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The Abyss Yawns for All

SPEECH

OF

HON. HUEY P. LONG

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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Mr. LONG. Mr. President, I have not consumed a single minute. We have been in session here nearly six hours to-day. I felt constrained to say nothing at all, and I have not said a word about this amendment.

I do not want to divert the Senate from its discussion of the money question, because I must frankly say that I think a great deal of good has been done by the discussion here to-day. I think it should be said to the credit of the Senator from Virginia that his bill, whether or not it is desired by us all, has served as the means of education and discussion of value in the Senate on the money question.

The Senator from Maryland [Mr. TYDINGS] has said to the Senator from Oklahoma [Mr. THOMAS] in effect, that he ought to be willing to increase the gold content of the dollar or the purchasing power of the dollar when it is abnormally low.

Mr. TYDINGS. Mr. President—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator from Louisiana yield to the Senator from Maryland?

Mr. LONG. I yield to the Senator from Maryland.

Mr. TYDINGS. I shall have to take issue with that. I do not want to be put down as adopting any one of these panaceas that have been offered. I do embrace the general idea that if we can soundly lessen the evils of too wide a fluctuation in commodity prices, it should be done.

My own humble opinion is to the effect that a restoration of world trade, many measures that could be projected to stabilize the currencies of silver countries, a fair consideration of war debts, and an adequate amount of disarmament to a peace-time basis will in themselves accomplish what the Senator from Oklahoma seeks to accomplish by his inflation measure.

I for one think that the "four horsemen" of this depression are riding outside the Congressional corral. They are in the field; they are in international pastures, and they

can not be roped by us entirely here. We can help, but they will have to be settled in large measure through international diplomacy and conference and accord; and one reason why I do not want to vote for any of these intermediate measures is because I fear they will delay the ultimate and sound solution which must come in the way I have just mentioned.

For that reason I would not object to a study of this question, but I would not want to do something which would only hamstring the efforts of those in places of high authority which, I believe, will be made after the 4th of next March.

Mr. LONG. Mr. President, the Senator from Maryland calls to my mind a little expression of a certain gentleman back a number of hundred years ago, who went to a Great Teacher and told Him his ideas of what might be eternal life. When he had stated to the Great Teacher, or the Saviour, what he thought should be the fundamental ideas of eternal life, the Saviour turned to him and said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom."

Had my brilliant friend from Maryland included in the list of wrongs which he gave the further statement that we could not concentrate the wealth of the land in a few hands, he would have himself prescribed a panacea for this trouble in which we now find ourselves. He is near the kingdom, and I want to compliment my friend.

Mr. President, there is a great deal of satisfaction on this further score. It appears that this idea of the law is being cleared up in our minds. The Senator from Oklahoma and the Senator from Maryland have done a great deal here in a few minutes along that line.

When, in 1920, the dollar was worth 60 cents, there were contracts between the Government and the railroads, there were contracts between the States and the railroads, there were contracts between the cities and the street railways and the cities and the electric-light companies, providing for certain charges for service, viz, 5 cents a ride on the street railways, 2 cents a mile in some instances on the steam railroads, as much as 1 cent a kilowatt-hour for electricity, as low as 5 cents a thousand cubic feet for gas; and distinguished lawyers, such as the gentleman who now leaves the Chamber [Senator REED, of Pennsylvania, left the Chamber], went before the Supreme Court of the United States and said, "These contracts do not mean any-

thing. The amount fixed in them is not worth the paper it is written on. In the general interest of society, the dollar must be considered as worth what it will buy, and the power of the Government to regulate overrides the sanctity of contracts."

The Supreme Court of the United States said to the gentlemen at that time representing these interests which wanted to revalue the dollar, that the contracts made by the Government with the railroads were of no value, that they had to be under the regulating power of the Government, which had to be reasonable, and that while that regulated fare might have been reasonable 10 years before, it had become confiscatory for that year, because the dollar had fallen to 60 cents. The same thing applied to the street railway fares. While the 5-cent fare was legal, having been made when the dollar was worth a dollar, in 1920, when the dollar was worth only 60 cents, the franchises stipulating the fares were no longer valid contracts, but had to be gaged and revalued on the basis of what the dollar would buy in service and products at that time.

All contracts were wiped out that the people had because the value of the dollar had fallen. It would no longer buy what it once bought, and the sanctity of contract, about which they now talk, went as the night, went as the mist before the sun. They were canceled by the thousands because, said the Supreme Court of the United States, the dollar would no longer buy what it once would buy, and the 5-cent fare must be 8 cents, the 2-cent railroad fare must be 3.6 cents, electric-light contracts for a cent a kilowatt were canceled and the rate was made 3 cents, the 5-cent charge for a thousand cubic feet of gas was made 14 cents, and all over the length and breadth of this country the very banking interests which owned the railroads and corporations then, which owned the banks then, and which own them both now, succeeded in having canceled contracts which had been made all over this country in order to protect the vested right of property.

Now the shoe is on the other foot. The dollar is no longer worth 60 cents, as it was in 1920; it is no longer worth a dollar, as it was in 1926; it is now worth \$1.60, and now we come and say, "You have had to wipe out contracts, you have had to use the power of regulation of the United States and of the States and of the municipalities in order that human life and property might be regulated, in order that this society might continue, and now, when we come back and say that we can not get now \$1.60 dollars to pay the debts we made when the dollar was worth 60 cents, you hold up your arms and holler 'the sanctity of contracts,' when you have canceled millions of dollars of contracts made when the dollar fell to 60 cents."

Society is not only at the water's edge, as the distinguished Senator from Arkansas said this morning; society is in

the middle. The water is flowing over the head of struggling humanity to-day because, at the value of commodity prices, interest on the public debt and the taxes to be paid in the United States alone, based upon the standard value of commodities, amount to \$45,000,000,000 per year, and there is not \$45,000,000,000 of income in the United States to-day. It can not be paid. It is known it can not be paid. The only thing that can be done is to put the human race through the wringer until what property and life remain are more concentrated in the narrow funnel than they are to-day.

There is nothing whatever to the contrary legal proposition, no sound basis for it. What are we going to do? We sat here yesterday and voted down the amendment offered by the Senator from Montana and the amendment which I offered. I do not care whether the Senate takes the amendment the Senator from Montana offered or the amendment I offered, or the amendment which the Senator from Oklahoma suggests, or the one the Senator from Texas suggests, or an amendment anybody else suggests. The fact is that the people of the United States can not pay the taxes and interest of this country on the income based upon the commodity values of to-day.

Then, getting back to the private situation, the private debts, as the Senator from Oklahoma amply shows, amount to \$200,000,000,000, gaged upon the 60-cent dollar; \$200,000,000,000 of debts were made in this country based upon the 60-cent dollar. To-day those debts amount to \$550,000,000,000 based upon the same 60-cent dollar, because it is now a \$1.60 dollar, and how can we stop and argue for an unreasonable proposition, that a 12-inch wedge has to go through a 2-inch hole, when there is no way to do it under the living sun, in these depressed circumstances. With all the values of our country estimated not to exceed somewhere around \$300,000,000,000 in normal times, and \$530,000,000,000 worth of debts based upon standard commodity values, that have to be paid in the United States to-day, how can we go further? It is so unreasonable, so impossible, Mr. President, that it does not require further argument.

The Senator from Maryland says it would be a terrible thing if we undertook to regulate the dollar to the point where it might ever bring down the value of farm crops and surpluses, and so forth. That is not correct at all. I understand that my distinguished friend the Senator from Maryland lives in the country. He may, but he does not understand the country as I do. I want to say, Mr. President, that if the farmer of the South to-day could be guaranteed that he would get 20-cent cotton or 15-cent cotton we would never hear a chirp out of one of them. Immediately following the war we did set the prices of some of the agricultural products in this country, and they had started to set a price

on cotton, which it was generally understood would be 15 cents a pound, if the market had not broken and it had not gone below that price, and there was no great calamity at that time. No one need worry about any riot coming from the agricultural and laboring element of this country as long as they are fed. They have shown that we need not worry about any kind of an uprising in seminormal times. They have stood starvation and distress and homelessness and every kind of a calamity known.

Just one more word. I am sorry the Senator from Maryland has departed. I want him to hear these last few words I have to say. I am going to ask one of the pages to ask the Senator from Maryland [Mr. TYDINGS] to come back into the Chamber and hear me for the next three or four minutes. He will do me a great courtesy if he will hear me for just about three or four minutes.

(Mr. TYDINGS entered the Chamber.)

I want to thank the Senator from Maryland for returning to the Chamber and giving me the opportunity of compelling him to listen for the next three or four minutes to what I have to say.

The Senator from Maryland, as I said in the beginning, almost reached the kingdom. Here is the weak part in our armor, because I agree with almost all the Senator from Maryland has said. Whatever I should apply as a weakness of the argument of the Senator from Maryland must also be applied as the weakness in my own discussion.

The Senator from Maryland says that four-fifths of the trouble must be settled internationally. Do we need to settle the trouble of starvation internationally? We have here more stuff to eat right in the United States to-day than the whole human family could eat up in 30 months. It is not in England; the food crop is not over in England. The wheat is not in England. The corn is not in China. The meat is not in Australia. It is right here.

Mr. TYDINGS. Mr. President—

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Does the Senator from Louisiana yield to the Senator from Maryland?

Mr. LONG. I gladly yield.

Mr. TYDINGS. Of course, in the meantime, we must not permit starvation, and I for one will not hesitate to vote for legislation designed to prevent starvation. But when the meat that we have gets over into Australia, and all the cotton gets over into England, the problem of starvation will largely take care of itself.

Mr. LONG. That is correct. I thank the Senator for his observation. But let me proceed again. The foodstuff with which to feed 120,000,000 people exists in abundance and superabundance within the confines of the American borders. We need not go anywhere to hunt for it; it is right here. We need not go to the Government of Siam to get an international agreement to get meat, corn, wheat, or any-

thing to eat. It is right in the United States. We need not do anything but control the internal affairs in order to have consumed what is in the United States. That is number 1.

We do not need to go anywhere outside of the United States to find enough material to clothe the human family, because we have more cotton and wool in the United States to-day than we could wear out in the next two years if we did not shear another sheep or raise another boll of cotton. So it is not necessary to go anywhere to find the food. It is right in this country to-day, and all we need to do is to look around.

We do not need a spyglass to look around and see what they are doing in the Fiji Islands. All we need to do is to find out how to use what we have here.

Then there is the third problem. We do not need to go anywhere to find homes in which to put the people. We have so many houses in the United States to-day that are empty, that, instead of passing legislation to provide for people to occupy those houses, we enacted a building and loan law so that the building and loan companies could keep them. In other words, we provided for a form of superficial financial integrity by which empty homes could continue to be owned so that the people could walk the streets in the meantime.

We do not need go look underneath the shelters of the Eskimos for the homeless to find a place to hide someone or to warm him. We have houses right here in the United States, more houses than 120,000,000 American people can live in to save their lives.

We do not have to have any treaty with the provisional government we are fixing to set up in the Philippine Islands in order that we can avail ourselves of those houses.

We have fallen down in our domestic policy.

Now I come to the sorrowful feature which I hope may percolate. Senators, you have allowed the property of America to be concentrated in the hands of a few, and you have brought disaster to America. You did that in the face of the warning of every teacher of religion and every teacher of government since time started. When the waves of civilization were beating against the shores of Egypt years before civilization was generally understood to have begun, the only conception they had of law was that in a land of plenty you would have starvation if you had concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. In the face of such a law we have sat here and ignored that policy. It has been pronounced an act of radicalism if one undertook to provide that the fruits and profits of the land should be shared by 120,000,000 instead of being concentrated in the hands of the few.

Mr. President, how much more time have I?

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 10 minutes left.

Mr. LONG. That is more than I shall consume. It will take me but three minutes more to conclude. I am sure the Senate will be relieved to know that.

How surely have we been working along that course! Mr. President, in 1916 President Woodrow Wilson, through a commission of his own, said that a calamity was headed for America because 60 per cent of the people owned only 5 per cent of the wealth and that 2 per cent of the people owned 60 per cent of the wealth. The commission said we were headed toward calamity unless we broke up that inordinate distribution of wealth which prevailed in 1916. And yet in 1932, 16 years having passed, do the 2 per cent still own 60 per cent of the wealth? No! One per cent

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owns 60 per cent of the wealth. Do 60 per cent of the people still own 5 per cent of the wealth? No! Two-thirds of the American people, 67 per cent of the people, to-day could not pay their debts and have a copper cent left. It is generally estimated that 5 or 6 per cent of the people own more than 85 per cent of the wealth and possibly have a control of a great deal of the remaining 15 per cent.

We have reached the point of stagnation. We have reached the middle of the stream. The abyss yawns. It has yawned for the poor man and he has fallen the victim of it. The abyss has yawned for the middle man and he has fallen the victim of it. Now the abyss yawns for everybody in America unless this condition is corrected. "The abyss yawns for all."