

It is the love and fealty I bear to the cause of Democracy that has prompted me to keep silent and strain every nerve in an effort to conform, if possible, to the wishes and policy of the powers that be in the Democratic party; but, sir, when I see the mantle of Democracy used to cover Republican monopolists while they rob the great common people, this same sentiment that has prompted me to silence and obedience bids me imperatively to call a halt and revolt against such an imposition upon Democracy and justice as is now proposed.

S P E E C H

OF

HON. JOHN L. M. IRBY,
OF SOUTH CAROLINA,

IN THE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1893.

WASHINGTON.
1893.

SPEECH
OF
HON. JOHN L. M. IRBY.

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. IRBY said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: I am the only farmer in the Senate, the only member of this body whose sole occupation is farming. I represent the farming element of South Carolina, but I can also say, for I feel that I represent the farming and producing element of the entire nation. I believe that it will not be denied that the farmers of this country have a deep, vital interest in the great question now at issue before the Senate. That interest is not something new. Their relations to the money question, while they have always been close, became very prominent and came home to them in a most practical and substantial manner when the demonetization of silver was effected in 1873. That was to them a new era, not unlike that, in many respects, of the new conditions with which they were confronted at the close of the war. When the war closed the soldier of the South returned to a land which had lost everything. The difficulties with which he was beset have often been described, but I believe never with adequate force or detail, nor shall I attempt it now.

I could perhaps sum it all up in the statement that he came out of the war without money, without home, and without hope. He left ruin behind him as he approached his home, and he found it there on his return. His fields were abandoned for years, the soil had deteriorated, debts had accumulated, his home was in ruins; there was utter desolation at home and in the fields. The returned farmer, and even those who were not soldiers, began life anew, opposed by obstacles such as seldom fall to the lot of an industrious people.

I could draw a picture of the misfortunes, the terrible struggles made by my people to restore their fallen fortunes, of the heroic sacrifices, of the long and patient endurance of want, self-denial, and all the ills of enforced poverty; but as I have said that has all been vividly depicted in the history written and unwritten of our country. But through all that trying period our people remained as they were from the beginning, Democrats of Democrats. Although bankrupt in fortune, they clung with devotion to their political heritage, and, by the indomitable courage which they exhibited on the field of battle, they had to a large extent recouped their fortunes in the period from 1865 to 1873, when the act destroying the money of the plain people was passed.

From that time to this the farmer has grown poorer and

poorer, but through it all he has stood like an iron wall in defense of the principles and doctrines of the Democratic party, hoping through this agency to be allowed to make an honest living and to get pay for his services as a laborer, a toiler, and producer. His main reliance for this end was the restoration of the Democratic party to power in both branches of Congress; but it has been in vain, for now that we are in control we are asked to yield to the forces which have always and persistently opposed us.

As the representative of our people I would be derelict in my duty were I to fail at this time to voice their sentiments and to utter in this presence their solemn protest against what is now threatened to be enacted. Our people are Democrats from principle. The Democratic party is their party. They do not propose to be driven out of it by the President or any of the self-constituted leaders of the Democratic party of this nation. A party is what the people who belong to it make it and demand that it shall be. My people were honestly opposed in the first place to the nomination of Mr. Cleveland. I am now opposed to the proposition under discussion. I am opposed to it because it is wrong and undemocratic. I am opposed to it as a man, as a Senator, and as a Democrat.

This country is now supposed to have a Democratic majority in the House and Senate and a Democratic Executive, and I wish to say that no man in this honorable body, or out of it, has tried harder to reconcile his ideas of duty and responsibility with the wishes of the Executive and his friends, who now propose to coerce the Senate, than I have. I come, sir, from the cradle of true Democracy. It has produced some of the greatest and best Democratic statesmen that ever lived. I believe as firmly in Democratic principles as I do in my Bible, and I always will contend that the only way to steer the ship of state clear of the shoals and rocks of socialism and anarchy, is by a return to true Democratic principles in the administration of affairs.

It is the love and fealty I bear to the cause of Democracy that has prompted me to keep silent and strain every nerve in an effort to conform, if possible, to the wishes and policy of the powers that be in the Democratic party; but, sir, when I see the mantle of Democracy used to cover Republican monopolists while they rob the great common people, this same sentiment that has prompted me to silence and obedience bids me imperatively to call a halt and revolt against such an imposition upon Democracy and justice as is now proposed. I can not keep my seat and see the banner of Democracy submerged in the cesspool of Wall street greed, nor can I remain silent and see it polluted to the basest uses by the protected hand of monopolistic avarice from New England.

Call it what you will, I propose to stand for true Democracy, so true, in fact, that I will denounce those who propose and follow Republican methods while masquerading in Democratic clothes, no matter who they may be—even to the President himself. I am deeply grieved to say this, but honesty and truth compel me, and before I shall have finished my brief remarks—for I shall only occupy a few minutes—I propose to draw the line of demarcation between the Democracy and the Administration methods of to-day so plainly that never again in the history of this country need they be confounded.

I am opposed to this measure as a man because my manhood revolts against the idea of settling a great national question by the physical endurance of the Senators. It is both humiliating and futile: Humiliating because it is an effort to apply cloture by physical force in order to shirk the moral responsibility; and is a mere makeshift that must excite the contempt of thinking, decent and honest people throughout the world: Futile because the minority can not, will not yield while life remains. I mean by this that knowing as I do that a large majority of the people of South Carolina are not in favor of the repeal of the Sherman law without substituting some provision that will improve the financial system of the nation, it is my duty, and the duty of all who believe as I do, to resist any and all physical opposition to us in the discharge of our obligations and responsibilities as long as there is a breath of life in us. We have no alternative compatible with honor: and should we die at our posts I have no doubt that our constituents would elect others to fill our places who would do the same. Hence the barbarous effort to coerce by brute force must in the end prove futile.

I am opposed to it as a Senator because it is incompatible with the dignity of this honorable body. This is the highest deliberative body in the nation. Here we have many of our wisest men, questions presented are weighed by men of the most mature judgment and experience, and to admit that any question can not be decided by reason and discussion without a personal conflict of physical force or endurance is to reflect upon the sincerity of the members of this honorable body. It is contrary to the laws and usages which have always governed the deliberations of the Senate. Every law and usage of this body from its foundation has been based upon the presumption that here Senators would engage in mental conflict only. It is contrary to the Constitution of the United States, because according to that democratic document the three branches of the Government were supposed to be coördinate and independent of each other, and this effort to coerce this body at the bidding of the Executive is a bold and flagrant violation of the spirit of the Constitution which if now tolerated, will be a precedent for the future prostitution of the Senate to the complete and absolute domination of the Executive.

I have said that my people were opposed from the first to the nomination of Mr. Cleveland. They entered their protest, violent as some people would say, in May, 1892, opposing his nomination. For this they have been condemned, but unjustly so. They opposed him through their representatives to the very last at Chicago, but, true and loyal Democrats as they have always been, they supported him at the general election and gave him 50,000 majority over Mr. Harrison, thereby giving practical demonstration of their devotion to the Democracy. They believed that the Democratic party of this nation would be true to the promises of its platform, and with this understanding they supported Mr. Cleveland.

For myself I have always been a Democrat. I have never voted other than the Democratic ticket. I have the honor to be the chairman of the Democratic party in South Carolina. By the Democratic party I was elected to the high position which I now hold; but as a Democrat, true, as I sincerely believe, to all of its principles, I must demand that a halt be called upon this un-

usual, irregular, and outrageous proceeding by Senators favoring the unconditional repeal of the purchasing clause of the Sherman law.

If the Democratic party are responsible for the laws which are enacted or repealed during this Administration, the Democrats alone should decide the policy of our party. I would be willing to submit this or any other question to the caucus of the Democrats of this Congress, and if a majority decide against my opinions I should yield; but I must and do now most solemnly protest against the right of a minority of the Democratic Senators to use Republicans to coerce into submission a majority of the Democratic Senators and to enact laws to which the Democratic party of this nation are opposed.

We believe that it was unjust, unfair, and undemocratic for the national convention to use the representatives of Republican States to foist upon us a nominee that does not represent us, but it is also flagrantly wrong that that nominee, after his election, should use the Republican party to pass laws that mean ruin and destruction to the plainer and poorer class of the South and West. We are told that it is all right for the minority to desert the platform and use Republicans to enact this law which a majority of Democrats oppose, but that it would be treason for me to desert the platform upon the question of tariff reform.

This is a palpable absurdity, because the Administration forces, by allying themselves with Republicans to enact measures in the interest of the wealthy and favored class and opposed to the interest of the masses of the people, establish a precedent and place themselves in an attitude which not only justifies us who I truly believe represent the people, but makes it in my opinion our bounden duty to oppose such tariff laws as may meet the approval and be presented by this unholy alliance. If this great crime against the people is perpetrated by them in regard to this, the most important of all the legislative questions now before the people, I dare to not follow them, and my people will sustain me, upon the other questions of lesser importance.

And when I say that I will not follow them upon other questions, I mean to convey the idea that the people of South Carolina will no longer follow the leadership of men who assume that they are the Democratic party of the nation and reflect and give utterance alone to true Democratic principles and doctrines.

I mean to say that any tariff law, any revision of the tariff which shall be offered here under the same auspices as those which now propose to commit the crime against silver, will be open to such suspicion as to preclude any Democrat from lending it his support. A tariff law, sir, prepared by the hybrid political alliance, now marshalling its ranks for the suppression by force of the voice of the people in this Chamber, must inevitably be regarded by the rank and file of the Democracy of the United States as a part of the conspiracy against silver desired to be consummated here. Such being the case, when I assume the attitude that I have indicated, I believe that I speak for the people of my State.

As for them and myself, there could never be a desertion of, any withdrawal from the Democratic party, so long as it pursues the policies of its platform. The Democrats of the United States, sir, prefer to follow the platform of the Democratic party than

that contingent of the Democratic Senators who have plainly abandoned the platform on this question, and who, sustained by the Executive, are endeavoring to commit a crime, which, in my judgment, could never be expiated except by the utter overthrow of the Democratic party at the next national election.

The people of my State want a revision of the tariff, but they are willing that this question shall be relegated to the rear for a quarter of a century rather than to see the financial question solved in the manner proposed by the Administration. I know that I represent my people when I tell you that, with tariff revision and the demonetization of silver, they would be still hopelessly wrecked; for what good would the revision of the tariff do them if they were so poor that they could not reap the benefit of the low prices under an alleged revised tariff? I know that I represent them when I tell you as a Democrat that I will not be coerced. I despise the patronage which has been so ruthlessly withheld from 90 per cent of the honest and genuine Democrats of my State.

If it is found necessary to overpower us with Republican votes in this Senate I dare to tell you that you can not revise the tariff. You may call that treason, but I answer if that be treason make the most of it. I desire, however, on this point to be distinctly understood, and to make myself perfectly plain to the minds of every Senator present and the country at large in making this statement. I do not make it as a threat nor for the purpose of coercing, or introducing any element of violence into this discussion. I make it with reluctance and deep regret, and would gladly avoid the responsibility of taking this position, but I believe it a solemn duty to the producers of this nation in every State, and especially to the noble, patriotic, and liberty-loving people of South Carolina, to raise the hand of warning and place those who seem intoxicated with power, upon positive notice that if they ruthlessly and by the aid of Republican votes override our wishes in this, the most important of all the questions of public policy, I for one will not follow their lead another step.

I do not wish for a moment to be understood as wavering in my allegiance to the importance of tariff reform, but this measure I deem of the greatest importance, and I firmly believe that it has the unqualified indorsement of a majority of the people, but the tariff law, when presented in this body, if it ever is presented for a vote, will be decided by a strict party vote, and I am unwilling to follow a fraction of the Democratic party that will prepare that law after they have depended upon the Republican party to assist them in carrying a measure of more importance—the repeal of the purchasing clause of the Sherman law.

I mean by this to say that the presumption is clear and conclusive, on account of the present attitude of the Administration and its friends toward the Republican contingent in Congress, that they have made concessions and agreements in regard to tariff reform and the retention of Republicans in office in exchange for Republican support of the pending measure. Believing this, I conceive the position which I now and here take to be the only one compatible with true Democracy and personal honor.

The Administration may coerce, command, and control one branch of Congress and perhaps some members of this body, but it can not and will not control me or my people. As for myself,

I am not one of the silver men who ask for or will accept any compromise short of the free and unlimited coinage of silver at a ratio of 16 to 1, or the complete rehabilitation of silver as a money metal.

This issue is broader and deeper than the mere dollars and cents involved in the solution of the silver problem or any solution of the money question. It goes to the very foundations of this system of government, and calls for a decision upon the possibility of the perpetuation of Democratic institutions. A free government, such as this, can only exist while it commands the patriotism, love, and fealty of its subjects; and it can only reach a higher development and a more glorious achievement by bestowing its greatest rewards and honors upon wisdom, merit, integrity, honesty, virtue, frugality, and industry, thereby encouraging those virtues and stimulating the youth of the land to strive for them.

On the other hand, when political success is known to be the result of low cunning or the suppression of principle, and the highest gifts and honors of the nation are bestowed as a reward for a pliant conscience, a premium is placed upon corruption, and it would be a thousand times better to sweep away all semblance of popular government at once and resort to a monarchy. Despotism crushes, while corruption debases. Of all things, corrupt practices and methods, which depend upon the corrupt use of power for success, are most to be dreaded in this form of government. It is better, sir, for the present ills to continue until we can agree upon a just and equitable solution of them, than to submit to the youth of this nation the sad and humiliating spectacle of a Democratic minority combining with the Republicans under the whip and spur of the Executive in order to legislate in opposition to the wishes and financial interests of the great masses of the people.

Again, I bid you of the opposition halt! Halt before it is forever too late. We have now come to the forks of the road, and I, for one, will perish before I prove recreant to the high trust reposed in me by the true Democracy of South Carolina. Apply the torture you propose, if you will, but the proud spirit of American liberty will no more heed such tactics than the chaste moon heeds the baying of a mangy cur. This proud, this grand, this truly American spirit of pure Democracy, will pass on to higher and grander achievement based on absolute truth, equity, and justice.

From the very moment you vote to perpetrate this proposed act, which I believe to be a crime against the productive interests of the nation, neither my people nor I will longer follow your lead.

Again, and in conclusion, I beg of you as you love your country and its glorious history, halt! As you love the Democratic party and its pure principles, halt! And as you love the priceless boon of civil liberty, and would transmit it as an unstained heritage to posterity, halt! I have given you fair warning, and if the Democracy be now divided the entire responsibility must rest upon you. [Applause in the galleries.]