

REMONETIZATION OF SILVER.

S P E E C H

OF

HON. J. D. CAMERON,
OF PENNSYLVANIA,

IN THE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1893.

WASHINGTON,
1893.

SPEECH
OF
HON. J. D. CAMERON.

The Senate having under consideration the bill (H. R. 1) to repeal a part of an act, approved July 14, 1890, entitled "An act directing the purchase of silver bullion and the issue of Treasury notes thereon, and for other purposes"—

Mr. CAMERON said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: The Senate will admit that I do not often occupy its time. Nothing but conviction that our action now is vital to the public interest forces me to speak to-day.

I shall begin by calling your closest attention, not to my own views, but to those of Mr. Gladstone, the prime minister of England, given officially by him in the House of Commons, on the 28th of last February, when the silver question was last debated. As far as I know, this is the latest, and most formal, as well as most explicit statement of the British Government on the subject.

England—

Said Mr. Gladstone—

is the great creditor of the countries of the world; of that there can be no doubt whatever; and it is increasingly the great creditor of the countries of the world. I suppose there is not a year which passes over our heads which does not largely add to the mass of British investments abroad. I am almost afraid to estimate the total amount of the property which the United Kingdom holds beyond the limits of the United Kingdom; but of this I am well convinced, that it is not to be estimated by tens or hundreds of millions. One thousand millions probably would be an extremely low and inadequate estimate. Two thousand millions, or something even more than that, is very likely to be nearer the mark. I think, under these circumstances, it is rather a serious matter to ask this country to consider whether we are going to perform this supreme act of self-sacrifice.

I will not trouble you further with Mr. Gladstone's remarks, although he went on to develop his idea in terms even more forcible than those I have quoted. Senators can read the debate for themselves. I have no wish to excite angry feelings against anyone, whether abroad or at home; but you will observe that the "supreme act of self-sacrifice," which Mr. Gladstone considers to be contrary to the interests of England as the great creditor of the countries of the world, is the attempt to maintain or restore to silver the function of serving as money.

I am tempted to sit down and leave this speech of Mr. Gladstone to stand alone as the ground for the vote I shall give on the bill now before us. It is ground enough. To my mind it carries conviction as to the true course of an American; but everyone can not be expected to leap at once across a gap which represents a lifetime of my feelings and thoughts; and not one

lifetime only, but fully two hundred years of American history. I trust the Senate will have patience with me if I explain what seems to me, and perhaps to them, self-evident. I want to carry with me their unanimous assent.

More than once in this debate we have heard the remark that the United States are the greatest country in the world. The sentiment is no doubt patriotic and honorable, although I am not sure that it is perfectly good taste; but if the fact is true, or if it is even partly true, I would like to ask Senators what our national greatness consists of. Some will say that it consists in the energy and numbers of our citizens: in their virtues, their intelligence, their education, their enlightenment; in the extent and resources of their territory, and its unrivaled variety of blessings; in its agriculture, its minerals, its rivers, and its lakes.

To all these titles to greatness I will add another. The chief claim of our nation to merit in the eyes of us who have a share in its government and in the eyes of every republican citizen, white or black, rich or poor, whose opinion we regard, is that from first to last, on all occasions and in every form, America has asserted the most emphatic possible negative to the policy and methods of the moneyed power of England. From the day when the Pilgrims founded Plymouth to the day when Penn founded Philadelphia; from the day when the tea was thrown into Boston harbor to the day when Washington was inaugurated President; from the day when Jefferson imposed his embargo to the day when the civil war ended, and down to the day we passed the act now under discussion, the chief interest of our history in the eyes of America or Europe has been its successful protest against the ideas and interests of the moneyed power of England, whether that power was for the moment embodied in church or king, in a landed aristocracy or in a trading monopoly.

On this point I imagine we are agreed. I will not argue it. You will all admit its truth, and I am in haste to show its force. You know that our statute books are crammed with legislation, all of which rests on direct negation of British principles and practices. Our form of government was itself devised on those lines. We have framed our entire administrative system, down to minute details, in the same spirit. We have fostered and protected the small landowner; we have protected manufactures; we have protected shipping; we have protected our citizens and seamen; we have, so far as we could, under any and all our party changes, even when we changed our methods, still preserved the radical policy which, whether under Federalist or Republican, Whig or Democrat, has always been to maintain a negative on what we thought, and still think, the mistakes of the money power of England.

I want to say nothing harsh or offensive, but here we are on delicate ground, and I must, in the least unpleasant way possible, explain why our people have so invariably followed this course. Americans are a sensible race, and far from vindictive or narrow. They have good reasons for all their acts, and especially for their fundamental principles. The reason for their attitude towards England is that, ever since America was discovered, England has been controlled by its moneyed interests;

and all Americans, at all periods of their history, have believed that the moneyed interests of England were selfish, cruel, and aggressive, as well as sordid, to a degree that made them dangerous to all the world and fatal to the weak.

If this point is clear, I will for an instant revert to Mr. Gladstone's speech of February 28, in which he has laid down, in its most explicit form, officially, the policy of the moneyed interests of England, which was the same evening approved and adopted by a large majority of the House of Commons. England, he said, because it is increasingly the great creditor of the countries of the world, could not be expected to perform the supreme act of self-sacrifice implied in restoring silver to its function as money. That is clear, is it not? The official avowed policy of England is to prevent the restoration of silver to its function as money because the moneyed interests of England require, or think they require, a monometallic gold standard.

I have stated the case with great moderation, and have cast not a word of blame on Mr. Gladstone, who merely represents a policy which England has always followed and avowed. I hope that I have carried every Senator with me down to this point, and, if so, I can not see how they can refuse to go with me in taking the next step. Any further measure which tends to discredit silver is, at least for the moment, a furtherance of the British policy; it tends to support the monometallic gold standard.

In voting against such a measure, I stand, therefore, on assured ground. The whole history of the American people for two hundred and fifty years, every precedent of every party in American politics, the entire mass of our legislation, every principle of our national polity supports me. My vote needs no defense. If any one is to offer explanation or excuse for his vote it is not I; it is the Senators who vote on the other side. The burden of proving their case rests on them.

Here I would stop, confident that Senators must all assent to the force of the reasoning, but many of my friends who agree that, as so stated, my reasoning is sound, and that the burden of proof does rest on them, advocate this measure on the ground that it is in reality hostile to the British policy; that the further depreciation of silver will increase the difficulties of England, especially in India, and will in the end force her to unite with us in restoring silver to its function as money.

I can not admit this argument as a proper basis for our legislation. The idea of legislating for the purpose of embarrassing a foreign government is neither dignified nor safe. I do not care to embarrass England or any other government. Such a motive is not fit to be acted upon; still less to be avowed. Further, I doubt its success. All history proves that the moneyed interest of England never recoils before such difficulties as are suggested by this line of argument. If India suffers, India will have to submit. If the people are ruined, they will have to die. If the laboring class in England resists, it will be starved out, or will be shot down. This has been invariable experience. The moneyed interest of Great Britain will never yield until it is ruined; and if ruin is impending over it, the ruin will come without our aid.

I am therefore reluctantly obliged to dissent from my friends on this ground. Here again I might stop, and leave to Senators on the other side the task of justifying their votes, of establishing the proof of their case which I do not need for mine: but the State which I have the honor in part to represent has a right to ask more than this from the men she has chosen to express her feelings and watch over her interests here. Pennsylvania has not, as a rule, been ignored in national legislation. Her opinions have weighed for much; her interests have counted for still more.

How does this much-abused Sherman act injure Pennsylvania? In no way whatever. Under this act we increase the currency now about \$36,000,000 a year, barely enough to meet the needs of the natural increase of population. In a very few years this act will be a measure of absolute contraction. It will unduly restrict the coinage. The people of Pennsylvania want even now, and expressly require, a greater increase than this, and ask for it in paper. But what advantage has paper over silver, which has at least an intrinsic value equal to 50 per cent of its nominal value in gold, and is also guaranteed by our gold reserve, whereas the paper would be guaranteed by the gold alone.

My friends admit this, but they say that this silver, hanging over the market, terrifies capital; prevents foreigners from investing in our securities; drives out gold, and paralyzes enterprise. Granting that we repeal this act, and granting even that you discard silver altogether, if we can find two or three or four hundred millions of gold to take its place, does any Senator venture to maintain that the sense of security will be greater? On the contrary, are we not all agreed that the danger of panic will be increased? I take no account now of the possible increase in the relative value of gold which might follow the increased demand for it. I ask you only to look at the present condition of Germany and Austria, and tell me whether any sane man, who sees the nervous apprehension caused there by the export of every few thousand of gold coins, can possibly maintain that we in America should feel safer under such a constant terror?

The condition of Europe is, in every point of view, much worse, far more complicated, and infinitely more alarming than ours. I am not, I admit, as a mere matter of personal opinion, especially anxious to see much foreign capital come here; but the probability of its coming depends far less on our silver than on their political and social prospects. This leads me to another necessary point in the situation. What is to be the effect of stopping silver coinage on our political and social conditions? Does any Senator think it will quiet them? On this point I might say much, but I want to be brief. I am not used to occupying your time. A few minutes will be enough.

We all know the history of the Sherman act. In effect it was a compromise between somewhat violent interests; a compromise in which the silver miners, the manufacturers, and the gold men acquiesced. The miners got a market for their silver; the manufacturers got a market for their goods; other interests were conciliated in their turn. In spite of this agreement, silver continued to fall, or gold to rise, I care not which. The Govern-

ment of England, in a sudden panic for fear that we should stop our silver coinage first, decided that something must be done, and, against the long-expressed wishes of India, the mint was closed. Silver fell; a panic followed here, and nearly the entire press and the whole capitalist class joined in calling for the closure of our mints, too.

In this cry the voice of the manufacturers was among the loudest, yet obviously the interest of the manufacturers was with silver, not with gold. I will not argue this point, which will be clear enough to those who care to study it. If the silver is sacrificed, the manufacturers will be responsible for it; and in that case, I take it for granted that the silver States will revenge themselves by throwing all their weight on the side of a reduction of the tariff. Our manufacturers might flourish on low silver and a high tariff; they must perish on gold and a low tariff.

My tariff friends may look on this prospect with equanimity, but I advise them to talk seriously with their constituents before acting, for the time may come when the mill owners and mill operatives will hold them responsible for any evils that may follow. For my part I feel a deep sense of responsibility to my people. I do not want to see the time when what is now passing in England shall happen in Pennsylvania, and a hundred and fifty thousand miners starving for food after a strike which has already lasted two months shall unanimously vote to continue the strike even if they die for it, rather than consent to a reduction of their wages.

The British miners, half a million of them, are to be starved into accepting low wages in order that the British Government may enhance the value of the gold in which America pays the interest on her British debts. The process is one which I would gladly avoid. The British Government may prefer to shoot its miners, as it has lately done. I do not think that a Senator of the United States should legislate with a view to shooting his constituents.

Pennsylvania for two hundred years has followed one invariable system. She never aims to destroy, but she tries to create, to preserve, to produce. She does not want to irritate, but to conciliate; she wants union, not discord. She tries to be gentle with the weak; to be liberal to the poor; to be generous even to her enemies, if she has any. All her influence has ever been exerted not to separate, but to unite. Within the limits of this Union her duty and her interest combine to make of her the peacemaker who comes between contending forces, receiving sometimes the blows of each, but strong enough to befriend both. Beyond the limits of this Union she has never much cared to go. The rest of the world may do what it pleases; Pennsylvania has always been satisfied to mind her own business.

Acting now on these fixed principles which start and end in common facts that command, I hope, your unanimous assent, I can do nothing to hurt the interests or the feelings of another State. I will not vote to ruin Colorado or Nevada. I will vote to help them, and in return I will ask their help to assist the other weak interests that are struggling throughout the Union for existence against heavy odds. I will vote in such a way as to lighten the many difficulties of the Southern States, and aid

them to keep abreast of the national movement. I will give support to every portion of our Union, remote or near, but I will not knowingly deny assistance to any, least of all to a weak or struggling State. Pennsylvania sent me here to be generous as well as to be practical, and you may be sure she will stand by me.

Then my propositions are these: We all agree that, with Europe and Asia in their present critical state of equilibrium, any silver or paper currency needs a larger guaranty than usual. For that purpose I propose a gold loan of so many hundred million dollars as Congress may decide, to be bought at the market rate, and held in the Treasury as the gold reserve is held in the Bank of France and by the governments of the Latin Union.

I propose to open our mints to the free coinage of American silver, imposing a duty on the import of foreign silver.

I propose further, for the benefit of the poorer and weaker States, especially in the South, to repeal the tax on State bank circulation; a measure which is intended to give them a free hand in moving their own crops, developing their resources, and relieving them from their servitude to the great capitalist cities. I look to no effect, or but little, from this step, as far as the North is concerned.

I would also press once more for action in favor of our shipping. The bill for that purpose is known to you, and neither its object nor its methods should be a matter of party division.

To meet, in part, the deficit of our income for next year, I would reimpose the duty of 2 cents a pound on sugar, and repeal the bounty.

Then I would wait a year to see how the system worked, and how far we were affected by foreign influence.

As for our foreign exchanges, they are automatic and will take care of themselves under any system. They have done so when we had no currency at all, when we had gold, when we had irredeemable paper, and when we had silver. If Europe wants our gold, let her have it if she can pay for it, that is to say, all except the gold in our Treasury.

No general or special legislation is likely to pass this Senate unless it is comprehensive enough to command practically universal assent. To that object I have addressed myself. If any other Senator brings forward a scheme more comprehensive, more liberal, conceived in a spirit of wider or more generous union, I will give him my support.