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Speech of Henry Clay,

IN DEFENCE OF THE AMERICAN SYSTEM,

AGAINST THE BRITISH COLONIAL SYSTEM:

Delivered in the Senate of the United States, Feb. 2d, 3d and 6th.

Mr. CLAY rose and addressed the Senate substantially as follows:—In one sentiment, Mr President, expressed by the honorable gentleman from South Carolina, (General HAYNE) though, perhaps, not in the sense intended by him I entirely concur. *I* agree with him that the decision on the system of policy embraced in this debate involves the future destiny of this growing country One way, I verily believe, it would lead to deep and general distress; general bankruptcy and national ruin without benefit to any part of the Union: The other the existing prosperity will be preserved and augmented, and the nation will continue rapidly to advance in wealth, power and greatness, without prejudice to any section of the confederacy.

Thus viewing the question, I stand here as the humble but zealous advocate, not of the interests of one State or seven States only, but of the whole Union. And never before have I felt, more intensely, the overpowering weight of that share of responsiblity which belongs to me in these deliberations. Never before have I had more occasion than I now have, to lament my want of intellectual powers, the possession of which might enable me to unfold to this Senate, and to illustrate to this People, great truths intimately connected with the lasting welfare of my country. should, indeed, sink, overwhelmed and subdued beneath the appalling magnitude of the task which lies before me, if I did not feel myself sustained and fortified by a thorough consciousness of the justness of the cause which I have espoused, and by a persuasion, I hope not presumptuous, that it has the approbation of that Providence who has so often smiled upon these United States

Eight years ago, it was my painful duty to present to the other House of Congress, an unexaggerated picture of the general distress pervading the whole land We must all yet remember some of its frightful features We all know that the people were then oppressed and borne down by an enormous load of debt; that the value of property was at the lowest point of depression; that ruinous sales and sacrifices were every where made of real estate; that stop laws and paper money were adopted to save the People from impending destruction; that a deficit in the public revenue existed which compelled Government to seize upon and divert from its legitimate object, the appropriation to the sinking fund, to redeem the national debt and that our commerce and navigation were threatened with a complete paralysis. In short, sir, if I were to select any term of seven years since the adoption of the present constitution which exhibited a scene of the most wide spread dismay and desolation it would be exactly that term of seven years which immediately preceded the establishment of the tariff of 1824.

I have now to perform the more pleasing task of exhibiting an imperfect sketch of the existing state of the unparalleled prosperity of the country. On a general survey we behold cultivation extended the arts flourishing, the face of the country improved our people fully and profitably employed, and the public countenance exhibiting tranquility contentment and happiness. And if we descend into particulars we have the agreeable contemplation of a People out of debt; land rising slowly in value, but in a secure and salutary degree, a ready though not extravagant market for all the surplus productions of our industry; innumerable flocks and herds browsing and gambolling on ten thousand hills and plains, covered with rich and verdant grasses; our cities expanded, and whole villages springing up, as it were by enchantment; our exports and imports increased and increasing; our tonnage * foreign and coastwise, swelling and fully occupied; the rivers of our interior animated by the perpetual thunder and lightning of countless steam boats, the currency sound and abundant; the public debt of two wars nearly redeemed, and to crown all, the public treasury overflowing, embarrassing Congress not to find subjects of taxation, but to select the objects which shall be liberated from the impost. If the term of seven years were to be selected, of the greatest prosperity which this People have enjoyed since the establishment of their present constitution it would be exactly that period of seven years which immediately followed the passage of the tariff of 1824.

This transformation of the condition of the country from gloom and distress to brightness and prosperity, has been mainly the work of American legislation fostering American industry instead of allowing it to be controlled by foreign legislation, cherishing foreign industry. The foes of the American System, in 1824, with great boldness and confidence predicted, 1st, the ruin of the public revenue and the creation of a necessity to resort to direct taxation. The gentleman from South Carolina, (General HAYNE,) *I* believe, thought that the tariff of 1824 would operate a reduction of revenue to the large amount of eight millions of dollars 2d. The destruction of our navigation. 3d. The desolation of commercial cities. And 4th The augmentation of the price of objects of consumption and further decline in that of the articles of our exports. Every prediction which they made has failed—utterly failed. Instead of the ruin of the public revenue, with which they then sought to deter us from the adoption of the American System, we are now threatened with its subversion, by the vast amount of the public revenue produced by that System. Every branch of our navigation has increased. As to the desolation of our cities, let us take as an example, the condition of the largest and most commercial of all of them, the great Northern capital. I have, in my hands, the assessed value of real estate in the city of New York, from 1817 to 1831 † This value is canvassed contested scrutinized, and adjudged by the proper sworn authorities. It is, therefore, entitled to full credence. During the first term, commencing with 1817, and ending in the year of the passage of the tariff of 1824, the amount of the value of real estate was the first year, $57,799 435 and after various fluctuations in the intermediate period, it settled down at $52,019,730, exhibiting a decrease, in seven years of $5,779 705. During the first of the year 1825 after the passage of the tariff it rose & gradually ascending throughout the whole of the latter period of seven years, it finally, in 1831, reached the astonishing height of $95,716,485! Now, if it be said that this rapid growth of the city of New York was the effect of foreign commerce, then it was not correctly predicted in 1824, that the tariff would destroy foreign commerce and desolate our commercial cities. If, on the contrary, it be the effect of internal trade, then internal trade cannot be justly chargeable with the evil consequences imputed to it The truth is it is the joint effect of both principles, the domestic industry nourishing the foreign trade, and the foreign commerce in turn nourishing the domestic industry. No where, more than in New York, is the combination of both principles, so completely developed. In the progress of my argument, I will consider the effect upon the price of commodities, produced by the American system, and show that the very reverse of the prediction of its foes, in 1824, has actually happened

Whilst we thus behold the entire failure of all that was foretold against the System, it is a subject of juste felicitation to its friends, that all their anticipations of its benefits have been fulfilled or are in progress of fulfilment. The honorable gentleman from South Carolina has made an allusion to a speech made by me, in 1824, in the other House in support of the tariff and to which otherwise, I should not have particularly referred. But I would ask any one, who could now command the courage to pursue that long production, what principle there laid down is not true? what prediction then made has been falsified by practical experience?

It is now proposed to abolish this system, to which we owe so much of the public prosperity and it is urged that the arrival of the redemption of the public debt has been confidently looked to as presenting a suitable occasion to rid the country of the evils with which the system is alleged to be fraught. Not an inattentive observer of passing events, I have been aware, that among those who were most eagerly pressing the payment of the public debt and upon that ground were opposing appropriations to other great interests, there were some who cared less about the debt than the accomplishment of other objects. But the people of the United States have not coupled the payment of their public debt with the destruction of the protection of their industry, against foreign laws and foreign industry. They have been accustomed to regard the extinction of the public debt as relief from a burthen, and not as the infliction of a curse. If it is to be attended or followed by the subversion of the American System, and an exposure of our establishments and our productions to the unguarded consequences of the selfish policy of foreign Powers the payment of the public debt will be the bitterest of curses. *Its* fruit will be like the fruit

"Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
"Brought death into the world, and all our woe.
"With loss of Eden."

If the system of protection be founded on principles erroneous in theory, pernicious in practice—above all if it be unconstitutional as is alledged, it ought to be forthwith abolished, and not a vestige of it suffered to remain. But, before we sanction this sweeping denunciation, let us look a little at this system, its magnitude, its ramifications, its duration, and the high authorities which have sustained it. We shall see that its foes will have accomplished comparatively nothing, after having achieved their present aim of breaking down our iron-foundries, our woollen, cotton and hemp manufactories, and our sugar plantations The destruction of these would, undoubtedly lead to the sacrifice of immense capital the ruin of many thousands of our fellow citizens and incalculable loss to the whole community. But their prostration would not disfigure, nor produce greater effect upon the whole system of protection in all its branches than the destruction of the beautiful domes upon the Capitol would occasion to the magnificent edifice which they surmount Why sir, there is scarcely an interest, scarcely a vocation in society, which is not embraced by the beneficence of this system.

It comprehends our coasting tonnage and trade, from which all foreign tonnage is absolutely excluded

It includes all our foreign tonnage, with the inconsiderable exception made by treaties of reciprocity with a few foreign Powers.

It embraces our fisheries, and all our hardy and enterprising fishermen.

It extends to almost every mechanic art: to tanners, cordwainers, tailors, cabinet-makers, hatters, tinners, brass workers, clock-makers, coach-makers, tallow-chandlers, trace-makers, rope-makers cork cutters, tobacconists whip makers, paper-makers, umbrella-makers, glass blowers, stocking-weavers, butter-makers saddle and harness makers, cutlers, brush-makers, book-binders, dairy-men, milk-farmers blacksmiths, type-founders, musical instrument makers, basket-makers milliners, potters, chocolate makers, floorcloth-makers, bonnet-makers, pocket book-makers, cord-makers glue-makers, mustard-makers, lumber-sawyers, saw-makers, scale-beam-makers, scythe-makers, wood-saw-makers and many others. The mechanics enumerated enjoy a measure of protection adapted to their several conditions varying from twenty to fifty per cent The extent and importance of some of these artizans may be estimated by a few particulars The tanners, curriers, boot and shoe-makers, and other workers of hides, skins and leather, produce an ultimate value per annum of forty millions of dollars; the manufacturers of hats and caps produce an annual value of fifteen millions; the cabinet-makers, twelve millions; the manufacturers of bonnets and hats for the female sex, lace, artificial flowers, combs &c. seven millions; and the manufacturers of glass five millions

It extends to all lower Louisiana the Delta of which might as well be submerged again in the Gulf of Mexico from which it has been a gradual conquest as now to be deprived of the protecting duty upon its great staple.

It affects the cotton planter himself, and the tobacco planter, both of whom enjoy protection.

The total amount of the capital† vested in sheep, the land to sustain them, wool, woollen manufactures and woollen fabrics and the subsistance of the various persons directly or indirectly employed in the growth and manufacture of the article of wool, is estimated at one hundred and sixty-seven millions of dollars and the number of persons at 450,000.

The value of iron, considered as a raw material, & of its manufactures, is estimated at twenty six millions of dollars per annum Cotton goods exclusive of the capital vested in the manufacture, and of the cost of raw material, are believed to amount annually, to about twenty millions of dollars.

These estimates have been carefully made, by practical men, of undoubted character, who have brought together and embodied their information. Anxious to avoid the charge of exaggeration, they have some times placed their estimates below what was believed to be the actual amount of these interests. With regard to the quantity of bar and other iron annually produced, it is derived from the well known works themselves; and *I* know some Western States which they have omitted in their calculations.

Such are some of the items of this vast system of protection, which it is now proposed to abandon. We might well pause and contemplate, if human imagination could conceive the extent of the mischief and ruin from its total overthrow, before we proceed to the work of destruction. Its destruction is worthy, also, of serious consideration. Not to go beyond the constitution, its date is coeval with that instrument It began on the ever memorable 4th day of July—the day of July, 1789 The second act which stands recorded in the statute book, bearing the illustrious signature of George Washington and the corner stone of the system *That* there might be no mistake bout the matter, it was then solemnly proclaimed to the American People and to the world, that it was necessary for the "encouragement and protection of manufactures," that duties should be laid. It is in vain to urge the small amount of the measure of protection then extended. The great principle was then established by the fathers of the constitution, with the Father of his Country at their head. And it cannot now be questioned, that, if the Government had not then begun anew and the subject untried, a greater measure of protection would have been applied if it had been supposed necessary. Shortly after, the master minds of Jefferson and Hamilton were brought to act on this interesting subject. Taking views of it appertaining to the departments of foreign affairs and of the treasury, which they respectively filled, they prepared several reports which yet remain monuments of their profound wisdom, & came to the conclusion of protection to American industry. Mr. Jefferson argued that, foreign prohibitions, foreign prohibitions, and foreign duties ought to be met, at home, by American restrictions, American prohibitions, and American high duties. Mr. Hamilton, surveying the entire ground, & looking at the inherent nature of the subject, treated it with an ability which, if equalled has not been surpassed & earnestly recommended protection

The wars of the French Revolution commenced about this period, and streams of gold poured into the United States through a thousand channels, opened or enlarged by the successful commerce which our neutrality enabled us to prosecute. We forgot or overlooked in the general prosperity, the necessity of encouraging our domestic manufactures. Then came the edicts of Napoleon, and the British orders in council; and our embargo, non-intercourse, non-importation, and war, followed in rapid succession. These national measures, amounting to a total suspension, for the period of their duration, of our foreign commerce; afforded the most efficacious encouragement to American manufactures; and accordingly, they every where sprung up Whilst these measures of restriction and this state of war continued, the manufacturers were stimulated in their enterprises by every assurance of support, by public sentiment, and by legislative resolves. It was about that period (1808) that South Carolina bore her high testimony to the wisdom of the policy in an act of her Legislature, the preamble of which, now before me, reads, "Whereas the establishment and encouragement of domestic manufactures is conducive to the interest of the State, by adding new incentives to industry, and is being the means of disposing, to advantage, the surplus productions of the agriculturists: And whereas, in the present unexampled state of the world, their establishment in our country is not only expedient, but politic, in rendering us independent of foreign nations." The legislature, not being competent to afford the most efficacious aid, by imposing duties on foreign rival articles, proceeded to incorporate a company.

Peace under the treaty of Ghent, returned in 1815, but there did not return with it the golden days which preceded the edicts levelled at our commerce by Great Britain and France. It found all Europe tranquilly resuming the arts and the business of civil life.—It found Europe no longer the consumer of our surplus, and the employer of our navigation, but excluding, or heavily burdening, almost all the productions of our agriculture; and our rivals in manufactures, in navigation, and in commerce. It found our country, in short in a situation totally different from all the past—new and untried. It became necessary to adapt our laws, and especially our laws of imposts to the new circumstances in which we found ourselves Accordingly, that eminent & lamented citizen, then at the head of the treasury (Mr. Dallas) was required, by a resolution of the House of Representatives, under date of the 23d day of February, 1815, to prepare and report to the succeeding session of Congress a system of revenue conformable with the actual condition of the country. He had the circle of a whole year to perform the work, consulted merchants, manufacturers, and other practical men, and opened an extensive correspondence The report which he made, at the session of 1816, was the result of his inquiries and reflections, and embodies the principles which he thought applicable to the subject. It has been said that the tariff of 1816 was a measure of mere revenue; and that it only reduced the war duties to a peace standard. It is true, that the question then was how much, and in what way, should the double duties of the war be reduced? Now also, the question is, on what articles shall the duties be reduced so as to subject the amount of the future revenue to the wants of the Government? Then it was deemed an inquiry of the first importance, as it should be now, how the reduction should be made, so as to secure proper encouragement to our domestic industry.—That this was a leading object in the arrangement of the tariff of 1816. I well remember, and it is demonstrated by the language of Mr. Dallas. He says in his report, "There are "few, if any Governments, which do not regard "the establishment of domestic manufactures "as a chief object of public policy. The United States have always so regarded it. * * * * That the demands of the country, "while the acquisition of supplies from foreign "nations was either prohibited or impracticable "may have afforded a sufficient inducement "for this investment of capital, and this application of labor; but the inducement, in its "necessary extent, must fail, when the day of "competition returns. Upon that change in "the condition of the country, the preservation "of the manufactures, which private citizens, "under favorable auspices, have constituted the "propriety of the nation, becomes a consideration of general policy, to be resolved by "a recollection of past embarrassment; by the "certainty of an increased difficulty of reinstating, upon any emergency, the manufactures "which shall be allowed to perish and pass away," &c. The measure of protection which he proposed was not adopted, in regard to some leading articles, and there was difficulty in ascertaining what it ought to have been.—But the principle was then distinctly asserted and fully sanctioned.

The subject of the American System was again brought up in 1820, by the bill reported by the Chairman of the Committee of Manufactures, now a member of the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States, and the principle was successfully maintained by the representatives of the people; but the bill which passed was defeated in the Senate. It was revived in 1824, the whole ground carefully and deliberately explored, and the bill, then introduced, receiving all the sanctions of the constitution, became the law of the land. An amendment of the system was proposed in 1828, to the history of which I refer with no agreeable recollections. The bill of that year, in some of its provisions, was framed on principles directly adverse to the declared wishes of the friends of the policy of protection I have heard (without vouching for the fact,) that it was so framed, upon the advice of a prominent citizen, now abroad, with the view of ultimately defeating the bill, and with assurances that, being altogether unacceptable to [illegible] would be lost. Be that as it may, the most exceptionable features of the bill were stamped upon it, against the earnest remonstrances of the friends of the system; by the votes of Southern members; upon a principle, I think, as unsound in legislation as it is reprehensible in ethics. The bill was passed, notwithstanding, it having been deemed better to take the bad along with the good which it contained, than reject it altogether. Subsequent legislation has corrected very much the error then perpetrated, but still that measure is vehemently denounced by gentlemen who contributed to make it what it was.

Thus, sir, has this great system of protection been gradually built, stone upon stone, and step by step, from the 4th July, 1789, down to the present period. In every stage of its progress it has received the deliberate sanction of Congress. A vast majority of the People of the United States has approved, and continue to approve it. Every Chief Magistrate of the United States, from Washington to the present in some form or other, has given to it the authority of his name; and however the opinions of the exisiting President are interpreted South of Mason's and Dixon's line, on the North they are, at least understood to favor the establishment of a judicious tariff

The question, therefore, which we are now called upon to determine, is not whether we shall establish a new and doubtful system of policy, just proposed, and for the first time presented to our consideration, but whether we shall break down and destroy a long established system, patiently and carefully built up, and sanctioned, during a series of years, again and again, by the nation and its highest and most revered authorities. And are we not bound deliberately to consider whether we can proceed to this work of destruction without a violation of the public faith? The People of the United States have justly supposed that the policy of protecting their industry, against foreign legislation and foreign industry, was fully settled, not by a single act, but by repeated and deliberate acts of Government, performed at distant and frequent intervals.—In full confidence that the policy was firmly and unchangeably fixed, thousands upon thousands have invested their capital, purchased a vast amount of real and other estate, made permanent establishments, and accommodated their industry. Can we expose to utter and irretrievable ruin this countless multitude, without justly incurring the reproach of violating the national faith?

I shall not discuss the constitutional question. Without meaning any disrespect to those who raise it, if it be debateable, it has been sufficiently debated. The gentleman from South Carolina suffered it to fall unnoticed from his budget, and it was not until after he had closed his speech and resumed his seat, that it occurred to him that he had forgotten it, when he again addressed the Senate, and by a sort of protestation against any conclusion from his silence, put forward the objection. The recent Free Trade Convention at Philadelphia, it is well known, were divided on the question and although the topic is noticed in their address to the public, they do not avow their own belief that the American System is unconstitutional, but represent that such is the opinion of respectable portions of the American People. Another address to the People of the United States, from a high source, during the past year, treating this subject, does not assert the opinion of the distinguished author, but states that of others to be that it is unconstitutional. From which I infer that he did not, himself, believe it unconstitutional.

[Here the Vice President interposed and remarked that, if the Senator from Kentucky alluded to him, he must say that his opinion was that the measure was unconstitutional.]

When, sir, I contended with you, side by side, and with perhaps less zeal than you exhibited, in 1816, I did not understand you then to consider the policy forbidden by the constitution.

[The Vice President again interposed, and said that the constitutional question was not debated at that time, & that he had never expressed an opinion contrary to that now intimated.]

I give way with pleasure to these explanations, which I hope will always be made when I say any thing bearing on the individual opinions of the Chair; *I* know the delicacy of the position, and sympathise with the incumbent, whoever he may be. It is true the question was not debated in 1816; and why not? Because it was not debateable; it was then believed not fairly to arise *It* never has been as a distinct, substantial leading point of objection. It never was made until the discussion of the tariff of 1824,* when it was rather hinted at; as against the spirit of the constitution, than formally announced, as being contrary to the provisions of that instrument. What was not dreampt of before, or in 1816, and scarcely thought of in 1804, is now made.

Such are the origin, duration, extent, and sanctions of the policy which we are now called upon to subvert. Its beneficial effects, although they may vary in degree, have been felt in all parts of the Union. To none, I verily believe, has it been prejudicial. To the North, every where, testimonies are borne to the high prosperity which it has diffused. There, all branches of industry are animated and flourishing. Commerce, foreign and domestic, active; cities and towns springing up, enlarging and beautifying; navigation fully and profitably employed, and the whole face of the country smiling with improvement, cheerfulness and abundance The gentleman from South Carolina has supposed that we, in the West, derive no advantage from this system. He is mistaken. Let him visit us, and he will find, from the head of La Belle Riviere, at Pittsburgh, to America, at its mouth, the most rapid and gratifying advances He will behold Pittsburgh, itself, Wheeling, Portsmouth, Maysville, Cincinnati, Louisville, and numerous other towns, lining and ornamenting the banks of that noble river, daily extending their limits, and prosecuting, with the greatest spirit and profit, numerous branches of the manufacturing and mechanic arts. If he will go into the interior; in the State of Ohio, he will there perceive the most astonishing progress in agriculture, in the useful arts and all the improvements to which they both directly conduce. Then let him cross over to my own, my favorite State, and contemplate the spectacle which is there exhibited. *He* will perceive numerous villages, not large, but neat, thriving, and some of them highly ornamented many manufactories of hemp, cotton, wool, and other articles. In various parts of the country, and especially in the Elkhorn region, an endless succession of natural parks; the forests thinned; fallen trees and underwood cleared away; large herds and flocks feeding on luxuriant grasses, and interspersed with comfortable, sometimes elegant mansions, surrounded by extensive lawns. The honorable gentleman from South Carolina says, that a profitable trade was carried on from the West, through the Seleuda gap, in mules, horses, and other live stock, which has been checked by the operations of the tariff. It is true that such a trade was carried on between Kentucky and South Carolina, mutually beneficial to both parties; but several years ago, resolutions, at popular meetings, in Carolina, were adopted, not to purchase the produce of Kentucky, by way of punishment for her attachment to the tariff—They must have supposed us as stupid as the sires of one of the discriptions of the stock, of which that trade consisted, if they imagined that their resolutions would effect our principles Our drovers cracked their whips, blew their horns, and passed the Seleuda gap, to other markets, where better humors existed, and equal or greater profits were made. I have heard of your successor in the House of Representatives, Mr. President, this anecdote, that he joined in the adoption of those resolutions, but when, about Christmas, he applied to one of his South Carolina neighbors to purchase the regular supply of pork, for the ensuing year, he found that he had to give two prices for it; and he declared if that were the patriotism, on which the resolutions were based, he would not conform to them, and, in point of fact, laid in his annual stock of pork by purchase from the first passing Kentucky drover. That trade, now, partially resumed, was maintained by the sale of Western productions, on the one side, and Carolina money on the other. From that condition of it, the gentleman from S. Carolina might have drawn this conclusion, that an advantageous trade may exist, although one of the parties to it pays in specie for the productions which he purchases from the other; and, consequently, that it does not follow, if we did not purchase British fabrics, that it might not be the interest of England to purchase our raw material of cotton. The Kentucky drover received the South Carolina specie, or, taking bills, or the evidences of deposite in the banks, carried these home, and disposing of them to the merchant, he brought out his goods, of foreign or domestic manufacture, in return Such is the circuitous nature of trade and remittance which no nation understands better than Great Britain.

Nor has the system, which has been the parent source of so much benefit to other parts of the Union proved injurious to the cotton growing country I cannot speak of North Carolina itself, where I have never been, with so much certainty; but of other portions of the Union in which cotton is grown, especially those bordering on the Mississippi, I can confidently speak. If cotton planting is less profitable than it was, that is the result of increased production; but *I* believe it to be still the most profitable investment of capital of any branch of business in the United States. And if a committee be raised, with power to send for persons and papers, I take it upon myself to say, that such would be the result of the inquiry. In Kentucky, I know many individuals who have their cotton plantations below, and retain their residence in that State, where they remain during the sickly season; and they are all, I believe without exception, doing well. Others, tempted by their success, are constantly engaging in the business whilst scarcely any come from the cotton region to engage in western agriculture. A friend, now in my eye, a member of this body, upon a capital of less than seventy thousand

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*See Appendix, A.

†See Appendix, B, for the document referred to.

*To say nothing of cotton produced in other foreign countries, the cultivation of this article of a very superior quality, is constantly extending in the adjacent Mexican provinces, and but for the duty, probably a large amount would be introduced into the United States, down Red river and along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

†See report in Appendix, marked *C*.

*Mr. Clay has been since reminded that the objection, in the same way, was first urged in the debate of 1820,

(*Continued on fourth page.*)