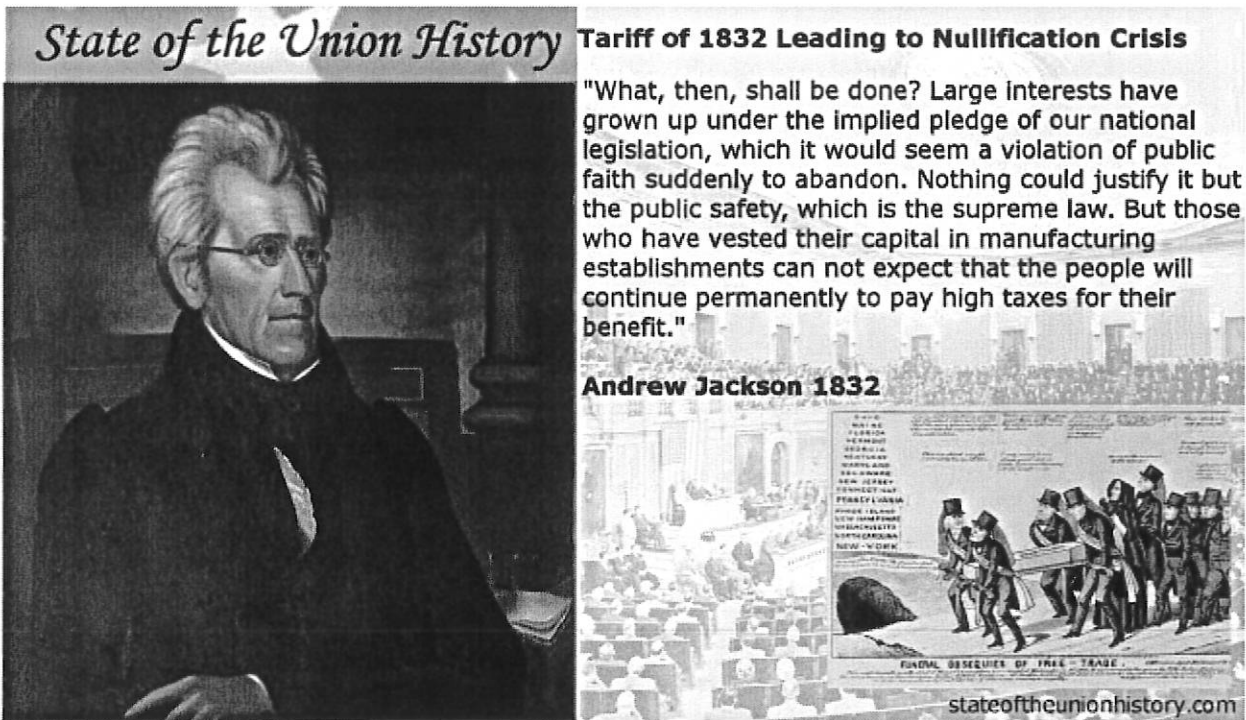


1832 Andrew Jackson - Tariff of 1832 leading up to the Nullification Crisis



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In this article, I examine the words of Andrew Jackson regarding the Tariff of 1832 and the objections which led to the Nullification crisis of 1832. Here we find Andrew Jackson sympathizing with those who believe the tariffs to be too high and unconstitutional. Jackson agreed that tariffs should be limited to only those items that are essential to the nation's independence and safety in times of war but advised that tariffs should be reduced gradually not abruptly. To decrease them abruptly, Jackson argued would be unfair to the great interests that have "grown up under the implied pledge" of tariffs and viewed abandonment as a violation of public trust. In these several paragraphs of Jackson's 1832 State of the Union address, Jackson presents himself as a man of reason and understanding. It is a tone that is quite different than the one he takes in the paragraphs immediately following on the Nullification crisis. My next post will dive into those words.

The tariff of 1828, also known as the Tariff of Abominations was pitting the Southern agricultural interests against the Northeaster manufacturing interests. The tariff increased the price of finished goods and was also blamed for a drop in cotton price. The southern states complained that they were being overly taxed to protect the interests of the Northeast. The Northeast was complaining about provisions inserted into the Tariff by the Democratic party that were targeting their industries causing lower prices of their manufactured goods. Nobody was happy, and each side blamed the other. Jackson's Vice President John C. Calhoun led the effort to demand that the tariffs be reduced. Calhoun was from South Carolina, the state most effected by the tariffs and the impact on the price of cotton. In 1830, Jackson urged Congress could put aside their own "interests and prejudices" and just work out a compromise to fix it.

In response, former President John Quincy Adams, then a member of the House of Representatives and chairman of the Committee on Manufactures got to work. Adams worked with both Calhoun and Henry Clay to push through the house a compromise bill that would reduce the tariffs. On July 14th, Adams succeeded, and Congress passed on July 14 and was to go into effect on March 3, 1833, but the reduction was too little for Calhoun and his supporters. In

November of 1832, South Carolina held a convention that declared the federal tariffs of 1828 and 1832 were unconstitutional and therefore null and void within the sovereign boundaries of their state. In his 1832 State of the Union Address, President Jackson defended the purpose of the Tariff of 1832, that is to reduce the import taxes before he began discussing the events surrounding the South Carolina Convention. We will examine those words here.

First Jackson explained what he believed the reason for tariffs and the constitutional limitations placed on those tariffs. Jackson viewed tariffs as a necessary regulation that should be limited to that which is "necessary to counteract the regulations of foreign nations" and on manufactured products that are essential to the nation in times of war. Jackson agreed that the existing tariffs went beyond this and recommended that they be "gradually diminished".

"In effecting this adjustment it is due, in justice to the interests of the different States, and even to the preservation of the Union itself, that the protection afforded by existing laws to any branches of the national industry should not exceed what may be necessary to counteract the regulations of foreign nations and to secure a supply of those articles of manufacture essential to the national independence and safety in time of war. If upon investigation it shall be found, as it is believed it will be, that the legislative protection granted to any particular interest is greater than is indispensably requisite for these objects, I recommend that it be gradually diminished, and that as far as may be consistent with these objects the whole scheme of duties be reduced to the revenue standard as soon as a just regard to the faith of the Government and to the preservation of the large capital invested in establishments of domestic industry will permit."

Second, Jackson argued that while tariffs in the abstract are beneficial to the nation, they introduce too many negative impacts on the economy. Jackson pointed to recent experience that high tariffs designed to permanently protect a domestic industry tend to create a "spirit of discontent and jealousy dangerous to the stability of the Union". Here Jackson seemed to be sympathetic to South Carolina's actions, blaming the high tariffs not the state legislature or John C. Calhoun.

"That manufactures adequate to the supply of our domestic consumption would in the abstract be beneficial to our country there is no reason to doubt, and to effect their establishment there is perhaps no American citizen who would not for a while be willing to pay a higher price for them. But for this purpose it is presumed that a tariff of high duties, designed for perpetual protection, which they maintain has the effect to reduce the price by domestic competition below that of the foreign article. Experience, however, our best guide on this as on other subjects, makes it doubtful whether the advantages of this system are not counter-balanced by many evils, and whether it does not tend to beget in the minds of a large portion of our country-men a spirit of discontent and jealousy dangerous to the stability of the Union."

Jackson asked, "What, then, shall be done?" Jackson explain that since the tariff has now been in place for some time, "large interests" had become established under the "implied pledge" that the tariffs would remain in effect. On one hand, Jackson argued to abandon them now, would seem to them a violation of "public faith". While, on the other hand, the manufacturing establishments and their partners should not expect that the people would be willing to permanently pay higher taxes for their benefit. Especially, when the money is not required for any "legitimate purpose" of the federal government. Perhaps, an argument could be made that paying off the national debt is a "legitimate purpose", but in 1832 that debt was soon to be paid off. Thus, when one steps back and looks at the overall condition of our country in 1832, it became obvious that the "policy of protection" should be limited to only those domestic manufacturing goods that are "indispensable to our safety in time of war". After making this argument, Jackson then described the viewpoint of South Carolina who saw the tariffs as unconstitutional and unjust. Anything beyond this patriotic duty, leads to nothing but discontent among the people. In some sections of the country (aka South Carolina), a system of protectionism is seen as a way to concentrate wealth into a few hands forming monopolies that have proven destructive to both liberty and the general good.

"What, then, shall be done? Large interests have grown up under the implied pledge of our national legislation, which it would seem a violation of public faith suddenly to abandon. Nothing could justify it but the public safety, which is the supreme law. But those who have vested their capital in manufacturing establishments can not expect that the people will continue permanently to pay high taxes for their benefit, when the money is not required for any legitimate purpose in the administration of the Government. Is it not enough that the high duties have been paid as long as the money arising from them could be applied to the common benefit in the extinguishment of the public debt?

Those who take an enlarged view of the condition of our country must be satisfied that the policy of protection must be ultimately limited to those articles of domestic manufacture which are indispensable to our safety in time of war. Within this scope, on a reasonable scale, it is recommended by every consideration of patriotism and duty, which will doubtless always secure to it a liberal and efficient support. But beyond this object we have already seen the operation of the system productive of discontent. In some sections of the Republic its influence is deprecated as tending to concentrate wealth into a few hands, and as creating those germs of dependence and vice which in other countries have characterized the existence of monopolies and proved so destructive of liberty and the general good. A large portion of the people in one section of the Republic declares it not only inexpedient on these grounds, but as disturbing the equal relations of property by legislation, and therefore unconstitutional and unjust."

President Jackson considered these fears to be greatly exaggerated but were nevertheless important items to consider. Jackson recommended that the tariff be reviewed and modified in a way that would eliminate the concerns of South Carolina, "so that none can with justice complain".

"Doubtless these effects are in a great degree exaggerated, and may be ascribed to a mistaken view of the considerations which led to the adoption of the tariff system; but they are never the less important in enabling us to review the subject with a more thorough knowledge of all its bearings upon the great interests of the Republic, and with a determination to dispose of it so that none can with justice complain."

This was Jackson being fair and understanding, for in the very next paragraph, Jackson takes a drastic turn telling Congress to be prepared to take whatever measures are necessary to defeat the opposition to our revenue laws in South Carolina. I will end here, and pick that up in my next post.

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Labels: Andrew Jackson, Tariff of Abominations, Taxes and Tariffs

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