

Repeal of the Sherman Act.

SPEECH

OF

HON. CHARLES M. COOPER,

OF FLORIDA,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Thursday, August 17, 1893.

The House 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. COOPER of Florida said:

Mr. SPEAKER: I should not intrude for a moment upon the attention of this House, wearied already with the long discussion of what may be called the same question, day after day, if it were not for the fact that I stand here in a position of my own and to some extent with views of my own. Standing as I do as the Representative of a far Southern agricultural district, being as I am a sincere friend of silver, but a sincere believer in bimetallism as well, anxious as I am to vote for any reasonable and practicable measure that would afford to the people of this country from time to time such sound and sufficient increase in currency as their necessities may require, yet in the face of the present situation, exercising my judgment on the facts as I see them, and voting in the interests of my people as I see them, I shall vote for the repeal of the Sherman law as proposed by the gentleman from West Virginia [Mr. WILSON], and shall vote against each and every one of the propositions contained in the proposed amendments suggested by the gentleman from Missouri. (Applause).

Mr. Speaker, I have sat here day after day and listened to abstract discussions of financial theories; and all the time there has been in my mind a question of which I could at no time divest myself; and yet men from my section do not seem to think it worthy of consideration, much less of answer. That question is where, in a few weeks from now, is the money to come from to buy and to move the cotton crop and the other crops of this country? I picked up a paper yesterday, and saw that the merchants and bankers of Savannah are trying to get authority to

issue scrip to pay for cotton. Savannah is the cotton market of Florida; and am I to stand here and in the face of the prospects that the farmers of Florida will have to sell their cotton at a depreciated price and for due bills or for scrip, with all that that means to them, with all of inconvenience and all of loss in the shaving of such papers, and am I not even to give them the chance of the only remedy that any one suggests as a means of supplying immediate money?

Mr. Speaker, some gentlemen here have intimated that Southern members who voted for the Wilson bill, and did not vote for any of the specified and limited methods to which they were wedded, of supplying a substitute for the Sherman law, would have an indignant constituency to answer. I say to them that when that day comes I will not be afraid to stand up with them and make my answer while they make theirs. [Applause.] I will say to my people, "I voted to give you the only immediate relief that was possible, at least the only thing which offered a prospect for immediate relief."

Those gentlemen may say to their constituents, what? They may read them their long and more or less learned and more or less eloquent disquisitions upon silver. Perhaps these will be accepted as a sufficient answer, and perhaps those men who have gone down into ruin through their inefficiency and delay will say so them: "We asked you for bread, and you gave us wind." [Applause.]

Mr. Speaker, as I have sat here and looked out upon this House my mind has unavoidably wandered to other scenes far distant. I have seen the farmer coming into his country town to sell his cotton, his money crop, and, unfortunately, too often his only money crop, and finding no buyer, because there is no money to buy it with, or having to sacrifice it at a depreciation because of the inadequate supply of money. I have seen the country merchant who had to carry the farmers through the year, pressed by his creditors, unable to make collections, unable to get accommodation from his local bank, the banks unable to make collections, deposits cut off, and all of those men going down into one common vortex of ruin, while we discuss the views of various financiers, modern and ancient, upon silver and gold and bimetallicism, and so forth, and so on. [Applause.]

Now, my friends, what is the cause of this depression, and what is to be the means of relief? As to its cause, in the first place, we have the statements of nearly all the business men of this country, that it is caused by the Sherman purchase law.

I am a lawyer, to some extent at least, and even in a court room where we are limited to absolute proofs of facts, we at least accept the opinions of experts, and we know that all the experts of this country, except a few gentlemen who are immediately interested in the production of silver, agree that such is the cause, and this goes far toward proving it.

Now, my friends, there has been a little suggestion upon the Republican side of this Chamber that this depression is caused chiefly by the prospect of tariff reform. I am not going to get off into tariff reform, but I will say just this about it, that the weakness of that statement is that it is not true. [Applause.] I do not know the affairs of every mill, or every mercantile or

banking concern in this country, but I have inquired far and near, and as far as I could obtain information, the concerns that are shutting up in this country and throwing men out of employment are not closing up for lack of orders. They are not closing up because they can not get orders for future delivery, or arrive at any basis of contract with those who desire to purchase. They are not closing up because they are insolvent concerns, but they are closing up for two reasons—one that they can not get the actual cash to run their business and to pay their men, and the other that on account of this financial stringency they fear to fill future orders, lest their customers will not be able to pay for them. That is it.

Now, my friends, these things demonstrate that the immediate cause at least of this depression is a lack of money, and we have a general agreement that this lack of confidence was brought about by this law. Why, no less eminent an authority on the silver side of this question than Senator JONES of Nevada stated, in a magazine article only the other day that you could maintain government money at par so long as the people believed that the Government could redeem it, or did not apprehend that the Government would be unable to redeem it. Therefore, he said, you can not base money upon gold alone, because the people will soon learn that there is not gold enough in the world to redeem outstanding obligations, and they will go below par.

It has been said that the Sherman law was not an adequate cause for this depression; but we all know, who know anything about it, that the business men of this country, and the business men and most of the financiers of every other country, had anticipated and expected this depression; that they have believed that the country can not continue to carry the accumulation of silver under the Sherman law; and, upon even the authority of Senator JONES, that makes the Sherman law an adequate cause for the present depression. [Applause.]

Mr. LIVINGSTON. Will the gentleman allow me to make a suggestion to him?

Mr. COOPER of Florida. I will, with pleasure.

Mr. LIVINGSTON. If the certificates issued under the purchasing clause of the Sherman act have created a burden upon the Treasury, will you explain why it is that these certificates are at a premium in New York and all over the country?

Mr. COOPER of Florida. I think I can. In the first place I never said that the certificates were a burden upon the people. I said that the want of confidence in the business men originated in a belief that the country would not be able to go on continuously accumulating silver and issuing Sherman notes. I believe that the purchase of silver and the issuing of these notes had broken down the public confidence. [Applause.] Breaking down public confidence caused the people to run upon the banks, caused the banks to lock up their currency, and brought about this present stringency. I am going to answer the gentleman's question further. I say to him that the reason that the currency has gone to a premium is that on account of this lack of confidence money has been locked up; and the very measure, therefore, that was expected to make an abundance of money has created a panic, and stringency has driven out gold and locked up the currency,

has brought on the contraction and panic and demoralized all the business interests. [Applause.]

Mr. LIVINGSTON. Is the gentleman aware that these certificates are at par in London? You have not answered my question.

Mr. COOPER of Florida. I think I have.

Mr. LIVINGSTON. These certificates are issued under the operation of the very law you are complaining of, and under which you say the confidence of the business interests has been broken down. Now, so long as these certificates are at par in London and are at a premium in New York, will you explain how it has brought depression upon the country?

Mr. COOPER of Florida. In the first place, as I have said before, I have made my statement and not the statement of the gentleman from Georgia; and he can not put his words in my mouth. In the second place, I have already explained that this money is at a premium because of the panic. The stringency locks it up, and it is locked up because of the lack of confidence in financial operations under the Sherman act; and I say to him further, that the reason it is at par in London is because you can draw gold for it in America. [Applause.]

Now, Mr. Speaker, I had almost gotten involved in the tariff when my friend from Georgia happily rescued me. [Laughter.] I do not want to get into any partisan discussion of this affair either, but I can not refrain, with my naturally combative disposition, from saying to my Republican friends—because I have sat down here for a number of days silently while once in a while they gave the Democratic party a prod and suggested that this was the result of turning the country over to the Democratic party—I can not resist saying this: That when the Democratic party had had this country for four years, at the end of Mr. Cleveland's last term we turned this Government over to you with the people prosperous and the Treasury full to overflowing. You gave it back to us in this condition of depression, in this condition of suffering, with a depleted Treasury and with the country already going over the precipice into this financial abyss; and that is all of politics I am going to bring into this speech.

A REPUBLICAN MEMBER. That is enough; you are doing well.

Mr. COOPER of Florida. Now, Mr. Speaker, I said that was all of politics; but I can not go further in my speech without making some reference, at least—to be in the fashion—to the Democratic platform at Chicago. Gentlemen have stood up here and told us that the man who did not vote for each of their particular fads upon the subject of currency was a traitor to the Democratic platform at Chicago. The Democratic platform of Chicago, in the only sentence where it mentions the coining of money, declares for the coining of gold and silver at equal intrinsic and exchangeable values; and the man who comes in here and undertakes to force me, or to limit me, to vote for the coining of silver at certain ratios, each one of which and the greatest of which is far below the market price, undertakes to drive me off the Democratic platform; and he can not do it. [Applause.]

Now, Mr. Speaker, passing from this question of coining at

either of the ratios, is there anything in the Democratic platform that declares we shall repeal the Sherman bill and enact another silver-purchase bill? I believe that the Bland bill in its day was a good measure. I believe it did this country no harm, but did it good, because it enlarged our currency at a time when we needed it; but since that bill was repealed we have had more than \$150,000,000 of Sherman money added to our currency.

In dealing with these matters we can only look at the facts as each of us sees them. Now, the question of how much of a certain kind of currency a country can successfully carry is a question of fact.

Gentlemen have been fond of referring here to France as the great authority upon coinage and finance. Do they not know that at the late Brussels conference France, through her delegates, declared that she would coin no more silver; that she would not open her mints to free coinage; and further declared when it was proposed to her that France, the United States, India, and the other countries of the Latin Union should enter into an agreement for the free coinage of silver—that she declared, when that proposition was made, that so many countries could not do it? She said, "You have got to include England and Germany, or else it will be impracticable." Do they not know that the representative of France said, "We have got all the silver coin that we can successfully carry, and we can not agree to coin any more, because the attempt to do so would be disastrous?" Mr. Speaker, that is the pronouncement of the highest authority of the gentlemen on the other side.

Just before I was leaving Florida an old friend of mine who had lived for years on the Pacific slope came to me and said, "I do not know how you stand on silver; I have got one advantage over you with reference to it; I have dug silver and I have dug potatoes, and they are each worth what they will sell for." [Laughter.]

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I am to be called upon to give value to any article by legislation, if that, indeed, is demanded of me by the Democratic platform, or any other controlling agency, I want to get some of the benefits of it. [Laughter.] We all know the story of the old darkey down South who was very much taken with the reports which came to his ears concerning the civil rights bill. He heard a great deal about the "provisions" of the bill, and he got an idea that it was something which would be very beneficial to him. So upon a certain day he went to his county town to draw his share of the "provisions," but when he found that there was no hog and hominy in the bill he took no more interest in it. [Laughter.]

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I am to vote for a bill to give an artificial value to things, if I am to vote for this measure, I want an amendment adopted by which it shall be enacted that my people shall receive a dollar for every 57 cents' worth of their cotton, and tobacco, and oranges, and pineapples, and vegetables, and logs, and lumber, and turpentine. If our friends will put that into their proposition perhaps—I do not say that I will, but I say perhaps—I will manage to hold my conscience in abeyance. [Laughter.]

An acquaintance of mine was cow attorney for a certain railroad. [Laughter.] His duties consisted in going around and

resisting claims for cattle that were killed on the track, and he did it very artfully. He resorted to all the arts that were known, the usual delays and everything else, and he continued in that service for about three years, when the railroad company discharged him, whereupon he became a very active and zealous promoter of like claims upon the other side.

One day, as he was addressing the jury in a justice's court, he became very severe, not only upon the company, but upon the attorney on the other side representing the company. Finally the other counsel could not stand it any longer, and he got up and threw his record at him—as sometimes happens to lawyers and to statesmen. [Laughter.] He said: "Didn't you for three years represent this railroad company and resist just such claims as this, doing what I am doing now, only a good deal more so?" Whereupon the indignant cow attorney replied: "Sir, for three long years I held my conscience in abeyance, but now it has broke loose." [Laughter.]

I have not held my conscience in abeyance, sir, but if I am to do it, I want to see some direct, immediate, palpable, tangible benefit for my people in this legislation. [Laughter.]

Mr. Speaker, we may theorize as we please as to the future far distant, but we know in fact that this fall, within the next few weeks, the continuance of the present state of affairs means a lower price for every pound of cotton in the South. If it goes on it means a lower price for every box of oranges in Florida; it means a greater diminution of that greatstream of tourist travel which to us is not entirely what the overflow of the Nile is to Egypt—because we deny the charge that we live wholly on fish in the summer and Yankees in the winter [laughter]—but we do admit the fact that it is a very material factor, and if there are hard times at the North and a money stringency, if all the money is locked up so that nobody can get any for business, much less for pleasure, shall the corridors of our hotels (which are palaces), shall the beautiful resorts of Florida, shall the lovely walks on the banks of the St. John and the Indian Rivers remain vacant, and shall all the channels of trade be deprived of that necessary supply of nutriment? The hotels, the transportation lines, the farmer who sells them his products, the merchant who sells them his goods, all will suffer. It is right upon us, and if there is not relief, and that speedily, we are going to have a hard winter in Florida, and if my vote can prevent it it is not going to occur. [Laughter and applause.]

Mr. Speaker, it has been said to us, "Are you going to be dictated to by England?" That brings up before us one of the most momentous events in the history of finance, or perhaps in the history of the world, during recent years; I refer to the demonetization of silver, or at least the stoppage of its free coinage, in India. When I say I am a friend of silver I am sincere, but I am not ready to vote in this emergency for the free coinage of a short dollar. And I am pinned right down to that or to another silver-purchase bill. I have no other choice or option. I am somewhat in the position of one of those steers that is shipped from Florida; it is put in a kind of runaway; one man holds up the bars on one side and another man holds them up on the other, and it must run right along; there is no escape on either side.

In this emergency I have made up my mind what I am going to do, and I have declared it. I am not allowed the opportunity to vote for the coinage of silver at its intrinsic value; it is not proposed to give me any such opportunity.

But, Mr. Speaker, I started to speak of the taunt which comes to us as to our being dictated to by England. Why, sir, at the end of the Franco-German war, when France—as proud a nation as exists upon God's footstool—had been overthrown in war; when every feeling of pride and resentment was aroused; in this situation, when Germany demonetized silver, did France say, "We will not be dictated to by any set of Germans. No Kaiser, nor Bismarck, nor any such set of gold bugs can dictate to us. We have maintained the free coinage of silver always; it is the traditional policy of France, and we can stand alone?" No, sir; France said nothing of the sort. It said, "When Germany has demonetized silver a great fact has occurred which we must recognize and to which we must conform our action;" and they closed the mints of France to the coinage of silver.

So, when the India council demonetized silver, or at least stopped its free coinage, in an empire of more than 250,000,000 of people and destroyed the greatest silver market of the world, thereby depreciating the price of silver, that was a transaction which we can not ignore—which must influence our action whether we like it or whether we do not. For my part I deplore it. If I had come here at any other time than in the presence of this financial depression and in the presence of that action of the Indian government I should be found voting with the men who will now vote contrary to me when this question comes to an issue. But, sir, I always endeavor to look at things as a sensible, reasonable man. And when, so far from the United States accomplishing anything at the Brussels conference, so far from our country getting the aid of any other nation, India demonetized silver, it was a blow that must be recognized; and to say that in the face of this action the United States alone shall undertake so hazardous an experiment as free coinage at a short ratio seems to me neither wisdom nor courage, but foolhardiness.

Mr. Speaker, various gentlemen who have argued this question have referred us to the reports of the India commission. It is a fact that that commission recommended a stoppage of the free coinage of silver in India. It is also a fact that they recommended that, if limited coinage by the government should be carried on, the ratio should be made 20 to 1. But already that is regarded as a most hazardous experiment. Now, what we are here for is not to try experiments, the effect of which would be that while we are awaiting the result months or perhaps years must elapse before confidence is restored. What we are to do is to bring money out of its hoarding places, and then we can devote such time as may be necessary to establishing the currency of this country on a permanent basis.

I shall be ready, I am ready now, to support any measure which to my mind affords a reasonable expectation of establishing our currency upon a sound, safe, sufficient, flexible, expansive basis. But I do not believe that we can successfully establish the free coinage of silver, even at a ratio of 20 to 1. And I do know that

such a measure will not restore confidence. I do know that the only means of supplying the country with sufficient money in time to do any good, in time to stop this stringency, in time to market and move the crops, in time to give idle workmen employment, in time to enable the mills to resume their work of industry and their diffusion of values, in time to save the bankers of this country who are struggling against ruin, and the merchants who are fighting from day to day to keep out of bankruptcy, and the farmers whose homes are mortgaged and who must raise the money to meet their interest and their principal—the only measure to do this in time is a measure that will bring out the millions and millions of money that we already have—that are hoarded, locked up in banks or in old stockings—money which is kept out of circulation by the general want of confidence.

Senator JONES of Nevada says that this condition of confidence will return whenever the people believe that the Government can maintain successfully a financial policy. That the great majority of the American people do now believe that the Government can not maintain the policy of the Sherman bill, I shall not argue, because I believe every man in this House knows it. Then, I say, what are we to do but that which at least the people believe is adequate; and if they believe it is adequate, it is adequate. [Applause.]

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