

REPEAL OF THE SHERMAN ACT.

SPEECH

OF

HON. A. L. HAGER,
OF IOWA,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Thursday, August 24, 1893.



WASHINGTON.
1893.

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HON. A. L. HAGER.

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. HAGER said :

Mr. SPEAKER: I have listened with attention and much interest to the discussion of the measures that have been introduced by members on the other side of this Chamber, which, they claim, will bring relief to the terrible and startling conditions in which the Administration now finds the business and industrial interests of this country. I do not expect at this time to enter into an extended discussion of my views upon the measures, nor do I flatter myself that I could inform members as to what their duty should be at this time. Every man must settle this question in the parliament of his own conscience and then vote as his own judgment directs for the best interests of his constituents and the country.

The propositions to be voted upon have been submitted to members on this side of the Chamber in the form in which the majority have seen proper to have the vote taken—not even so much as consulting the minority as to how the propositions should be voted upon, or granting to them the right to offer amendments. We are left with no alternative but to vote for the substitute and the amendments that have already been prepared, or against them, and for the unconditional repeal of the purchasing clause of the Sherman bill, or against it—only this and nothing more. For one, I desire to enter my most earnest protest against that way of doing business, and to express my surprise that the Democratic party should present such a measure at such a time in such a way, and then, with unblushing effrontery and with a spirit of "I am holier than thou art," demand that the minority shall be nonpartisan and patriotic.

I do not pretend to speak for others on this side of the Chamber, but for myself. I united with the Republican party because I regarded patriotism and Republicanism as synonymous terms, and I have never had reason to change or amend my views; and, after listening to all of this discussion, I see that we are not asked to vote to help the business and financial conditions that are threatening to overthrow the country, but to aid in widening the breach that now seems to exist in the organization known as the Democratic party, which breach, if it could be made per-

manent, would be a better and more satisfactory assurance to the people and the business and financial interests of the entire country than the assurance that the balance of trade was largely in our favor and hundreds of millions of gold flowing to our shores from Europe. The truth is that the people have not lost faith in the country, nor in the currency of the country, but that they never had an abiding and continuing faith in the Democratic party.

There was never a Presidential election when the country was as prosperous, when wages were as remunerative, when labor was as contented, when factories were running under such pressure, as on the day of the election in November last. On that day Harrison was defeated, Cleveland was elected, and both branches of Congress turned over to the Democratic party—the first experiment that the people had thought safe to make in that direction in a period of thirty years. I will frankly admit that I was astounded when the news was flashed over the country announcing the result of that election, but I do not think my astonishment, however great, would compare with the present grief and disappointment of a majority of the people who aided in bringing about such a result. [Applause on the Republican side.]

The platform adopted by the Democratic convention in Chicago in June of 1892 is familiar to every member on this floor, and the campaign made upon that platform is yet fresh in the minds of the people. I now recall, in part, the speech that was made by Mr. Cleveland when the committee selected by that convention notified him of his nomination. He said, referring to the chief and most important plank in the platform adopted by that convention:

Turning our eyes to the plain people of the land, we see them burdened as consumers by a tariff system which unjustly and relentlessly demands of them, in the purchase of the necessaries and comforts of life, an amount scarcely met by the wages of hard and steady toil, while the money thus wrung from them tends to build up and increase the fortunes of those for whom this injustice was perpetrated.

And behold, we find Congress convened in extraordinary session within five months after the President had taken his oath of office. For the purpose of repealing a measure that he indicated was robbing labor for the benefit of the rich and powerful? No; but for the avowed and expressed purpose of repealing the purchasing clause of the Sherman bill, and thus nullifying one of the principal planks in the Democratic platform. We were told by every Democratic orator from Maine to California, and from the Lakes to the Southern Gulf, during the campaign of 1892, that the McKinley bill was the cause of all our ills, and that if they could be intrusted with full power in the Federal Government they would at once repeal that hated and malicious measure, and thus bring happiness and prosperity to all of their fellow-citizens.

The people listened to your appeals, they believed your statements, and they returned a verdict in your favor. It would be harsh and unjust for me to say that I have no sympathy for the people in their dire distress, and the general bankruptcy and want that now surrounds them, but the truth is they had no reason to accept your statements—they should have known bet-

ter; for that party has not made a prophecy in the last thirty years that has come to pass, or a promise that they have kept or intended to keep. Their prophets and their promises are exactly alike.

You came to the people in 1890, immediately after the adjournment of the Fifty-first Congress, and you promised the people that if they would elect you to Congress that you would at once repeal that damnable, that infamous measure, as you mildly termed the McKinley bill. They accepted your statements and returned you to the Fifty-second Congress with the largest majority that was ever given to a party in the popular branch, I believe. You were here in session for months and months, and did you repeal the bill, or did you make one honest effort at repeal? You know that you did not. You began nibbling and naggng and pecking away at the bill, and had just about as much effect upon its colossal strength as a lean and hungry hound would in baying at the moon or a buzzard pecking away at an Egyptian monument. [Laughter.]

There it stands now, as it did through the first and second sessions of the Fifty-second Congress, calmly looking down upon its maligners and threatened destroyers, and has brought more of prosperity and blessings and independence to the people of America than any revenue law ever before placed upon a Federal statute book. It stands as Grant stood at Appomattox, calmly dictating terms of surrender to the nations of the world. [Applause.] And now, what kind of a spectacle do you present to us, when Congress has assembled at the call of the President in this extraordinary session? Do we find a party, united and harmonious, coming into these Halls—falling upon each others' necks and mingling tears of joy over their return to absolute power in every branch of the Government? Hardly.

The gentleman from North Carolina who has just taken his seat said that the Democratic party had had votes enough in the last election to have elected two Presidents, and he did not know but they ought to have done it. I think you ought to have done it, gentlemen, because then you might have had one President who would have interpreted this plank of your platform in the way that one wing of the party understands it, and another President who would interpret it in the way to suit the other wing of the Democratic party. [Laughter.]

There does not seem to be that perfect harmony among the elements composing the Democracy that inspired them in the campaigns of 1890 and 1892. They seem to be hopelessly divided upon a plank in their platform that was but little discussed in my part of the State last fall, and each man seems to have an interpretation of his own, while there can be and should be, by any fair and honest man, but one interpretation given to that plank, viz: For the coinage of both gold and silver without discrimination against either metal.

But I said a moment ago that the Democratic party was not a pledge-keeping party, and in support of that statement, and as part of the evidence on that proposition, I desire to submit to the entire country—North and South, East and West—the arguments that have gone into the RECORD, made by members of the Democratic party on the floor of this Chamber since this dis-

cussion was first opened by the gentleman from Maryland. He seemed to be very zealous to carry out the financial plank of their platform, but was just as certain as the sun shines in the heavens that it could not be done; but I will venture the assertion that the distinguished gentleman did not argue thus before the people of his district in the campaign of 1892, and if he did not—and his fellow-citizens had the right to believe that the platform meant just what it said in plain, terse Anglo-Saxon—then the Democratic members of this House, as the gentleman from Georgia so well and truly said, obtained the votes of the people by false pretenses, and it is a well-recognized principle in law that a man shall not profit by his own wrong.

But the gentleman from Missouri, it would seem, is the most terribly deceived of all. He honestly believed that the President was elected and power given to his party for the express purpose of repealing the McKinley bill and the Sherman law, and enacting a free-coinage bill; and he gave good reasons for the faith that was in him, but he now wakes up to the terrible realization that he has been tricked on both planks. The deceivers have finally themselves been deceived.

I have but little sympathy for the gentleman, for I should judge he was born a Democrat—a man of good grasp and quick comprehension—and who has been a hard worker in the ranks of the Democracy for lo! these many years. He should have known their history well, and had no business to be deceived by any promise or pledge that party has made in the past thirty years; but it is better to learn late than to have never learned. I judge from his argument that the gentleman's confidence in that organization is not being ground out between the upper and nether millstones, but is being pressed out between the two planks of that platform, the one known by the fond and endearing term of tariff reform and the other as free silver.

I listened with interest to the warning that he gave to his own party, when he told them in his most earnest and emphatic way that the party had reached the point in its history when there was to be a division of the sheep from the goats; a dividing of the faithful from the unfaithful; of the servants of the people from the servants of the money power; of those who bow at the shrine of gold and those who worship at the dual shrine of gold and silver, and gave them due and timely notice that it would depend upon which course they took whether or not he would be longer a member of that organization. They are most certainly divided—upon what ratio as to numbers none possessing less than infinite knowledge can tell.

But I shall watch with not a little concern the attitude of the gentleman as regards his party after the vote has been recorded on the measures now pending before this House. If sincere in his statements made to the members of his own party, and I have no reason to doubt his sincerity or his honesty, then I shall most certainly expect him to sever his political relations with a fair minority, if not the majority, of his party, and organize a party composed of members on that side of the Chamber who entertain the same views on the money plank of the platform that the gentleman expressed in his speech on the floor of this House in opening the discussion for his wing of the party.

Mr. Speaker, since this discussion opened we have heard the desires of the bankers, the boards of trade, the bondholders, the money-lenders, and the creditor classes generally; but there is a very large class of men found in every State of this broad land that we have not heard from—the men who raise corn, and wheat, and oats, and barley, and hogs, and cattle, and cotton, and rice, and tobacco. They have been too busy to speak, or too modest to be heard, or have depended upon the good faith of parties to carry out fairly and honestly the pledges made to them in the platform and on the stump.

But be not deceived; they are not mocked. If you falter in your plighted faith with them, then there will be a time, and that right speedily, when they will act; and when they exercise their right through the silent medium of the ballot, which should execute the freeman's will in every district in every State of this Union, as lightning does the will of God, then there will be weeping and wailing in the camp of those that kept the word of promise to the ear but broke it to the hope. I do not believe that the Sherman bill has scarcely the remotest effect upon the present appalling conditions in which we now find the country, and my reasons are that the Sherman bill has now been a law for more than three years, and had been upon the statute books for two years when the convention of the Democracy assembled in Chicago in June, 1892.

You there adopted your platform of faith, the chief article of which was the repeal of the unconstitutional McKinley bill, and in favor of the repeal of the Sherman bill, and "for the use of both gold and silver as the standard money of the country, and for the coinage of both gold and silver without discriminating against either metal," etc. Under the threat and the promise contained in that platform the prosperity of the country continued up to and including the day when the country was startled with the news that the Democracy had been successful and was to have control of the legislative and executive branches of this Government.

From that time up to the present hour business men and business interests, generally, began to lose confidence in themselves, and in each other, and what little confidence they had in the Democratic party; and that confidence has not been restored by reason of the assembling together of this body of the representatives of the people, and, in my humble judgment, it will not be restored, but present conditions, much aggravated, should there be an unconditional repeal of the Sherman bill and no favorable legislation for silver. The fact is, the entire people now realize that the Democratic party is in power. They could know that from conditions, if in no other way, and they see the leaders and representatives of that party absolutely failing to come together and agreeing to any policy among themselves.

With no Moses to lead them or direct them, but a Moses from Georgia rising from his seat in this House simply to condemn them, they stand paralyzed and utterly helpless before all of the great questions that now confront them, without a remedy for any ill or a balm for any wound, and the people cry out, "Is there no balm in the Democratic party, are there no physicians there?" And I answer that there are physicians galore, of every school,

of every faith, and of every shade of opinion, but if there is any balm they do not seem to have the ability to apply it. And the "unconstitutional" and "robber" McKinley bill yet stands with "knife at the throat" of labor, and in the same attitude that it has held to the industries of this country since its adoption.

You promised the people if they would intrust you with power, and place in your hands the reins of Government, that you would bring them prosperity, happiness, and plenty. They now realize that they had them in abundance before the election. They listened and gave you their confidence and their votes, and in less than nine months from the day of your election they have, as a result, adversity, misery, and poverty.

The banner of prosperity that was turned over to you has been changed into a weapon of destruction; men out of employment, factories closing down, banks failing, all business paralyzed and financial ruin rising to face us at every turn, and millions of men ready to take the road as tramps, and people cry out in amazement, "Is this the country in which we were living one short year ago!" and I answer, It is, but under entirely different conditions, and with an Administration elected in favor of tariff for revenue only, but which Administration seems now to be first in favor of the demonetization of silver.

The present demand seems to be for a speedy remedy that will restore the confidence of the people, and I have one to suggest, a little less humiliating to the Democratic party than the one proposed by the gentleman from Ohio [Mr. GROSVENOR], and the remedy is in the possession and control of the Democratic party, and if they will but use it they will be entitled to all of the honor—and that remedy is to convince the people of this country that you are as utterly and hopelessly divided upon the interpretation of the tariff plank of your platform as upon the plank now under discussion, and, my word for it, confidence would be restored, labor would be again employed, and prosperity and happiness, and business confidence would again return to bless our native land. [Loud and continued applause on Republican side.]

I have listened with attention to the arguments made that a repeal of the Sherman bill would restore business confidence and bring about an international monetary conference with the nations of Europe. The advocates of such a measure are earnest and sincere, no doubt, but I have not been persuaded that the results claimed would follow in either instances. Did I believe for one moment that the Sherman bill was the cause of the present financial distress and want of business confidence that is so widespread throughout the entire nation, I would not hesitate for a single moment to vote for its unconditional repeal, although in so doing I am satisfied that my vote would be against the judgment of a large majority of the people whom I have the honor to represent.

But upon this very important question I would prefer to be right rather than to be returned to this Chamber any number of terms; although I believe that I appreciate the honor of a seat on this floor, and the advantages that come to a man by associating with eminent men from every part of this Union as much as any member can. Or could I be persuaded that the repeal of the Sherman bill would aid in bringing about an international mon-

etary conference, I should not hesitate for one moment to give my vote for such repeal.

But, Mr. Speaker, I am satisfied that the repeal of the Sherman law would make the conditions in which we now find ourselves much worse, and, instead of helping the country, it would merely deter it in overcoming bad conditions. I can not understand the logic of those who reason that the demonetization of silver by this Government would force the nations of Europe to a monetary conference. We are the only nation in the world that produces silver and gold in large quantities, producing, I believe, about 41 per cent of the silver and 31 per cent of the gold of the world, and it does seem to me that this nation should be the last nation to strike a blow at either gold or silver, but that it should exert every power and resource at its command to maintain the use of both metals.

In other words, we have a greater interest in bimetalism than any other nation or any other people in the civilized world. If England could have transferred to her our silver mines, a proposition made to her statesmen, as we have had made to us in this Chamber, to demonetize silver would be met with derision and contempt. England looks after English interests and English welfare alone. She always has and always will, and I respect England for so doing, and would commend her example to the people of my own country as worthy of imitation. England adopted the single gold standard nearly eighty years ago, and consulted her own interest when she did it. And as England and the United States are now the two great rivals for the commerce of the world it seems to me it would be the height of folly for us to dishonor and disgrace a precious metal that we produce so largely as silver, and which would take the lead in the fight for commercial supremacy if we will but give it an equal chance with gold. Do this and the contest for commercial supremacy is decided, the battle already won. [Applause.]

Many of those who urge the repeal of the Sherman bill admit that the present troubles can not be traced to the operation of that measure, but base their action on the assumption that it will relieve the minds of the people and thus bring about a return of confidence. For one, I am not here to help enact laws against imaginary ills. We are here to represent intelligent constituencies, who do not expect or ask us to strike at phantoms.

Mr. Speaker, as the measures are at present presented for our action, and as at present advised, I shall vote against the substitute and the amendment proposed, and against the bill for the repeal of the Sherman act. I thank you, gentlemen, for your attention. [Applause.]