

IN HIS OWN BEHALF

Congressman Tongue on the Porto Rican Bill.

SAYS IT IS A DESIRABLE MEASURE

Tongue's President's Recommendation—The Necessity for Revenue—Was the Sole Consideration.

WASHINGTON, April 22.—(To the Editor.)—The Oregonian of April 16, that has just reached me, contains the following editorial note: "The citadel of the anti-Porto Rico forces appears to be the doctrine that free trade with the island is a proposal of folly and inequity. It is strange, then, that representative Tongue, for example, steadily refuses to point out the obvious bearing of this doctrine upon the President's assertion, that free trade for Porto Rico is 'our plain duty.'"

I take it that this is an invitation extended in good faith for me to offer such reasons or explanations as I may have to give, if any, in reference to the Porto Rican bill just passed by both houses of Congress, and signed by the President. Accepting it in this spirit, I gladly comply with the invitation. This is done more readily for fear a failure to do so would be construed as still further "steadily refusing" to justify the vote given by myself in favor of the bill.

Before doing so, permit me one word. I am not able to fully comprehend the opposition of the Oregonian to the bill as usually passed by both houses of Congress. All of the essential principles for which the Oregonian has so ably contended were established and provided for in the bill as it passed the House. The principal objection made by the Oregonian, or at least the one that appeared most strongly to me, was the fact that such bill appeared to be the inauguration of a policy of attempting to protect ourselves from the products of Porto Rico, and establishing trade barriers between us and them, seemingly perpetual. With this objection, was in earnest accord. But its removal was secured by members of the House, whose ideas were similar to my own, in a quiet way, at a conference of the Republican members. The bill as first reported by the committee was entitled "A bill to regulate the trade of Porto Rico and for other purposes." The operation of the bill was limited as to time. Certainly, upon its face, and especially in the light of the information we then possessed, the bill seemed to have no other object, except that of offering restrictions upon trade and endeavoring to protect certain interests from competition in the island of Porto Rico. When it was pointed out that something like this was necessary, not for protection, but in order to provide temporary revenue to support the government of Porto Rico until other means could be devised, we urged upon the ways and means committee to so change the bill that its purpose should be apparent upon its face, and that it should be a precedent never intended to be established. This was readily complied with, the title of the act was changed, a preamble was added to it showing the reasons for its passage, and a fifth section added, limiting its operation for two years.

What was Added. The bill, preamble and fifth section were as follows: "An act, temporarily to provide revenues for the relief of the island of Porto Rico, and for other purposes. Whereas, the people of Porto Rico have been deprived of markets for a large portion of their products, and have lost property and crops by severe and unusual storms, whereby they are impoverished and are unable to pay internal revenue and direct taxes; and, whereas, temporary revenue is necessary for their schools, their roads, and their public buildings, and the administration of their government; therefore, be it enacted, etc."

Section 5. This act shall be taken and held to be provisional in its purposes and intended to meet a pressing present need for revenue for the island of Porto Rico, and shall not continue in force after the 1st day of March, 1902. This changed the whole character of the bill, removed every vestige of the fact that it could be construed into any precedent; for any purpose outside of the Constitutional question involved. I do not, however, understand that the Oregonian objects to the bill on Constitutional grounds. The majority of the people of the United States are not raising that question. While the bill was in the Senate, Mr. Pettigrew struck out the fifth section and proposed a special tariff upon coffee imported into Porto Rico. Notwithstanding that such provision is subject to every Constitutional objection made to the other revenue features of the bill, it received only a vote, out of a Senate composed of 30 members.

The Oregonian goes to the root of the matter when it asks: "What is the right; necessary to be done; must be done; nothing else will satisfy the people; nothing else will meet the test in Congress; nothing else can expect sustenance of the courts. If it is right and necessary to give Porto Rico free access to our markets, that must be done. If it is right and necessary to proceed gradually with self-government in the Philippines, that must be done." The Oregonian might have said, if it is right and necessary to proceed gradually with the removal of trade restrictions, that ought to be done. With this preliminary, let me call attention to the editorial at the commencement of my letter.

Now, I presume the designation of "the anti-Porto Rican forces" is intended to be applied to the supporters of the bill. Let me call attention to the fact that in the House of Representatives, the men who supported this bill, practically without exception, are men who favored the acquisition of new territory, the retention of all of our newly acquired territory, and they are the men who are largely responsible for the present policy of National expansion. They include the men who will be held responsible for the success or failure of this National policy. They are entering upon legislation in reference to this newly acquired territory with the hope of making this policy a success with full knowledge of their responsibilities, and with the eyes of history upon them.

Who Composed Opposition. On the other hand, those composing the opposition to the bill in the House, with not to do a half dozen exceptions, were opposed to the acquisition of either the Philippines or Porto Rico, and are now opposed to retaining either of them. Many were opposed to the acquisition of either the Philippines or Porto Rico, and are now opposed to retaining either of them. Many were opposed to the acquisition of either the Philippines or Porto Rico, and are now opposed to retaining either of them.

Another statement of fact that appeared to the supporters of this bill that "free trade with the island is a proposal of folly and inequity." When we remember that the bill just passed gives absolute and unqualified free trade in all necessary food products going from the United States into Porto Rico, that it removes 35 per cent of existing duties at once upon all other

articles of commerce between the United States and Porto Rico, that it removes absolutely even this small duty within two years at most, and just as much sooner as a legislature elected by the people of Porto Rico so decides, it seems rather strange to see that the supporters of such a measure regard free trade with the island as a "proposal of folly and inequity." If so, they have enacted an unusual amount of "folly and inequity" to be continued in one bill. Now, add to this that the same people who supported and passed this bill in both the Senate and the House have passed a separate bill through each House giving an unrestricted commercial intercourse between the United States and Hawaii, there is still less ground for making this charge against them. The permanent policy of this legislation, so far as this Congress can make permanent is unrestricted commercial intercourse, absolute free trade, between the people of Porto Rico and the people of the United States. But here this small retention of 15 per cent of the present duties upon a portion of their commerce for a period of two years, or until Porto Rico can provide otherwise, consistent with the President's assertion that it would be "our plain duty" to sustain the same commercial duties and perform the same commercial duties performed by the several states of the Union. In every state of the Union, the duties collected under the Dingley law at the ports of entry are paid into the Treasury of the United States. Certainly the President intended that it would be the "plain duty" of Porto Rico to submit to the same burdens. In every state of the Union, as well as the territories, our internal revenue laws are enforced and the taxes prescribed, including war taxes, are collected upon numerous articles, spirits, tobacco, various and numerous kinds of drugs and medicines, stamps upon checks, notes, mortgages and other commercial transactions, and the money paid into the National Treasury for the support of the Federal Government. The President certainly expected and intended that it would be the "plain duty" of Porto Rico to submit to the same burdens and to this taxation. In the several states of the Union, including the State of Oregon, money necessary to support the various local institutions, Governmental and educational, is collected by direct taxation, levied upon the property of the citizen. This, in some instances, is very burdensome and some instances aggregate from 3 to 4 per cent of the assessed valuation of the property. The President certainly understood and intended that it would be the "plain duty" of Porto Rico to support her own local, general and municipal government, educational, court and police systems and road improvements in exactly the same way. No one who read the editorial referred to, would have been surprised if in any other way. And I insist now that when free trade is fully established in Porto Rico that just as soon as possible the people of Porto Rico should perform the same "duties" and assist in defraying her share of the expenses of the National and the Federal Government. We have levied during the last 12 months something like \$1,000,000 upon the people of Porto Rico, and it was referred to a committee, of which he was a member. On the 13th of February last Mr. Payne introduced a similar bill in the House, and it was referred to the committee on ways and means, of which he is chairman. It then became the duty of the committees of which these gentlemen were members to enter upon another phase of the Porto Rican question. Up to that time the expenses of government in the island had been paid from the money that had been collected at the time of the treaty of cession and by duties collected upon merchandise imported into Porto Rico. The money on hand had been exhausted, the treasury was empty and the Government was completely cut off every source of revenue for the support of local government. As Porto Rico has no local government, it became the duty of these gentlemen, members to provide some method of supplying the revenue that they were cutting off in another way. Government must be supported in Porto Rico, the same as it is maintained, municipal regulations enforced, justice administered, schools carried on, roads improved and repaired, all of which require money. These committees were called upon to devise the necessary legislation in order to raise it. In the absence of a local legislature, it required Congressional action. It then occurred to these gentlemen that they were not possessed with an over-abundance of information, and, at the request of Senator Foraker, as he called the matter, the War Department instructed General Davis, the Military Governor of Porto Rico, to come to Washington, appear before these committees and give the facts in his possession as to what had been done, and what was necessary fiscal legislation. It is no discredit to either the Administration, the Cabinet, Senator Foraker or Mr. Payne to say that up to that time they had not had the conception of the awful conditions in which the industries of Porto Rico had been left by the storms of August, 1899. A general way they knew there had been a devastating storm that had wrought great injury, about the particulars of which they knew little. The advent of General Davis into Washington revealed the true condition of affairs in the island, as it had not appeared before, and changed the whole current of legislation. His testimony before the committee is responsible for the bill that we have now.

most of the coffee trees were either uprooted, broken off or stripped of foliage and the berries of the larger trees of other varieties, which are habitually grown for shade to the coffee, were blown down, and their protection to the coffee trees was destroyed. The coffee trees were not wholly denuded, the protection of the berries from the sun's heat is absent, and the green fruit is blighted and spoiled. "It will take five years to re-establish these coffee trees, and there will be necessarily years of want and industrial paralysis."

It seems to me that Porto Rico has gone to realize in some way \$5,000,000 a year from taxes, at least. It ought to be much more than that; but at least \$5,000,000 for municipal government and insular government, including perhaps a million dollars for a million dollars is two and a half times more than I can collect from taxes, to say nothing of the hurricane, and perhaps five times as much as I can collect from taxes. To bridge over this means must come from somewhere, or this prostration will continue."

I quote the following from the testimony of General Davis before the Senate committee: "Judging from the capacity of the island to pay taxes, and on the basis of present tariff rates, and the condition of their industry, I should say it would be imprudent to expect to obtain more than \$5,000,000 from all sources."

Mr. Pettigrew—Suppose we should repeal the tariff on coffee, would you have free trade with the United States? General Davis—That would cut it still more. Mr. Pettigrew—How much? General Davis—It would cut it about in two.

Mr. Nelson—What does your plan contemplate in regard to customs and internal revenue taxes? Are they to go to the general fund, or be devoted exclusively to that country? General Davis—It is, of course, immaterial where the money comes from, but they must have a large revenue to administer the affairs of the government. My suggestion is that all collections here to the country; but I am looking to see the sources from which revenue can be obtained. A general system of taxation to produce revenue enough to carry on the government would amount to confiscation. Mr. Pettigrew—Care you collect enough to maintain the government?

General Davis—Not for two or three years on any basis. General Davis was asked by Mr. Nelson: Have you any system of taxation akin to our internal revenue taxation? General Davis—Only on two articles. One, the liquor tax, of which I have spoken, of 3 cents a liter, and the other, a tax on amusements, the manufacture matches.

The chairman—Do you levy the tax readily, or with difficulty? General Davis—With difficulty; no man pays his tax readily.

He further testified that the people dependent upon the coffee industry had been fed by the charity of the Government, and \$800,000 expended in their behalf. He further pointed out that to undertake to enforce the internal revenue laws against this class of people would not only be unfeeling, but would result in a total and unremedied disaster. "It must be remembered that these people have lived under different laws. They are not adapted to the present law, but the tax levied upon the manufacture of tobacco in the United States, wealthy corporations turning out immense quantities, is a small affair. The tax upon some of our most important retail dealers is a serious thing. The internal revenue stamps required upon cigars is reasonably light upon that class of our population who indulge in these luxuries. In Porto Rico the manufacturer is frequently also a retail dealer in a small building, doing a small business, in both making and selling cigars. 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