

THE PENSION VETOS.

It is much to be regretted that the full text of the debates in Congress upon the President's vetoes of private pension bills cannot be published in the newspapers. The intelligent reading public would then see how astonishingly weak the arguments are which are brought forward by the Republicans against the President's action. We have taken the trouble to read many pages of the debates as they are published in the *Record*, and a more wearisome task it would be difficult to imagine. From beginning to end there is not an argument brought forward which is worthy a moment's serious consideration by any intelligent mind. There is in all of them an effort, as stupid as it is studious, to make it appear that in vetoing a few of the pension bills the President is showing his hostility to all pensions for soldiers. Slight effort is made to refute his statements, or to adduce evidence to show that he is mistaken; but over and over again the changes are rung upon the puerile assertion that the President was not in the war, and has no sympathy with the men who were.

The most fluent defender of all pension schemes upon the floor of the House appears to be Mr. Jackson of Pennsylvania. Here is a sample of his style of argument in favor of passing a pension over the President's veto:

"He (The President) is in sympathy with those who are at heart opposed to pensioning Union soldiers, and he intends to limit and restrict the number of those that shall hereafter be pensioned as far as it reasonably can be done. And if this position is taken in the early part of his Administration, what may we not expect in the near future in the way of repeal of the legislation of the last twenty years, should his party be retained in power? . . . But we were told that this great and good President, who vetoes pension bills by the score, meant right. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I suspect he does mean right in the sense of attempting to please certain elements of the country; but he does not mean right in the eyes of the generous and loyal people of this land. [Applause on the Republican side.] I desire to say, sir, that the President means exactly what his vetoes show. His vetoes, by their substance, language, tone, and temper, can have no other construction than that he dislikes all pension legislation, and I do not think that he will thank gentlemen for intimating that he is only trying to save, at best, the poor little pittance of money that is in controversy in granting these pensions."

Mr. Jackson has an eager rival in this kind of debating in his colleague, Mr. Bayne. This is the way Mr. Bayne looks at it:

"Mr. Speaker, if I am correctly informed, all the Presidents of the United States before the one we now have, vetoed but one pension bill. No man among them all in the whole previous history of this country had the courage to deny to the widows, or the orphan children, or to the crippled soldiers, or dependent parents of such soldiers pensions until we got our present President. He stands out in the history of our country a conspicuous example of a disposition, a taste, a temerity, a partisanship which is unexampled. . . . The President has chosen to take the present law in regard to pensions as a sort of constitution, and if bills fall within the meaning of that law they ought to be passed, but if they are outside of that law then they should not be passed. Why should the President assume a position of that kind? Has not Congress the power to pension the widow of a dead soldier or his dependent parents, whether entitled to a pension under the existing law or not?"

A Republican speaker of slightly higher grade is Mr. Browne of Indiana. He had the fairness to put this whole private-pension business on its true ground when he said:

"These private bills are of themselves the law of the particular case. It is not a question in these

cases for Congress to determine whether or not under the general law the claimant is entitled to a pension. That is not the question. If he were entitled to relief under the general law, the Pension Bureau is the place where he would secure his relief. There may be instances, to be sure, in which Congress sits as a kind of court of appeals to reverse the action of the Commissioner on the facts. There may be such cases; but in the main this Congress determines that in the particular case a pension ought to be given, not because it is covered by a general law, but because it is not covered by any general statute. It is because it has in itself equities that take it out of the general rule. It is because the facts of the case address themselves to the judgment and sympathy, if you please, of Congress. It is because, in view of the circumstances, it is the opinion of Congress that in the particular instance a pension ought to be granted."

Taking these extracts from the *Record* as fair samples of the arguments adduced against the President, what do they show? Would not the inference of every reader be that the President had vetoed the larger part of all the private pension bills which had been sent to him? There is an entire avoidance of all mention of the fact that the vetoes are exceptional cases, and are applied to bills which, if approved, would be likely as precedents to let in thousands of similar claims based upon grounds which have not hitherto been held as valid for securing any kind of pension. Instead of denying that there is any excuse for granting pensions on the ground of the "judgment and sympathy" of Congress, as Mr. Browne calls it, the President has admitted it by giving his approval to nearly 600 such pensions. Out of 665 special pension acts which have been sent to him by this Congress he has vetoed only 90. While he has used the veto power to a greater extent than any other President, and while it is true that but one pension bill had been vetoed before Mr. Cleveland became President, it is also true that more pension acts have become laws by his signature than by that of any other President.

These facts were all kept in the background in the debates until Mr. Matson of Indiana, the Chairman of the Committee on Invalid Pensions, brought them out. Mr. Matson was himself a Union soldier, and cannot, therefore, be charged with lack of sympathy for other soldiers. The full history of the record of the present Congress on this subject, as brought out by him in the debates, chiefly by skilful use of question and answer, is, briefly summed up, as follows: First, that the present House Committee on Invalid Pensions, having a Democratic majority, has reported favorably about 600 private pension bills, against about 400 by the Republican Committee of the last Republican Congress (the Forty-seventh); that the present Committee rejected as undeserving about as many as it reported; that reports from the Committee were not unanimously made, but that many of the reports were made by a bare majority, and many others by a mere majority of a quorum; that out of the 600 or more thus reported, all except 90 have been allowed to become laws by the President, some without, but the majority with his signature; and that nearly all of those vetoed by him had previously been rejected by a Republican Commissioner of Pensions.

Now, think for a moment what these figures show. The rejection of half the claims made upon the Committee shows that the very air of Washington is full of bogus claims. If the Committee rejected half, is it unreasonable to

suppose that they passed some which were undeserving, especially if they allowed the decision of a few members to be sufficient? And what does that enormous increase from 400 pension acts in both sessions of the Forty-seventh Congress to 600 before the first session of the Forty-ninth Congress is over, mean? Are the pensions to increase in numbers as the veterans of the war die off? The idea is preposterous. The increase shows that the preaching of demagogues like Logan has encouraged every camp-follower and sneak in the army, and everybody else who could invent the shadow of an excuse for putting in a claim, to go down to Washington with a demand for a pension. Undoubtedly hundreds of these claims are inspired by claim-agents who are working them on shares. The Republican Congressmen who shout "solid South" and talk about the "loyal people" when the President puts his veto upon some of the most transparent of these attempts to rob the Government, are talking in the interest of fraud, and they know it.

Only the other day, in Chicago, Logan came out in favor of a pension for every man who had ever served in the Union army, on the ground that no man came out of the war as strong as he was when he went into it. If that idea were to be carried out in a pension law, how long would it be before it would be followed by another granting a pension to the widow of every man who served in the Union army? And then we should be on the road to national bankruptcy. Mr. Bayne says, in the extract which we have quoted from his speech, that all the Presidents before Cleveland together vetoed only one pension bill, but he neglects to say that it was Gen. Grant who defeated a gigantic pension scheme in 1875, called the Equalization of Bounties Bill. In refusing his signature he said: "I do not believe that any considerable proportion of ex-soldiers, who, it is supposed, will be the beneficiaries of this appropriation, are applicants for it, but rather it would result more in a measure for the relief of claim-agents and middlemen, who intervene, or would intervene, to collect or discount the bounty granted by it." If the argument that every President who opposes pensions for soldiers is a solid Southern sympathizer holds good, what shall be said of this act of Gen. Grant's?

THE DEGENERACY OF THE SENATE.

The recklessness with which the Senate is adding the most indefensible jobs to the River and Harbor Bill challenges the attention and provokes the indignation of the whole country. The Commerce Committee began by adding about \$3,000,000 to the already indefensibly large amount appropriated by the log-rolling measure. The Senate itself no sooner got hold of the bill than it enthusiastically endorsed the worst jobs which the Committee had admitted. On Wednesday week an overwhelming majority was given to an amendment appropriating \$150,000 for the Government's purchase of the Sturgeon Bay and Lake Michigan Ship Canal in Wisconsin from a corporation which has profited largely by its use, although Senators Edmunds and Ingalls clearly showed that it was, in the words of the New York *Tribune's* correspondent at Washington, "one of the worst

jobs which have ever been attached to a river and harbor bill." On Thursday another amendment to the bill was adopted, approving the no less outrageous scheme of the owners of the Portage Lake and River Improvement Company's Canal and the Lake Superior Ship Canal Railway and Iron Company's Canal to unload upon the Government, for the sum of \$350,000, property for which they have no further use.

Encouraged by the ease with which these two jobs had been put through, the advocates of the Hennepin Canal scheme brought forward that measure with a well-grounded confidence in their success. This scheme was defeated in the House three months ago, despite an almost solid Republican vote in its favor, Mr. Browne, an Indiana Republican, characterizing it as "a measure that inaugurates a system that would lead to the most prodigal extravagance, the inauguration of a class of legislation that is in the face of the Constitution, if the Constitution means anything," since it contemplates the construction by the Federal Government of a canal entirely within the limits of a single State. Yet the Senate Committee proposed to commit the Government to the project, which at the lowest estimate will cost \$7,000,000, by appropriating \$300,000 for the preliminary work, and on Monday the appropriation was voted, with the aid of twenty-six Republicans.

The nonchalance with which the Senate thus endorses one job after another would be sufficiently startling if its disregard of the public interest were now manifested for the first time during the session. But in point of fact this river-and-harbor extravagance is only the culmination of a long record of the most discreditable performances in the line of legislation. Only a fortnight ago the Senate virtually defeated, by sending to an unfriendly committee, a bill which proposed to prohibit Senators from acting as counsel for corporations which have or may have legislation before Congress. This measure was aimed at a crying scandal—the practice of Senators appearing before the courts in the capacity of lawyers to plead the causes of railroads in matters which they may be called upon to consider in their capacity of legislators. Nor is this the only indecent feature of the practice. The Senatorial lawyer not merely appears before a judicial tribunal in a case which may come before him as a law-maker, but he pleads his cause to a bench which he has himself oftentimes helped to create. He first as a Senator persuades a President to nominate a friend for a Federal Judgeship, and secures the confirmation of his man; and then as a lawyer takes a fee to argue a case before the man who owes his seat to him. It is notorious that great corporations employ Senators as counsel in the Federal courts chiefly for these two reasons—that they may secure lawyers who enjoy some personal advantage with the judges, and that they may virtually bribe the Senators to favor their interests in matters of legislation. "Matt." Carpenter, who was always delightfully frank, used to joke freely about the great falling off in the number of his retainers in railroad cases before the Supreme Court after his first term in the Senate expired, and the equally significant increase of his business as soon as he was elected

again a few years later. It is quite impossible to conceive of a man with high ideas of public duty, such as characterized John Quincy Adams, and should characterize every public man, doing what the leading lawyers of the Senate have long been doing; and a bill to prohibit the practice would pass without opposition in any body where high standards of action are maintained. Yet thirty-one out of fifty-two Senators voted to smother Mr. Beck's eminently proper and necessary proposition.

The theory of the Constitution was that the Senate would stand as a breakwater against extravagant schemes which demagogues in the House might be inclined to favor. Yet a few weeks ago we found the Senate passing by a very large majority a pension bill which proposed to put on the roll every soldier who served in the army three months, and who now claims to be disabled and dependent upon his own exertions—a proposition never before heard of in any other nation, and involving an increase of taxation by from \$50,000,000 to \$200,000,000 a year. There had never been any public demand for such an extension of the pension system; indeed, everybody knew that thoughtful people would oppose it. But the pretence was made that the "soldier vote" demanded it, and the Senate yielded almost without a protest.

A few weeks earlier a Senator who is universally regarded as a "crank," brought forward a bill appropriating \$77,000,000 out of the Federal Treasury to aid schools in the various States, chiefly in the South. It was clearly shown that the inevitable effect of the bounty must be to injure rather than help the educational system of the South, just getting upon a sure foundation of self-support, and Senators privately made no concealment of their opinion that the scheme was a foolish one. Mr. Plumb of Kansas stated the notorious fact when he declared in the course of the debate:

"Now, I say, what every man knows, that I can count on the fingers of my two hands the members on this floor who are actually in favor of this measure, who will dare avow that they are for it as an original proposition or as one that commends itself to their judgment. But one man says: 'I made incautiously somewhere a speech in favor of it, and at a time when I did not consider the surroundings'; and another man says: 'My Legislature say they want me to vote for it'; and so on all the way round. If there could be some way of voting upon this measure without meeting these conditions, it would have practically no support. I do not believe legislation thus enacted is likely to be wise."

But Senators had got the idea that the scheme was popular with the people, and that if they did not vote for it they might be censured by people who did not understand its folly so well as they themselves did, and they passed it by a vote of three to one, with the express understanding that it would fail in the House, and that they might thus shirk the plain duty of defeating it themselves.

We think it is not too much to say that there has not been a time in the history of the country when the United States Senate occupied a lower place in the public esteem than at present. Neither party can disclaim a share in the degeneracy of the Senate, but by far the larger part of the blame must attach to the Republicans, who not only are responsible as the party in the majority in the chamber, but who have cast a solid or an

almost solid vote for every one of the measures which have aroused the popular disgust. As the only branch of the Government which the Republicans controlled, it behooved the Senate during the present session to elevate its standard, and the weakness of the House gave it a great opportunity; but it has thrown away its chance.

A SIGN OF THE TIMES.

For a series of years the New York *Sun* published on every Sunday and Monday morning a detailed statement of its circulation for the previous week. It took the ground that the public was entitled to full knowledge regarding the number of copies printed by any journal, and repeatedly called attention to its own course in this particular. Thus, on the 12th of April, 1883, it said:

"It is, of course, reasonable that an advertiser should be informed as to the exact extent of the circulation of the newspaper in which he advertises. He has a right to know how much publicity he is purchaser of, so as to be able to calculate whether he is paying a fair price or not. Accordingly we print conspicuously, at the head of this page, every Sunday and every Monday, a statement of the exact number of copies of the *Sun* sold on each day of the preceding week."

A few months ago the *Sun* appeared on a Sunday morning without the usual statement of the previous week's circulation, and ever since then this statement has been omitted from the Sunday edition. Newspaper men did not fail to notice the change, and it was felt to be only a question of time when the table would disappear from the Monday edition as it had already vanished from the Sunday edition. That time has at last come, and the *Sun* of Monday last appeared without any figures of circulation for the previous week.

The reason for the *Sun's* refusal to take the public any longer into its confidence in this matter is, of course, its loss of circulation within the last three years, which is without exception the most extraordinary thing ever known in the history of newspapers. Mr. Charles A. Dana came into control of the *Sun* in the year 1868, and in writing the prospectus of the paper for 1882 he made this fair summary of the transformation which he speedily wrought in its character:

"The *Sun* of 1868 was a newspaper of a new kind. It discarded many of the forms and a multitude of the superfluous words and phrases of ancient journalism. It undertook to report in a fresh, succinct, unconventional way all the news of the world, omitting no event of human interest, and commenting upon affairs with the fearlessness of absolute independence."

The *Sun* was remarkably successful in living up to this ideal. Its justifiable boast was that it gave "all the news for two cents" at a time when other papers charged twice as much, and that it gave the news, too, in the most convenient form for a busy man to get at. It accompanied the news with editorial comments which provoked attention, and its editorial articles upon matters not of a strictly news character were uncommonly well written. The day laborer, the business man, the man of leisure alike found something to interest them in its columns.

The public was quick to show its appreciation. In an interesting article published on May 21, 1882, the *Sun* said:

"The regular daily circulation of the *Sun* is now at a higher point than ever before in the history