

# AMERICAN SHIPPING

Nine-Tenths of Our Exports and Imports Carried by Foreign Vessels.

Those who attended the Denver conference will remember the resolutions presented by Major Wm. W. Bates of Denver relative to American shipping. And, notwithstanding that conference did not assume to write a party platform, it did venture to declare for "American ships for American foreign commerce, without a cent of subsidy." Beyond a doubt that expresses the populist position on this question; but, of course, it contains no suggestion of how the present deplorable situation may be bettered, except that it shall not be done via the subsidy route.

American ships and American sailors in 1810 carried more than 91 per cent of our ocean trade. Last year they carried less than 9 per cent of it. Of course, the trade had increased enormously, but the astounding fact is that last year the tonnage carried by American ships itself was actually less than in 1810. Here are the figures: In 1810.....981,000 tons In 1902..... 873,000 tons

Those who live in interior states are apt to overlook the importance of our ocean trade; but the fact that we pay annually about one hundred million dollars to foreigners for carrying freights and passengers, shows that it is a question of national importance.

The New York board of trade and transportation recently appointed a special committee on the merchant marine, with the object "to secure the freest and widest possible immediate discussion of methods for the rehabilitation of our merchant marine in the foreign trade." This committee has issued a statement of facts and asks expressions of opinion. What at bottom this is an adroit movement to push propaganda work for Mark Hanna's ship subsidy scheme, The Independent is not prepared to say. The committee invites "a full, frank, good-tempered discussion," and we can certainly afford to meet the issue in this spirit.

To this end, The Independent reprints the committee's address, and invites correspondence. Beyond a doubt, our readers would enjoy reading something from the pen of Major Bates, whose books on American navigation and shipping are recognized authority on the subject.

The committee's "brief statement of facts" follows:

It is a fact that the United States of 1810, with seven million inhabitants, owned more registered tonnage for over-sea trade than the United States of 1903, with a population of eighty million.

**OUR TONNAGE IN 1810 AND IN 1903.**  
This tonnage in 1810 was 981,000; it is now 873,000, and, worse still, it

showed an actual decrease of six thousand tons from the year before.

**PERCENTAGE OF COMMERCE CARRIED IN AMERICAN SHIPS NINETY YEARS AGO.**  
In 1810 American ships and American sailors carried 91.5 per cent of their country's ocean trade, and, moreover, a great share of that of Europe.

**DECLINE IN PERCENTAGE IN 1861.**  
In 1861, though we had already lost our Atlantic steam lines and our shipbuilding was falling off, we still carried 65.2 per cent of our own trade and some of the trade of other nations.

**PRESENT PERCENTAGES.**  
American ships last year conveyed only 8.8 per cent of our imports and exports. Our registered tonnage in 1861 stood at 2,496,000. It stands now at 873,000. Two-thirds of our once great and powerful deep-sea fleet has vanished—and not one new keel for a deep-sea ship is being laid on either our Atlantic or Pacific coastline.

**FOREIGN SHIPS NOW MONOPOLIZE OUR CARRYING.**

Meanwhile an ever increasing fleet of foreign vessels throngs our ports and monopolizes the carrying of more than nine-tenths of our import and export commerce.

**MORE THAN A HUNDRED MILLIONS A YEAR.**

The United States pays to these foreign vessels for conveying our freights and passengers upwards of one hundred million dollars a year. Much of this vast sum of money goes to steamers which are regularly enrolled on the "merchant cruiser" list of European governments, which are manned by naval reserve officers and sailors, and are available for service against us in war.

**VAST FOREIGN TONNAGE.**  
The British empire has 14,800,000 tons of merchant shipping; Germany, 2,960,000 tons; France, 1,480,000 tons; Norway, 1,660,000 tons; Italy 1,180,000 tons. By far the larger part of all these fleets is engaged in ocean carrying.

**SMALL AMERICAN TONNAGE.**  
But the United States of America, which produces far more merchandise and now sends more abroad than any other nation, has a fleet registered for deep-sea commerce of only 873,000 tons.

**OUR WORKINGMEN AND OUR FARMERS INTERESTED.**

American commerce, the labor in the mines, the forests, the shops and in the shipyards are interested in this question, and American farmers, whose products supply two-thirds of the value, and a much larger portion of the bulk, of our exports, are equally concerned with all other Americans in whatever will contribute to the employment of American ships, their active and sustained competition with foreign ships, and the inevitable reduction in freight rates sure to follow such increased competition.

**A STUDY OF FACTS INVITED.**  
The New York board of trade and transportation invites you to give the facts herein set forth your earnest consideration. It is of the highest importance that American shipbuilding and ship-owning for ocean commerce must be revived. This is not a political question; it is not a party question. It is a business question, pure and simple, and a full, frank, good-tempered discussion of it ought to bring the whole country into harmonious support of some plan which will be practicable and effective.

**EVERY METHOD TO BE CONSIDERED.**  
Friends of free ships, subsidies, discriminating duties and every other policy that has been suggested are cordially urged to present their views and arguments. The system which best stands the test of free debate is the system which is most worthy of adoption.

**SOMETHING MUST BE DONE QUICKLY.**

But on one vital point all must be agreed beforehand, and that is that something must be done and done quickly, if we are to save the remnant of our ocean carrying trade and redeem our shipyards.

**A DESPERATE CONDITION TO BE REMEDIED.**

The deplorable condition of the ship-owning and shipbuilding industries is in itself conclusive proof that a vigorous remedy is needed.

**THE REMEDY?**  
The question is—what shall that remedy be?

Respectfully submitted,  
AARON VANDERBILT, Chairman,  
DARWIN R. JAMES,  
HERMAN SIELCKEN,  
PATRICK FARRELLY,

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HENRY A. ROGERS,  
OSCAR S. STRAUS,  
Ex. officio,  
Committee on the Merchant Marine,  
New York Board of Trade and Transportation.  
202 Broadway, New York.

In order to present a remedy, one must know the cause which wrought havoc with our shipping. Major Bates points out in his "American Navigation" that our primary navigation policy, which obtained until 1815, was what built up American commerce in American bottoms; that the change of policy in 1815, growing out of a yielding to the wishes of Great Britain, together with the act of 1824 and the complete reversal of policy in 1828, effected the ruin which is now agitating the New York board of trade and transportation. Hence, the wise thing to do is to go back to the original navigation policy.

And what was that? A system of tonnage duties, discriminating in favor of ships belonging to citizens of the United States. The Independent recommends to the New York board of trade and transportation an earnest study of Major Bates' book. That will explain why Mark Hanna's subsidy scheme is not only unconstitutional, but also ineffective to bring about what its advocates pretend to claim for it.

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