

Outline of John Strohm's Career in Congress

From the beginning Congressman Strohm's career was marked by a deep concern for internal improvements in the country. He gave his attention early, to the development of the Columbus and Sandusky Turnpike which the company was to build and extend in consideration of 49 sections of public land given to them as an inducement to make the improvement (Cong. Globe, Vol. 15, pp. 83 and 279).

He was also interested in having a canal built on the Ohio River to avoid the falls of Louisville (p. 352).

He was very careful to insist that improvements must not be partially distributed, and that they must be given to the whole country. At first he held there could be no improvements provided for under the constitution except they promote general welfare.

He was greatly concerned about the protective tariff of 1842; and labored for a provision in the improvement grants, that if the tariff were repealed none of the money allotted for improvements should be spent (p. 523).

He labored for the passage of a bill for the relief of Robert Fulton's heirs (pp. 1115 and 6).

His most notable service was for the preservation of the high tariff of 1842. Sir Robert Walker's views on tariff were gaining ground as a result of England's reduction of tariffs inspired by him, and it was being urged that we should gain a great foreign market if we lowered our tariff. The proposed Walker tariff was introduced in 1846, as a successor of the tariff of 1842, and it was enacted with dire results ending in the panic of 1857.

Strohm's arguments in favor of the high tariff of 1842 and against the proposed low tariff of 1846 are to be found in Globe, 15, p. 1027, and in Vol. 16, p. 981, the Appendix. He argued:

1. This is the first time in our history that we reverse our policy of fostering industries and turn to destroying them.
2. That only a revenue tariff is constitutional is an idea long abandoned—our revenue tariffs hurt business and did not produce revenue—destructive.
3. This is the first time discriminating duties are to be used to destroy—not to help.
4. The proposed tariff will prostrate domestic manufacture.
5. It will cause a loss of millions of invested capital.
6. It will not give the farmer an advanced price for grain in England, though the corn laws of England be repealed because we are too far from her market—nearer ones get it.
7. The laborer is cut off from his labor and we will pay an increased price for foodstuffs.

8. Farmers will lose hauling for forges and furnaces, as they will be closed—and will lose these people as customers.

9. The only persons who will profit will be importers.

But the protective system:

1. Promotes resources.

2. By thus promoting, our growth in strength will be our defense instead of standing armies.

3. Our country will be made thereby one of true independence, as we can develop and live without other nations.

4. We will prosper and enable the states to pay their debts to foreign nations held largely against them—and thus establish our credit.

5. Our resources thus established can and ought to be used to build improvements in peace beneficial to our citizens, and to make a happy people.

6. Thus we will extend commercial relations to all sections of our vast country and bind them together and overcome the jealousies of sections still existing.

7. We will get macadamized roads, railroads, canals, harbors and bridges, etc. These will serve well in war to transport troops, munitions, ordnance, stores, etc., in our war with Mexico and other nations if any.

8. We can get these only by rejecting the proposed tariff (1846).

9. Our past shows we were prosperous always under protective tariffs.

10. The condition of the country five years before the tariff of 1842 was enacted (1837) was most deplorable.

Answer to the South:

1. Every article the South purchases has been cheapened by the protective tariff.

2. But if not, "Are they not willing to undergo inconvenience to establish a true independence of their country?"

"My district is agricultural—and raises more agricultural products than any other county in the United States, yet we want the manufacturers to succeed in that district and everywhere."

3. "We are now in war, and must have a tariff that will meet the needs of business—but revenue tariffs meet the needs of the treasury only and change as the treasury's needs changed, not as business and growth need."

These arguments seem odd and worn out to us, but they were novel then. Our country looked bigger to them then than the world looks to us now. There was no need in Strohm's mind to concern ourselves about foreign countries as we had no possible need of them. To establish a "true independence" by making ourselves prosperous and self sufficient was his great idea—perhaps it was the idea at the base of the protective system. His position that "true independence" consisted in being able to ignore the other nations of the world is novel even to us. His thought that a tariff should be used to "develop our strength and resources" so as to make us powerful in war and to compensate for the lack of standing armies, was very enticing. His "internal improvements" to enable us to mobilize, is a provident view and worthy of a great statesman.

From 1847 onward, Strohm presented many petitions for the abolition of slavery. These first came from Quakers in Lancaster County and elsewhere. He was active in trying to clean slavery out of the District of Columbia (Globe).

He took the view that our armies should withdraw from Mexico and that a commission should go there instead, to negotiate peace. But the army was to be kept close by on our border. He saw that it was a "Politicians' War."

He was on the committee on public expenditures, and I think chairman, and took his committee into a thorough investigation of the accounts of the Secretary of the Treasury and reported a discrepancy of \$1,400,000. This was a matter as big as the aeroplane discrepancies of our day.

He made a speech on this subject before the House, January 21, 1848, in Committee of the Whole. This was his second big effort (Vol. 18, p. 466).

His last recorded acts were petitions to abolish slavery and to admit no new states except on the provision that slavery be excluded in them. Many of the petitions on this subject were from Lancaster County.

Being followed by Stevens, his record seems quite diminutive, compared with the acts of that great statesman.

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