

# The Commoner

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## THE TOLLS QUESTION

The house of representatives responded to the president's appeal and passed the Sims bill repealing the free tolls measure. As the details of the vote will be found on another page, it is sufficient for the present purpose to say that the vote on the repeal bill stood 247 for, 162 against, giving to the president's recommendations a majority of 85. An analysis of the vote reveals the fact that 220 democrats voted for the repeal and only 52 against, showing that the president's position was sustained among the democrats by a vote of more than four to one. The republican vote on the proposition stood 93 against and 23 for, or a little more than four to one against the president. The progressive vote stood 17 against the repeal and 3 for, or a little over five to one against the president. As there are 432 votes in the house, the president secured a clear majority of the entire house in favor of the stand he has taken.

The fight was a bitter one, and a number of the democratic leaders spoke, worked and voted against the repeal of the tolls measure. As the opponents of repeal have dragged into the discussion much that can not fairly be regarded as legitimate argument, The Commoner begs to call the attention of its readers to the facts in the case.

### "GAG RULE"

First, as to the charge of "gag rule." The committee on rules reported a rule allowing 20 hours for debate; none of the friends of free tolls asked for more time than that before the rule was reported, but during the discussion of the rule the charge was made that the president's supporters were attempting to cut off debate and force the measure through under a "gag rule."

What are the facts? When the subject first came up the opponents of the repeal measure asked for 8 hours, and it was granted them. They then asked that the time be extended to 15 hours, and this was granted. Later they asked that the time be made 20 hours, and this was granted. The charge that the time was unduly limited can not fairly come from the friends of free tolls, for when the free tolls measure was under consideration in 1912 the debate on it occupied less than three hours. It will be seen, therefore, that seven times as much time was given for the discussion of the repeal measure as was given for the discussion of the original measure giving free tolls to coastwise vessels. When it is remembered that four-fifths of the democrats favored the repeal, while a majority of the democrats opposed the free tolls measure, it will be seen that the friends of the repeal measure were exceedingly liberal in the allowance of time as compared with the friends of the original free tolls measure. In the face of these facts, one must be very biased in his

opinion to accuse the president's friends of an attempt to adopt a "gag rule" or to unduly limit debate.

### THE PLATFORM PLEDGE

In the discussion of the repeal measure it was impossible to confine its opponents to a discussion of the merits of the question. They stoutly contended that they were standing upon the platform adopted at Baltimore, and assumed to themselves a superior sort of virtue because of the sanctity with which they invested this particular plank of the platform. The readers of The Commoner have long since learned to regard a platform pledge as binding and they are entitled to know the grounds upon which the democrats of congress acted in repealing a measure endorsed by the platform.

There are three facts to be considered—facts which the friends of free tolls have refused to discuss. First, that there was another plank in the platform, or rather another clause, which was practically a part of the same plank which contained the free tolls declaration. This clause had to do with the encouragement of the merchant marine and reads:

"We believe in fostering, by constitutional regulation of commerce, the growth of a merchant marine, which shall develop and strengthen the commercial ties which bind us to our sister republics of the south, BUT WITHOUT IMPOSING ADDITIONAL BURDENS UPON THE PEOPLE AND WITHOUT BOUNTIES OR SUBSIDIES FROM THE PUBLIC TREASURY."

The merchant marine includes ALL the ships belonging to American citizens, and it will be seen that the democratic party expressed a deep interest in the upbuilding of the merchant marine, and yet, notwithstanding the importance of the subject and the anxious concern felt by the party for the rehabilitation of the merchant marine, it specifically declared against bounties and subsidies as a means of aiding the merchant marine. The action of the free tolls

democrats in ignoring this plank is incomprehensible, because its language is clear and specific and it reiterates a doctrine for which the democratic party has stood from time immemorial. This opposition to bounties and subsidies, whether granted openly and directly or whether granted secretly and indirectly, as they are through a protective tariff, is a fundamental article of democratic faith.

But while the friends of free tolls are able to overlook the plank above quoted, with its clear and ringing declaration against subsidies and bounties they regard as sacred the following lines in which the party endorsed free tolls:

"We favor the exemption from toll of American ships engaged in coastwise trade passing through the canal."

Why do these few words stand out so brightly before the advocates of free tolls? And why are they unable to see or remember the words condemning bounties and subsidies? What oplate does the little plank contain that it can make those who accept it oblivious of the larger plank? By what rule of construction can the small plank be made binding and the large one be ignored?

The secret of the strange power exerted by the little plank is to be found in the fact that it carefully conceals the means by which it is to be carried out. Had the word "subsidy" or "bounty" been inserted in this plank, it could not have secured the endorsement of the convention because the contradiction between this plank and the larger plank would have been immediately apparent. If the same care had been used in the drawing of this plank that was used in the drawing of the plank on the merchant marine, it would have read as follows:

"We favor the exemption from toll of American ships engaged in coastwise trade passing through the canal, BUT WITHOUT IMPOSING ADDITIONAL BURDENS UPON THE PEOPLE AND WITHOUT BOUNTIES OR SUBSIDIES FROM THE PUBLIC TREASURY."

Second, but even if the platform had not contained within itself a complete refutation of the position taken by the advocates of free tolls, the president would have been justified in the position that he took by the changed conditions which confronted him. A platform is a pledge and is as binding upon an official as the command of a military officer is upon a subordinate—the statement can not be made stronger. But the subordinate officer is sometimes compelled to act upon his judgment where a change, of which the commanding officer is not aware, has taken place in conditions. It is not only the right of the subordinate to judge the situation for himself where conditions have changed since the order was given, but it is his duty to do so. It is true that he risks his position if he miscalculates the condition and disobeys when he

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