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CONGRESS.

Debate on the Direct Tax.

SPEECH OF MR. CLAY.

(Concluded.)

The public debt exists. However contracted, the faith of the nation is pledged for its redemption. It can only be paid by providing an excess of revenue beyond expenditure, or by retrenchment. Did gentlemen contend that the results of the report were inaccurate—that the proceeds of the revenue would be greater, or the public expenses less than the estimate? On these subjects, Mr. C. said he believed it would be presumption in him, when the defence of the report was in such able hands, (Mr. Lowndes) to attempt its vindication. Leaving the task to that gentleman, he should assume for the present its accuracy. He would lay down a general rule, from which there ought never to be a departure, without absolute necessity, that the expenses of the year ought to be met by the revenue of the year. If in time of war it were impossible to observe this rule, we ought, in time of peace, to provide for as speedy a discharge of the debt contracted in the preceding war as possible. This can only be done by an effective sinking fund based upon an excess of revenue beyond expenditure, and a protraction of the period of peace. If in England the sinking fund had not fulfilled what was promised, it was because of a failure to provide such a revenue, & because the intervals of peace in that country had been too few and too short. From the revolution to 1812, a period of 124 years, there had been 63 years of war & only 61 of peace; and there had been contracted 638,129,577 of debt, & discharged only 39,594,305. The national debt at the peace of Utrecht amounted to 53,631,076, and during the peace which followed, being 27 years, from 1714 to 1741, there was discharged only 7,231,531. When the operations of our sinking fund are contrasted with those of G. Britain, they would be found to present the most gratifying result. Our public debt on the 1st day of January 1802, amounted to \$78,754,568 70 cents, & on the 1st January, 1815, we had extinguished \$33,873,453 98 cts. Thus in 13 years, one half the period of peace that followed the treaty of Utrecht, we had discharged more public debt than Great Britain did during that period. In 16 years she did not pay more than a seventh part of her debt. In 13 years we paid more than a third of ours. If then a public debt, contracted in a manner, he trusted, satisfactory to the country, imposed upon us a duty to provide for its payment; if we were encouraged, by past experience, to persevere in the application of an effective sinking fund, he would again repeat that the only alternatives were the adoption of a system of taxation producing the revenue estimated by the committee of Ways and Means, or by great retrenchment of the public expenses.

What respect can a reduction of the public expenses be affected? Gentlemen who assailed the report on this ground have, by the indefinite nature of the attack, great advantage on their side. Instead of contenting themselves with crying out retrenchment! retrenchment! a theme always plausible, an object always proper, when the public interest will admit of it, let them point the attention of the house to some specified subject. If they really think a reduction of the army or navy, or either of them be proper, let them lay a resolution upon the table to that effect. They had generally, it is true, singled out in discussing this report (and he had no objection to meet them in this way, though he thought the other the safest course,) the military establishment. Mr. C. said he was glad that the navy had fought itself into favor & that no one appeared disposed to move a reduction or to oppose its gradual augmentation. But the "standing army" is the great object of gentlemen's

apprehension. And those who can bravely set at defiance hobgoblins, the creatures of their own fertile imaginations, are trembling for the liberties of the people endangered by a standing army of 10,000 men. Those who can courageously vote against taxes are alarmed for the safety of the constitution & the country, at such a force scattered over our extensive territory! This could not have been expected, at least in the honorable gentleman (Mr. Ross) who, if he had been storming a fort, could not have displayed more cool collected courage than he did, when he declared that he would shew to Pennsylvania, that she had on faithful representative, bold and independent enough to vote against a tax.

Mr. C. said he had happened, very incidentally the other day, and in a manner which he had supposed could not attract particular attention, to state that the general condition of the world admonished us to shape our measures with a view to the possible conflicts into which we might be drawn; and he said he did not know when he should cease to witness the attacks made upon him in consequence of that general remark, when he should cease to hear the cry of "standing army," "national glory," &c. &c. From the tenor of gentlemen's observations it would seem as if, for the first time in the history of this government, it was now proposed that a certain regular force should constitute a portion of the public defence. But from the administration of general Washington, down to this time, a regular force, a standing army (if gentlemen please) had existed, and the only question about it, at any time had been, what should be the amount. Gentlemen themselves, who most loudly decry this establishment, did not propose an entire disbandment of it; and the question ever with them, is not whether a regular force be necessary, but whether a regular force of this or that amount be called for by the actual state of our affairs.

The question is not, on any side of the house, as to the nature but the quantum of the force. Mr. C. said he maintained the position, that, if there was the most profound peace that ever existed; if we had no fears from any quarter whatever; if all the world was in a state of the most profound and absolute repose, a regular force of ten thousand men was not too great for the purposes of this government. We knew too much, he said, of the vicissitudes of human affairs and the uncertainty of all our calculations, not to know that even in the most profound tranquility, some tempest may suddenly arise, and bring us into a state requiring the exertion of military force, which cannot be created in a moment, but requires time for its collection, organization and discipline. When gentlemen talked of the force which was deemed sufficient some twenty years ago, what did they mean? That this force was not to be progressive? That the full grown man ought to wear the clothes and habits of his infancy? That the establishments maintained by this government, when its population amounted to four or five millions only, should be the standard by which our measures should be regulated in all subsequent states of the country? If gentlemen meant this, as it seemed they did, Mr. C. said he and they should not agree. He contended that establishments ought to be commensurate with the actual state of the country, should grow with its growth, and keep pace with its progress. Look at that map (said he, pointing to the large Map of the United States which hangs in the Hall of Representatives)—at the vast extent of that country which stretches from the Lake of the Woods, in the northwest, to the Bay of Fundi in the east. Look at the vast extent of maritime coast; recollect we have Indians and powerful nations conterminous on the whole frontier; and that we know not at what moment the savage enemy or Great Britain herself may seek to make war with us. Ought the force of the country to be graduated by the scale of our exposure or are we to be influenced by the increase of our liability to war? Have we forgotten that the power of France, as a counterpoise to that of Great Britain, is annihilated—gone; never to rise again, I believe under the weak, unhappy imbecile race who now sway her destinies? Any individual must, I think, come to the same conclusion with myself, who takes those considerations into view, and reflects on our growth; the state of our defence, the situation of the nations of the world, and above all of that nation with whom we are most likely to come into collision—for it is in vain to conceal it; this country must have many a hard and desperate tug with Great Britain, let the two governments be administered how and by

whom they may.—That man must be blind to the indications of the future, who cannot see that we are destined to have war after war with Great Britain, until, if one of the two nations be not crushed all grounds of collision shall have ceased between us. I repeat, said Mr. C. if the condition of France were that of perfect repose, instead of that of a volcano ready to burst out again with a desolating eruption; if with Spain our differences were settled; if the dreadful war raging in South America were terminated; if the marines of all the powers of Europe were massacred as they stood prior to the revolution of France; if there was universal repose, and profound tranquility among all the nations of the earth considering the actual growth of our country, in his judgment, the force of ten thousand men would not be too great for its exigencies. Do gentlemen ask if I rely on the regular force entirely for the defence of the country? I answer, it is for garrisoning and keeping in order our fortifications, for the preservation of the national arms for something like a safe depository of military science and skill, to which we may recur in time of danger; that I desire to maintain an adequate regular force. I know, that in the hour of peril, our great reliance must be on the whole physical force of the country, and that no detachment of it can be exclusively depended on. History proves that no nation, not destitute of the military art, whose people were united in its defence, ever was conquered. It is true that in countries where standing armies have been entirely relied on, the armies have been subdued and the subjugation of the nation has been the consequence of it; but no example is to be found of a united people being conquered, who possessed an adequate degree of military knowledge. Look at the Grecian republics struggling successfully against the overwhelming force of Persia; look more recently at Spain. I have great confidence in the militia, and I would go with my honorable colleague, (Mr. McKee) whose views I know are honest, hand in hand, in arming, disciplining and rendering effective the militia—I am for providing the nation with every possible means of resistance. I ask my honorable colleague, after I have gone thus far with him, to go a step farther with me, and let us retain the force we now have for the purposes I have already described. I ask gentlemen who propose to reduce the army if they have examined in detail the number and extent of the posts and garrisons on our maritime and interior frontier? If they have not gone through this progress of reasoning, how shall we arrive at the result that we can reduce the army with safety? There is not one of our forts adequately garrisoned at this moment; and there is nearly 1-4 of them that have not one man. I said the other day that I would rather vote for the augmentation than the reduction of the army. When returning to my country from its foreign service, and looking at this question it appeared to me that the maximum was 20,000 the minimum 10,000 of the force we ought to retain. And I again say, that rather than reduce I would vote to increase the present force.

A standing army Mr. Clay said, had been deemed necessary from the commencement of the government to the present time. The question was only as to the quantum of force; and not whether it should exist. No man who regards his political reputation would place himself before the people on a proposition for its absolute disbandment. He admitted a question as to quantum might be carried so far as to rise into a question of principle. If we were to propose to retain an army of thirty or forty or fifty thousand men; then truly the question would present itself, whether our rights were not in some danger from such a standing army, whether reliance was to be placed altogether on a standing army or on that natural safe defence which, according to the habits of the country and the principles of our government, is considered the bulwark of our liberties. But between five and ten thousand men; or any number under ten thousand, it could not be a question of principle; for unless gentlemen were afraid of spectacles; it was utterly impossible that any danger could be apprehended from ten thousand men; dispersed on a frontier of many thousand miles—here twenty or thirty; there an hundred, and the largest amount at Detroit, not exceeding a thin regiment. And yet, brave gentlemen—gentlemen who are not alarmed at hobgoblins—who can intrepidly vote *even against taxes*, are alarmed by a force of this extent! What, he asked, was the amount of

the army in the time of Mr. Jefferson, a time, the orthodoxy of which had been so ostentatiously proclaimed. It was true, when that gentleman came into power, it was with a determination to retrench as far as practicable. Under the full influence of these notions, in 1802, the bold step of wholly disbanding the army, never was thought of. The military peace establishment was then fixed at about four thousand men. But before Mr. Jefferson went out of power what was done—that is, in April 1803? In addition to the then existing peace establishment, eight regiments amounting to between five and six thousand men, were authorized, making a total force precisely equal to the present peace establishment. It was true that, all this force had never been actually enlisted and embodied; that the recruiting service had been suspended and that at the commencement of the war we had far from this number; and, Mr. C. said we have not now actually ten thousand men, being at least two thousand deficient of that number. Mr. C. adverted to what had been said on this, and other occasions of Mr. Jefferson's not having seized the favorable moment for war which was afforded by the attack on the Chesapeake. He had always entertained the opinion, he said, that Mr. Jefferson on that occasion took the correct manly & frank course, in saying to the British government—your officers have done this—it is an enormous aggression—do you approve the act, do you make it your cause or not? That government did not sanction the act; it disclaimed it, and promptly too—and, although they for a long time withheld due redress, it was ultimately tendered. If Mr. Jefferson had used his power to carry the country into a war at that period, it might have been supported by public opinion during the moment of fever, but it would soon abate and the people would begin to ask, why this war had been made without understanding whether the British government avowed the conduct of its officers, &c. If the threatening aspect of our relations with England had entered into the consideration which had caused the increase of the army at the time Mr. C. said; there were considerations equally strong at this time, with our augmented population, for retaining our present force. If, however, there were no threatenings from any quarter, if the relative force of European nations, and the general balance of power existing before the French revolution were restored; if South America had not made the attempt, in which he trusted in God she would succeed, to achieve her independence; if our affairs with Spain were settled; he would repeat, that ten thousand men would not be too great a force for the necessities of the country, and with a view to future emergencies.

He had taken the liberty the other day to make some observations, which he might now repeat, as furnishing auxiliary considerations for adopting a course of prudence and precaution.—He had then said, that our affairs with Spain were not settled, &c. that the Spanish minister was reported to have made some inadmissible demands, of our government. The fact turned out, Mr. C. said; as he had presented it. It appeared that what was then rumor was now fact; and Spain had taken the ground not only that there must be a discussion of our title to that part of Louisiana formerly called West Florida, (which it might be doubted whether it ought to take place) but had required that we must surrender the territory first and discuss the right to it afterwards. Besides this unsettled state of our relations with Spain, he said; there were other rumors—and he wished to God we had the same means of ascertaining their correctness, as we had found of ascertaining the truth of the rumor just noticed.—It was rumored that the Spanish province of Florida had been ceded with all her pretensions, to Great Britain. Would gentlemen tell him, then, that this was a time when any statesman would pursue the hazardous policy of disarming entirely—of quietly smoking our pipes by our firesides, regardless of impending danger? It might be a palatable doctrine to some, but he was persuaded was condemned by the rules of conduct in private life, by those maxims of sound precaution by which individuals would regulate their private affairs. Mr. C. said, he did not here mean to take up the question in relation to South America. Still it was impossible not to see that, in the progress of things, we might be called on to decide the question whether we would or would not lend them our aid. This opinion he boldly declared—and he entertained it, not in any pursuit of vain glory, but from a deliberate con-

viction of its being conformable to the best interests of the country—that, having a proper understanding with foreign powers—that understanding which prudence and a just precaution recommended—it would undoubtedly be good policy to take part with the patriots of South America. He believed it could be shewn that, on the strictest principles of public law, we have a right to take part with them, & that our interposition in their favor would be effectual. But he confessed, with infinite regret, that he saw a supineness on this interesting subject throughout our country, which left him almost without hope; that what he believed the correct policy of the country would be pursued. He considered the release of any part of America from the dominions of the old world; as adding to the general security of the new.—He could not contemplate the exertions of the people of South America, without wishing that they might triumph, and nobly triumph.—He believed the cause of humanity would be promoted by the interposition of any foreign power which should terminate the contest between the friends and enemies of Independence in that quarter, for a more bloody and cruel war never had been carried on since the days of Adam than that which is now raging in South America—in which not the least regard is paid to the laws of war, to the rights of prisoners, nor even to the rights of kindred. I do not, said Mr. C. offer these views expecting to influence the opinions of others: they are opinions of my own. But on the question of general policy, whether or not we shall interfere in the war in South America, it may turn out that, whether we will or will not choose to interfere in their behalf, we shall be drawn into the contest in the course of its progress. Among other demands by the minister of Spain; is the exclusion of the flag of Buenos Ayres and other parts of South America from our ports. Our government has taken a ground on this subject, of which I think no gentleman can disapprove—that all parties shall be admitted and hospitably treated in our ports, provided they conform to our laws whilst among us. What course Spain may take upon this subject, it was impossible now to say.—Although I would not urge this as an argument for increasing our force, said Mr. C. I would place it among those considerations which ought to have weight with every enlightened mind in determining upon the propriety of its reduction. It is asserted that Great Britain has strengthened and is strengthening herself in the provinces adjoining us. Is this a moment when in prudence we ought to disarm. No, sir. Preserve your existing force; it would be extreme indiscretion to lessen it.

Mr. C. here made some observations to shew a reduction of the army to from four to five thousand men, as had been suggested, would not occasion such a diminution of expense as to authorize the rejection of the report, or any essential alteration in the amount of revenue, which the system proposes to raise from internal taxes, and his colleague (Mr. McKee) appeared equally hostile to all of them. Having, however, shewn that we cannot in safety reduce the army, Mr. C. would leave the details of the report in the able hands of the honorable chairman, (Mr. Lowndes) who, he had no doubt, could demonstrate; that with all the retrenchments which had been recommended, the government would be bankrupt in less than three years, if most of these taxes were not continued. He would now hasten to that conclusion; at which the committee could not regret more than he did, that he had not long since arrived.

As to the attitude in which this country should be placed, the duty of Congress could not be mistaken. My policy is to preserve the present force, naval and military, to provide for the augmentation of the navy; and if the danger of war should increase, to increase the army also. Arm the militia, and give it the most effective character of which it is susceptible. Provide in the most ample manner, and place in proper depots, all the munitions and instruments of war. Fortify and strengthen the weak and vulnerable points indicated by experience. Construct military roads and canals—particularly from the Miami of the Ohio to the Miami of Erie; from the Scioto to the Bay of Sandusky; from the Hudson to Ontario; that the facilities of transportation may exist of the men & means of the country to points where they may be wanted. I would employ on this object a part of the army; which should also be employed on our line of frontier, territorial and maritime, in strengthening the works of defense. I would provide steam bat-