

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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DOCUMENTS

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THE LEGISLATURE

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE.

1867.

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1867.

FORTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE.

SENATE.

No. 35.

STATE OF MAINE.

RESOLVE relative to the ship-building interest of Maine.

Resolved, That this legislature views with alarm the
2 depressed and suffering condition of the ship-building
3 interests of the state, which condition has arisen, in a
4 large degree, from the heavy duties imposed by con-
5 gress upon the foreign materials entering into the
6 construction of ships, and other burdens imposed by
7 government, and which are depriving our ship build-
8 ers of a successful competition with foreign built ships,
9 especially with those of the British North American
10 Provinces.

Resolved, That the memorial to congress adopted by
2 the ship builders of Maine, assembled in convention at
3 Augusta, on the thirtieth and thirty-first days of Janu-
4 ary last, in which is set forth the depressed and suf-

5 fering condition of the ship-building and ship-owning
6 interests of this state, as having been caused by the
7 onerous burdens imposed by the government, and indi-
8 cating in what manner relief should be afforded, should
9 receive from congress that attention which the great
10 importance of the interests involved demand.

Resolved, That our senators and representatives in
2 congress be requested to use their best efforts to pro-
3 cure such legislation as will afford the ship-builders
4 and ship-owners of Maine, that relief which they so
5 ardently desire.

Resolved, That the governor be and is hereby re-
•2 quested to forward a copy of these resolves, with a
3 copy of said memorial, to each of the senators and
4 representatives in congress from this state.

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled :

GENTLEMEN :—Your memorialists are a Committee raised for a specific purpose, by a large and intelligent Convention of ship-builders and ship-owners, held in Augusta, Maine, January 30th, 1867.

The following is the resolve under which they act :

“ *Resolved*, That a Committee consisting of Hon. Samuel Cony, Hon. N. G. Hichborn, Hon. E. W. Stetson, Hon. Isaiah Stetson and Hon. J. P. Morse be raised to memorialize Congress and ask that the ship-building interest of Maine be relieved from the heavy burdens imposed by Congress upon this important branch of industry, through a drawback on duties on all foreign articles entering into the construction of ships.”

In accordance with the above instruction your memorialists proceed to say that, among the prominent interests of Maine, doubtful if any are more so than her navigable ; in fact it is second to none but her agricultural.

She has usually had engaged in ship-building some 6,000 to 7,000 men, and twice that number in sailing or navigating them. Some 100,000 persons are thus dependent upon the same for a livelihood.

So well adapted are the facilities and opportunities of Maine for prosecuting this essential branch of national, as well as State industry, and so energetically have her citizens pursued it, when untrammelled by onerous burdens, that she has actually constructed for a series of years, on an average, more than fifty per cent. of all the sea-going vessels of the country. This she will undoubtedly continue to do, but it is for Congress to decide whether that percentum shall be few or many.

If the onerous burdens now imposed by tariffs and taxes can be lightened, the hum of industry, as of yore, will again be heard in our ship-yards ; ship-owners will again increase, and our commerce send Maine ships to bear our flag wherever civilization is known.

The effect of continuing such a policy must be not only to de-

stroy the business, but actually to defeat the ends of the government in imposing the burdens. If no ships are built of course no dutiable articles are consumed and no revenue paid to the government. This is the simplest problem of arithmetic.

During the year ending June, 1865, one hundred and nine ships and barques were built in the United States. Maine built seventy-four of them—forty-six brigs were built, and Maine built thirty-four of them. The number per year built since has, probably, somewhat increased, the ratio built in Maine remaining about the same. These vessels have been built mainly from sales of ships out of the country during the rebellion, but so heavy has been the cost that they have ceased to be productive property, and hence little preparation is making for building in the future. High costs and unproductiveness are elements that never fail to check business.

It is estimated that some 120,000 tons of shipping were built in Maine during the last year, and from carefully prepared memoranda, it is ascertained that the duties on articles actually entering into the construction of ships amount to about ten dollars per ton. This in the aggregate amounts to \$1,200,000 per annum—a sum equal to the whole taxation of the State. Such a burden cannot fail of its results. Relief must be had or the business dwindle to a close; our ship-yards be abandoned, our builders lose their business, and mechanics be discharged to seek other employ, and probably in other States.

Again, the law for collecting tonnage dues is so framed, that a ship registered for the first time in December, must pay for the full calendar year. Suppose the register to be dated December 30, the ship must pay for a full year thirty cents per ton, and then if she clear and happen into port in another district on January 1st, she must pay another thirty cents per ton; this is expensive and vexatious. It cannot be the intent of the law to tax a ship for time expiring before she is built or registered.

Once more—the admeasurement of the houses of ships, and entering the same in the register, works wrong in many ways to the owner, and but little comparative good to the government.

The excise tax, also, upon the manufacture of many articles, such as rigging, sails, tanks, &c., is unequal and onerous, and needs re-adjustment if not repealing.

Thus we have recited briefly the disabilities under which this speciality of Maine industry rests. If these disabilities upon ship-builders must continue, Maine must bear more than one-half the

whole burden thus imposed upon the nation ; and that too, with but very slight compensative consideration. Maine has but comparatively few manufactories, grows but little wool and produces no coal, and but very little iron,—her's it seems to be "to do and bear." But it is not from local considerations alone, that we urge relief in this direction. It involves, we think, a national question of no ordinary moment.

As has been well said, by the Secretary of the Treasury in his recent able report, the nations that build ships sail them ; and if we cease to build we cease to sail, and hence cease that hardy, practical training on the seas in merchant marine which so eminently fits our sailors for the defence of the country on the water, in time of danger. Should the future, which we fear is not unlikely, find us engaged in a foreign war, its great battles must be fought on the seas ; and it would be unpardonable for a nation of our means and experience not to have an extensive merchant marine from which to extemporize such men as so summarily sent the British built and manned Alabama to the bottom. Further than this, should a sudden conflict with a commercial nation arise, the extensive ship-yards of Maine, and her numerous strong armed and well skilled mechanics may all be needed to meet the emergency.

Once more : Commerce is now admitted to be the great equalizer and civilizer of the world ; and it is our duty, as well as our privilege, to send our flag wherever intelligence is known. As it now is, our citizens, induced by the superior advantages offered in neighboring Provinces, are taking our timber, carrying it to said Provinces, there constructing their ships for foreign trade, and sending them abroad. American ships manned by American sailors, and bearing every where a foreign flag ! Such a policy, long continued, can but work infinite wrong to our country and its institutions.

From such a condition your memorialists ask an intelligent and appreciative Congress to save the State and Nation.

And as in duty bound will ever pray.



STATE OF MAINE.

IN SENATE, February 8, 1867.

Laid on the table on motion of Mr. CROSBY, and the usual number of copies ordered to be printed.

THOMAS P. CLEAVES, *Secretary.*