
The house then went into a committee on the bill to establish the department of the treasury.

Mr. TRUMBULL in the chair.

The said bill is as follows.

Mr. BOUDINOT moved to strike out from the first clause, the words, "Congress of the United States," and to insert, "Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled," which was agreed to.

Mr. BENSON moved to strike out from the same clause the words "who shall reside at the seat of the government of the United States." The reasons on which he grounded this motion were, that, as the bills for the establishment of the foreign and war departments had no such clause, it might be inferred from this provision, that the Secretary for foreign affairs, and the Secretary at war might reside where they pleased; and further, that the words were unnecessary, as it was ever understood, that

from the necessity of the case, the great departments should always be resident with Congress. This motion was agreed to.

Mr. PAGE then moved to strike out the following words in the same clause, "and be removable at the pleasure of the President." This was carried without debate.

Mr. BENSON moved that in the same clause immediately after the word "Treasury" be inserted "to be the principal officer of the department." This motion was agreed to.

Mr. PAGE then moved to strike out the following words from the second clause, "to digest and report plans for the improvement and management of the revenue and the support of public credit." He thought it the duty of the house to originate all plans for raising a revenue, and that it was unnecessary and improper that an executive officer should have this power. He observed, that in England, it was true, a similar officer had this power; but he was always a member of the House of Commons, by which alone he claimed a right to bring forward and support propositions on the subject of the revenue. He hoped that the head of any department would never be suffered to carve out work for the house, and throw into it the whole weight of his influence.

Mr. TUCKER thought it was giving to an individual too much of that power which ought to be claimed and exercised by the house; it would enable him to impose opinions on the house of representatives which it might be improper for them to adopt, or even to consider and deliberate upon. He said it was the business of the President to submit measures to the legislature, and the proper communication was between the Secretary and the President, not between the former and this house. He contended also that the words were unnecessary. A subsequent part of the clause had provided that it should be his duty to give information when required to either branch of the legislature.

Mr. BENSON said, that if this amendment prevailed, the bill itself would be rendered nugatory; for this power was of more importance than all the others which belonged to him, united. He doubted whether the public credit would ever be restored, unless an individual had the management of the business.

Mr. GOODHUE apprehended that it was carrying jealousy too far to contend that all the information which was requisite in forming systems of revenue, should be drawn from no foreign quarter, but should originate within these walls. The Secretary of the treasury was, from the nature of his office, the only person who could afford that information in all its extent.

Mr. PAGE replied that it was the duty of the representatives to inform

themselves and to be prepared for such business. They might appoint a committee of finance, who could report plans, and the business would then originate where it ought. He asked if it was not evident, that measures introduced here by an officer of his station, would have a considerable influence, and an improper bias on members? If the Secretary had no duties more important, let him, said he, form his plans, and propose them to a member, but he never would agree that an officer should be admitted to this house with his propositions. It would be found at last that the officer himself, instead of the house, would have the originating of money bills, and we should be like the parliaments of France, with a power only of registering edicts. This was no undue jealousy, he said, but true constitutional language. He was attached to an energetic government—he wished to see a permanent one—he would never therefore consent to any measures in its infancy, which would render it inefficient, by alarming the people, and giving up any constitutional powers.

Mr. AMES conceived there were two principles to guide the committee; one, that the powers of this officer should be useful and efficient. The other, that they should be safe. The first thing to be enquired then was, whether this power would tend to general utility. If the secretary of the treasury might be presumed to have the best knowledge of the finances of this country, and if this house was to act on the best information, it seemed to follow logically, that the house must obtain intelligence from that officer: The best mode of obtaining that information was undoubtedly to derive it from himself personally. Gentlemen would not, he believed, deny that the officer must have more knowledge of affairs, peculiarly within his province, than others who had no particular concern in them. From the nature of his employment he would have a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the state of the funds of the United States, the demand upon them, and the proper management of them. He was charged with the legal duty of understanding this subject. He said, that it was a misfortune indefeasibly attached to the nature of public assemblies, that the interest of finance, were by them of all others, the least understood, because those interests were so intricate and complicated, and so difficult of arrangement, and the opinions and prejudices of members so various, that an individual might gain more knowledge by an hour's research, than a popular body by a long investigation. The present situation of the finances of the United States, and of the individual states would, he said, fortify this remark. The affairs of revenue in this country had hitherto been in a confused chain, and he wished now to adopt the only measure which would cast a ray of light on this chaos. He now flattered himself that an office would be established which could put the finances in such a situation, as that he should not be ashamed of them.

With respect to the safety of the power, he begged to know whence the danger could arise? Was it because the officer would report such untruths as the house could not detect? The objection supposed that he would have some weight and authority: It was therefore pretended that the facts reported would have an improper influence. He did not know that it was in the power of the Secretary to make that appear true, which was not true. If he asserted falsehoods, they might be detected; and a responsible officer would, he presumed, run no risque of such a detection. He asked what means of public influence he could possess over the minds of members—he could conceive of none; but at any rate it was impossible that in a public communication, he could merely by evidences in support of his plans, have so improper an influence as he could from out-door intrigue and private conversation. It appeared to him much safer to give the necessary information publicly, than to individual members; and that to admit the Secretary to give public communications to the legislature would establish a controul over him—It was a certain mode of making him responsible; because it was a virtual impeachment to oblige him to come and give in plans, when the facts to be stated were but a detail of his own duties. The house would have a uniform mode of making him perform his duty faithfully, and the investigations which would follow the recommendation of his measures would be an established and uniform check upon his conduct.