. It makes but little difference what the total is in silver dollars. It (dollars) has been emphasized on the other side in speaking of the amount coined, and in commenting upon the trick that had been played upon the people when silver was demonetized. The gentleman should remember that there were not only silver dollars coined, but half-dollars; there was no doubt fifty times as much silver coined in halves and quarters, which were all legal tender, as was coined into dollars.

Mr. CUTCHEON. Then, I will enlarge my question by asking the gentleman to state the total amount of dollars and half-dollars which had been coined by the Government up to 1873.

Mr. KELLEY. I understand the exact figures are right there in the hands of the gentleman from Minnesota, and I will ask him to give them to you.

Mr. LIND. Of silver dollars prior to 1878 about eight million had been coined.

Mr. CUTCHEON. Yes; about eight millions.

Mr. LIND. Of the other silver coins—

Mr. CUTCHEON. That is, quarters and dimes.

Mr. LIND. Yes; halves, quarters, dimes, half-dimes, and three-cent pieces, all of which were legal tender, there had been coined over \$300,000,000.

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Mr. CUTCHEON. Now, how much of this does the gentleman think was in existence after specie payments had been resumed?

Mr. KELLEY. I should say about \$308,000 from that statement. [Laughter.]

Mr. CUTCHEON. Oh, no.

Mr. KELLEY. Then, what became of it?

Mr. CUTCHEON. You know and I know that from 1861 on but very little silver was in circulation in this country.

Mr. BLAND. If the gentleman from Kansas will allow me an interruption just there.

Mr. KELLEY. Certainly.

Mr. BLAND. Prior to 1873 silver dollars were just beginning to be coined at the mint. There had been two millions of them coined two years prior to that, but for two months, about the time of the demonetization of silver, nearly a million dollars had been coined. They were coming in at the rate of half million a month, and would have come in at the rate of eight or ten millions if the coinage had not been stopped.

Mr. KELLEY. Now, Mr. Speaker, I desire to say—

The SPEAKER. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BARTINE. I yield to the gentleman a few moments longer.

Mr. KELLEY. If you will call in mind the date at the time silver was demonetized it was almost immediately after the culmination of the national debt. And the object of the people who had it demonetized, by a trick I say, and can prove—demonetized by a Congress that did not know what they were doing and by a President that when he signed that bill did not know what was in it; at that time it was about the time or soon after the public debt had culminated at its highest point.

It was, therefore, to the advantage of those men who held those bonds that they should make the money that was in those bonds, and the interest as well as the principal, worth as much as possible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one more idea, and that is that at the time that Germany demonetized silver it was immediately after the war with France, when France was compelled to pay to Germany a great amount of tribute for damages that she had sustained. After obtaining the bonds from France, the obligation of France, for the purpose of indicating how much she owed Germany, Germany proceeded to make her money more valuable, in order that every dollar of principal and interest paid her by France should also be worth more to her; and it is the exact reverse of this proposition that we are asking for to-day. Therefore I say this is a crisis of a discussion that has been going on in this country, and it is a subject that is as well, if not better, understood by the great majority of the people of this country, especially the people of the West and the Northwest, than by the members of this House.

Now, Mr. Speaker, another idea. You will all remember that shortly after the culmination of the war, at high tide, when the debt of this country was near its height, the subject came up and troubled the minds of many as to how we would ever be able to pay that debt, and the idea was suggested to Abraham Lincoln, that great man who was always so full of good sense and common sense that he could apply to any business or other proposition, and he said to them, "The money is not in sight to pay this debt to-day, but we have an intimation that in the West and the Southwest there are mountains of silver." Said

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he, "I think there is more than enough silver there to pay it. But little of it has been taken out as yet, but it seems to me that that is to be the solution of this question, that the silver to pay this debt is to come from the mountains of the West and the Southwest." And added that every inducement should be offered to the miner to take it out. Little did Abraham Lincoln think at that time that the very proposition he was submitting was to be shorn of its power, its virtue, and its strength by the very party that held the obligations of this Government, and that indicated how much was to be paid.

Mr. KERR, of Iowa. Can you point to the time when Lincoln made this remark?

Mr. KELLEY. It was but a few days, or weeks, before he was assassinated. I do not remember the exact time.

One other idea, Mr. Speaker, and that is this: A celebrated statesman, a gentleman who lives in Illinois and who has lived there for a number of years, who was a compatriot of Abraham Lincoln, who has nearly as much sense as Lincoln had, as nearly so as any man I know of—I refer to Oglesby—has said that much of the success of his life, politically at any rate, was due to following the advice of that wise and sagacious statesman, Abraham Lincoln, when he said to him, "Dick, you want to keep your ear to the ground, and hear the voice of the people as soon as possible, and follow that voice wherever it leads; and remember always that the people will never lead you wrong." I say, Mr. Speaker, that the people of this country, and by them I mean the great mass of the people, I do not mean those who own the bonds or own the mortgages, because they are not the one-fiftieth part of the people—I say that the people, the voters who make Congress and who make Presidents, have voiced with no uncertain sound what their disposition and their desire is upon this question.

Now, Mr. Speaker, speaking of this crisis that I think is about to culminate, I think we are either about to make or unmake the farmers of the West and the producers of the West, as well as of the East; for I want you to understand, as I think you well know, that the agricultural interests of the East are nearly as much depressed as those of the West. And I say that in this crisis we are either about to give the farmer and the producer the instrument with which they can help themselves to pay off the mortgages and be relieved from the bondholders and the mortgage-holders, or we are about to retain that power and that instrument from them and to make them forever the slaves of the bondholders and the slaves of the holders of their obligations.

It has been repeatedly asserted upon this floor, for the purpose I think of influencing votes upon this question, that if this bill is passed it will receive the veto of the Executive of this Government. Well, I do not believe in that kind of an argument, but inasmuch as it has been made, I want to put alongside of it this other argument and this further advice, that gentlemen should keep their ears close to the ground and listen to the voice of the people; because when this question is voted upon to-morrow it will decide the question whether many of the members of this House shall return to the next House, or whether their seats are to be occupied by others. [Applause.]

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