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BENJAMIN RUSH & DR. S. WEIR MITCHELL

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HISTORICAL NOTES OF DR. BENJAMIN RUSH, 1777.

CONTRIBUTED BY DR. S. WEIN MITCHELL.

[The following extracts from one of the Note-Books of Dr. Rush, in the Ridgway Branch of the Library Company of Philadelphia, are particularly interesting and valuable because they contain the abstracts of the speeches made by the doctor and other members of Congress on the question whether the action of the Congress of the New England States, held at Providence, Rhode Island, in December of 1776, regulating the prices of certain domestic and foreign products, required the approval of Congress to make it valid; to increase the rate of interest on Loan Office certificates; to refer the appointment of three major-generals to the general officers of the army; and the proposition of General Charles Lee, while a prisoner of war, for a conference with several members of Congress. Dr. Rush's criticism of Washington and several of his generals, the condition of the army, and his characterization of the political attitude of the people of the United States, although familiar to those who have followed his political career, are still interesting reading.—ED. PENNA. MAG.]

Decem^r 25, 1776.

In a *Congress* composed of Deputies from the 4 New Eng^d States of New Hampshire, Mass: Bay, Rhode Island & Connecticut, Decem^r 25, 1776. They agreed to regulate the prices of the follow^g articles at the following rates.

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Farming— $3/4$ p diem, and mechanical labor compared with it in the usual proportion.

Wheat— $7/6$ p Bushel N. H; M. B; & R. I; $6/$ Con:

Rye— $4/6$ D° D° D° D° $3/6$ D°:

Indian Corn— $3/4$ M. B., $3/6$ N. H; R. I: $3/$ D°

Wool— $2/$ p B M. B.; R. I; Con; $2/2$ N. H:

Pork— 4^a — $4\frac{1}{2}$ $4\frac{1}{2}$ M. B. according to weight p pound.

Pork— $3\frac{1}{2}$ $3\frac{1}{2}$ $3\frac{1}{2}$ p pound Connecticut.

D° $4\frac{1}{2}$ $4\frac{1}{2}$ —New Hampshire.

D° $3\frac{1}{2}$ — $4\frac{1}{2}$ —Rhode Island.

Beef— 3 p pound M. B; N. H; R. I: In Connecticut $24/$ p hundred.

Hides— 3^a p pound in all.

Salt— $10/$ p bushel D°.

West India Rum— $6/8$ p gallon by Hogsh^d $7/8$ by the single gallon—& $2/$ p quart.

New Eng^d Rum— $3/20$ p Hogsh^d $4/$ p barrel, $4/6$ p single gallon, allowing one penny p gallon for every ten miles it is carried.

Sugar, best Muscovado— $54/$ p hund: by Hogs^d $60/$ by the single hundred weight & 8^a p pound for single pound allow^e 9 p hund weight for every ten miles land carriage.

Molasses— $3/4$ p gallon by hogs^d: & $3/8$ p barrel & $4/$ p single gallon—allow^e 1 p gallon for every 10 miles carriage.

Cheese— 6^a p pound.

Butter— 10 D°

Peas— $8/$ p bushel.

Potatoes—In the fall $1/4$ p bushel, in other seasons $2/$ p d°

Yarn Stockings— $8/$ p pair.

Mens Shoes— $8/$ p pair.

Salt-pork—M. B; R. Island $92/$ p hundred; $84/$ in Con; $100/$ N. Hampshire.

Cotton— $3/$ p bag $3/8$ by the single pound.

Oats— $2/$ p bushel.

Flax—1/ M. B; N. Ham; R. I: 1/— $\frac{1}{2}$ pound Con: /10 $\frac{1}{2}$ pound.

Coffee—1/4 $\frac{1}{2}$ pound in all.

Tallow—/7 $\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ pound in all.

Tow Cloath—yard wide $\frac{2}{3}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ yard—and all coarse linnen in proportion.

Flannels—Yard wide $\frac{3}{6}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ yard and other flannels in proportion, according to thier widths and qualities, & all woollen cloath in like proportion.

Woollen goods—coarse linnen—Duck Ticklenburg & Osna-brigs shall be sold at 275 Sterling, for what cost 100 in Europe—*prize goods* 250 for what cost 100—All public vendues & auctions to be suppressed—wood—hay—planks—leather—shingles—charcoal—mutton—veal—flour wth the rates of carting to be regulated by the states seperately.

An acc^t of the prices given by General Howe in New Jersey for sundry articles:

Hay—when bro't by the inhabitants £4..0..0 $\frac{1}{2}$ ton—
£3..0..0 when fetched by the army.

Wheat—6/ $\frac{1}{2}$ bushel D^o 5/6 D^o

Beef—/3^s $\frac{1}{2}$ pound /2 $\frac{1}{2}$ D^o

Pork—D^o D^o D^o D^o.

Oats—3/ $\frac{1}{2}$ bushel 2/6 D^o.

Corn—3/— D^o D^o.

no pay for wood or candle.

Upon motion in Congress whether the meeting held by the four New Eng^d States by deputies at Providence Decem^r 25, 1776, was a proper one and whether it did not stand in need of the approbation of Congress to make it *valid*.—

It was said by *M^r Sam^l Adams*: That a right to assemble upon all occasions to consult measures for promoting liberty & happiness was the priviledge of *freemen*. That it

was contested by Gov^r Hutchinson & that it was dreaded only by tyrants.

Mr. Rich^d Henry Lee: It was said on the same side of the question that we were not yet confederated, therefore no law of the union infringed.

Col. Wilson; on the negative said, that the design in the committee of the 4 New England States in sending their proceedings to Congress was to demand their approbation—That the same was clearly intimated by the tenor of the appointments from Rhode Island and Connecticut,—that the committee had commanded, and countermanded continental troops,—that the said troops were to be paid by the continent,—therefore, that the business the committee transacted was wholly *Continental* and of course, required the approbation of Congress.

Mr. John Adams said, that he lately travelled thro' New Eng^d & that he was sure that the approbation of the Congress of the meeting would give pleasure to the committee and their constituents. That thier meeting was founded in necessity. That altho' we were not confederated, the same principles of equity & reason should govern as if we were united by a confederacy—that the four New England states bore the same relation to the Congress that four counties bore to a single state. These four counties have a right to meet to regulate roads—and affairs that relate to the poor—but they have no right to tax or execute any other branch of legislation. In like manner the four New Eng^d States, or any other four states have a right to meet upon matters wholly indifferent, but they have no right to touch upon continental subjects—that the committee from the 4 New Eng^d States have touched upon continental Subjects, therefore, the *meeting* stands in need of the approbation of the Congress.

Dr. Rush: The desire of independance is natural not only to individuals but to communities. There was a time (near 200 years) when it was wrong to say a word agst the dependance of the colonies upon Great Britain—a time came when it was equally criminal to enforce that depend-

ance. The time may come & probably will come, when it will be the interest of the united States to be independant of each other, but I can conceive of no temporal punishment to be severe eno' for that man who attempts to dissolve, or weaken the union for a century or two to come. I admire the proceedings of the committee assembled at Providence. They are full of political virtue & wisdom, and I think the other states will act wisely & virtuously in proportion as they resemble them. But I think the *meeting* is full of great & interesting consequences, and should be regarded with a serious & jealous eye. Thier business was chiefly continental, and therefore they usurped the houses of Congress as much as four counties would usurp the powers of legislation in a state, sh^d they attempt to tax themselves. The committee have in one instance, in regulating the price of goods counterverted [?] an express resolution of Congress; and lastly tho' the meeting was necessary and no injustice intended or done by it to any state, yet it becomes us to remember that arbitrary power has often originated in justice & necessity.

This question was decided by a majority in the Committee of the whole house in the *affirmative*—but in the *negative* a few days afterwards. It was reconsidered Feb^r 13th.

Feb^r 10, on motion to raise the interest of money to 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ cent for loan office tickets, it was said in the negative—

1. That there was no other way of laying out money.
2. That loan office tickets are the same as money, and, therefore, in case of the want of money new emissions are equally proper.

In the affirmative it was said by *Mr Serycant*, That loan office tickets would be confined only to one State.

By *Mr Jas Wilson*: That Bonds, lands etc., were transferrable as well as loan office tickets, and therefore the argument of thier being the same as money is without force. That the money lenders had all thier money paid into them, that 3 millions had been received by the usurers in Pen-

sylvania, all of which was probably in thier hands, and that if the interest was raised to 6 ½ cent it w^d procure money.

Mr John Adams: That loan offices tickets would not circulate because they bore an interest. That Massachussets bay in the last war emitted 50,000 in notes bearing an interest of 6 ¾ cent, which were immediately locked up and withdrawn from the circulation, even tho' gold & silver was plentiful among them. That new emissions would only increase the difficulty, that the continent would bear only 7 millions. That unless the interest was raised, the money holder would employ his money in speculation in buying lands and in monopolizing goods, by which means, the necessaries of life were enhanced in thier price; that this alone would regulate the price of goods, that no other wisdom [two lines torn] emission we would rather see our army disbanded, and Howe let loose to ravage the whole country.

Upon calling the question the States (10 in number divided equally). As a proof of the impropriety of each state having a seperate Vote, it is remarkable that there were 18 members for raising the interest & 10 only against it. The States that voted in favor of it were New Hampshire, Massachussets bay, New Jersey, Pensylvania and Virginia. The inhabitants of these states collectively, make near two-thirds of the whole inhabitants of the united States. [torn] political character in the same light as they do a suit of cloaths. They put it on & off at pleasure. But we trifle with all morality—we trifle with the happiness of millions by not holding up [two pages torn out].

Feb^r 14, 1777.

Upon the question whether the Congress should recommend to the States to adopt the plan for reducing and regulating the price of labor, manufactures, imports, and provisions, which had been adopted in the four New England States. It was said in the negative by

Mr Jas. Smith, That such a recommendation would inter-

ferre with the domestic police of each State which were of too delicate a nature to be touched by the Congress.

Dr. Rush, I am against the whole of the resolution. It is founded in the contrary of justice—policy & necessity as has been declared in the resolution. The wisdom & power of government have been employed in all ages to regulate the price of necessaries to no purpose. It was attempted in Eng^d in the reign of Edward II by the English parliament, but without effect. The laws for limiting the price of every thing were repealed, and M^r Hume, who mentions this fact, records even the very attempt as a monument of human folly. The Congress with all its authority have failed in a former instance of regulating the price of goods. You have limited Bohea tea to $\frac{2}{3}$ of a dollar, and yet it is daily sold before your eyes for 30/. The committee of Philad^a limited the price of West India goods about a year ago—But what was the consequence? The merchants it is true sold their rum, sugar & molasses at the price limited by the committee, but they charged a heavy profit upon the barrel or the paper which contained the rum or the sugar. Consider, Sir, the danger of failing in this experiment. The Salvation of this continent depends upon the authority of this Congress being held as sacred as the cause of liberty itself. Suppose we should fail of producing the effects we wish for by the resolution before you. Have we any character to spare? Have we committed no mistakes in the management of the public affairs of America? We have, sir! It becomes us therefore, to be careful of the remains of our Authority & character. It is a common thing to cry aloud of the rapacity & extortion in every branch of business & among every class of men. This has led some people to decry the *public virtue* of this country. True Sir, there is not so much of it as we could wish, but there is much more that is sometimes allowed on this floor. We estimate our virtue by a false barometer, when we measure it by the price of goods. The extortion we complain off arises only from the excessive quantity of our money. Now,