
The Political Earthquake of the 12th Congress

How Henry Clay's patriotic nationalists dumped the appeasers

by Anton Chaitkin

Lyndon LaRouche has announced an extraordinary campaign for the U.S. Congress from Virginia's 10th District, to be carried out if necessary from the federal detention center where he is being held a political prisoner.

The political precedent LaRouche has identified for his effort, is the 1811 debut of Kentuckian Henry Clay in the House of Representatives. Clay, aged 34, led a political revolution that ended the appeasement of the nation's aggressive enemy, and began the industrialization to turn America from backwardness to world power status.

Unrelieved national humiliation had lit a fire of rage in the population. The government offered no defense against the hijacking of U.S. ships; against the kidnaping of thousands of sailors and their forced induction into the enemy navy; against the murder of men, women, and children by Indian terrorists, who were armed and instigated by British garrisons across the Canadian border.

Patriots today can clearly read, the parallels between that crisis of national existence and the developing crisis of 1989.

A weak President, James Madison, was convinced that a tight budget, and an anti-defense Congress, dictated inaction in the face of grave danger. The constricting budget was the brainchild of Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin, a Swiss banker. And the Congress was dominated by an alliance of radical, anti-American aristocrats from Boston and Virginia. Henry Clay and his patriotic allies knew that by overturning the treasonous faction—which was in fact a tiny, unpopular minority—they could force a change in national policy.

Prelude to the revolt

Henry Clay had perhaps been primed, since his early childhood, for the responsibility of moving the nation to save itself. At age four, in his native Virginia during the Revolution, he and his mother watched invading British soldiers thrust swords through his father's fresh grave, seeking hidden family treasures. In his young manhood he worked

for five years as personal secretary to judge George Wythe, the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew scholar who wrote the rules for the U.S. Constitutional Convention. Clay emigrated to Kentucky, Virginia's frontier land, as a practicing lawyer. He maintained the contacts he had made with George Wythe's students and friends—who now were the leadership of the republican movement in Kentucky, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Young Clay was personal attorney in Kentucky for the Virginia statesman and former Revolutionary colonel, James Monroe.

Kentucky's legislature appointed Clay to the U.S. Senate in December 1806, to serve out the last fraction of an unexpired term. (Until the 20th century, the Senate was appointed by the state legislatures, while the House has always been popularly elected.) Senator Clay moved and passed a resolution in February 1807, directing the Treasury Secretary to prepare a construction plan for a national network of canals and highways, a backbone for industrial and military strength. Though Gallatin did nothing with the report he was forced to publish, the question had been ably put before the public; its implementation was left for Clay and his allies, when the power would be in their hands.

Clay was again appointed to the Senate in 1809, to serve the last two years of a term. As the outrageous British attacks increased, Clay rebuked and picked fights with the British agents in U.S. politics. Massachusetts Senator James Lloyd tried to block a proposed preference for American manufactures in the procurement of naval supplies—little America should simply leave the dirty business of manufacturing to mighty Britain. This argument for weakness has a melancholy resonance in the present, Harvard-prescribed "post-industrial era." A paraphrase of Henry Clay's rejoinder has been recorded:

"The fallacious course of reasoning urged by many against domestic manufactures, namely, the distress and servitude produced by those of England," he said "would

equally indicate the propriety of abandoning agriculture itself. Were we to cast our eyes upon the miserable peasantry of Poland, and revert to the days of feudal vassalage, we might thus draw numerous arguments against the pursuits of the husbandman. In short, take the black side of the picture, and every human occupation will be found pregnant with fatal objections."

American troop movements, in southern territory whose possession was disputed with Spain, brought the warning that Britain would be displeased. Clay answered, "Sir, is the time never to arrive, when we may manage our own affairs, without the fear of insulting his Britannic majesty? Is the rod of British power to be for ever suspended over our heads? . . . We are . . . warned of the indignation of England. . . . The whole navy of the haughty mistress of the seas is made to thunder in our ears. . . . We are . . . menaced with the chastisement which English pride will not fail to inflict. Whether we assert our rights by sea, or attempt their maintenance by land, this phantom incessantly pursues us. Already has it had too much influence on the councils of the nation."

Clay and the 'candidates movement'

Clay decided early in 1810, after strategy consultations with "friends to the East," to declare his candidacy for the U.S. House of Representatives for the 12th Congress, which would convene in 1811. He continued to focus on the need for U.S. industrial development, as the essential program of a popular movement that could both elect him, and accomplish his nationalist aims. A "Memorial of the Mechanics and Manufacturers of Lexington, Kentucky, to Congress," published on Christmas day, 1810 in the *Kentucky Gazette*, was almost certainly written for the petitioning workers and businessmen by their newly elected congressman. They ask the Congress, which had already done a great deal to promote the business of merchants and importers, to now support new industrial construction with tariffs and other legislation. Their plea could be that of a Third World country today, or of the U.S.A., whose industry is collapsing:

"The manufacturer works up our raw materials, and consumes our provisions. What he earns, is kept at home, and is almost immediately circulated again by various channels through society. The merchant is by no means so useful a character—part of his gains are sent abroad, and paid away to foreigners. The mechanic and manufacturer, likewise contribute to make the country really independent by furnishing those supplies, which we should otherwise be dependent for, on foreign nations. . . .

"The nation which produces but a small part of what she can consume, or grows but few articles, we have already seen, must always be a dependent one. . . . Let her pursuit be exclusively agriculture; and the depression of markets (which has been the case with respect to our provisions, tobacco and cotton) will penalize the industry and enterprise of the nation. Whereas the multiplication and diversity of

pursuits would give a country resources which others could not deprive her of. . . . [The] increase of manufactures would tend to keep at home the precious metals . . . the most useful representative of wealth and labor.

" . . . [S]hould our disputes with foreign nations end in war . . . when old states are daily overturned, and new kingdoms are as often erected; we cannot calculate upon preserving peace for a moment—would not a congressional act for the permanent support of the mechanics and manufacturers of the country much encourage those citizens who are disposed to devote their capital to those pursuits, and as much assist our government in the vigorous prosecution of war?"

The first session of the 12th Congress was delayed from March until November of 1811, a full year after the congressional elections had taken place in the various states. While negotiations with the British dragged on interminably, the nationalists' political machine was being assembled for decisive action. Clay's friend and client, James Monroe, was appointed Secretary of State in April 1811.

Just as the 12th Congress convened in November, British-supplied Indians launched a major attack on U.S. troops under Gen. William Henry Harrison in the Indiana Territory. This particular Congress, however, was not one to be intimidated.

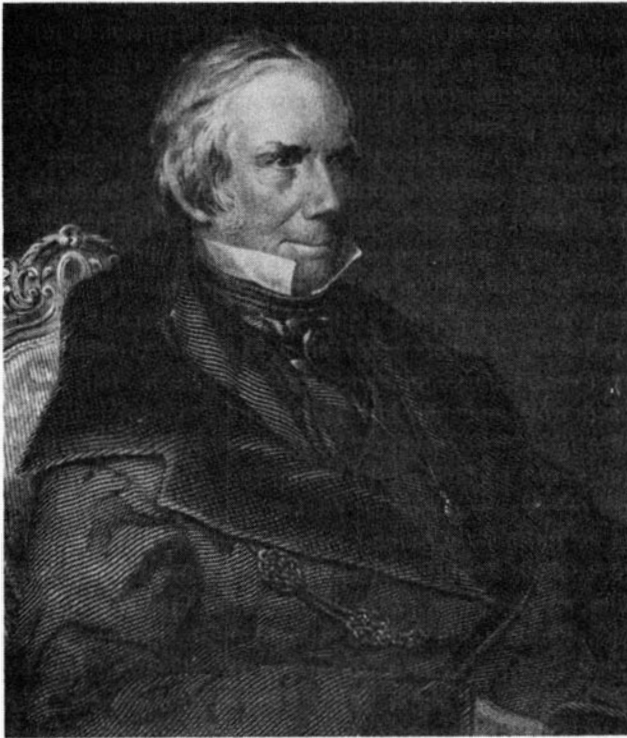
Fifty-nine newly elected members took their seats on Nov. 4; only 82 had been reelected from the 11th Congress.

In previous sessions, the House had knuckled under to the assumed authority of the pro-appeasement leaders, Federalist Bostonian Josiah Quincy and Republican Virginian John Randolph. But the 12th Congress, largely "amateurs" in national politics, had not come to Washington to take orders from bluebloods. A sample of the new membership will demonstrate the character of the candidates movement which was to crack the old order of things.

The Massachusetts House delegation included three new members known as War Democrats: Leonard White, a town clerk, who served only one term—in the 12th Congress; William Widgery, a shipbuilder who had been a lieutenant on a privateer in the Revolution—one term only; Peleg Tallman, a Maine merchant who had lost an arm in a naval engagement and had been imprisoned in Britain until the end of the Revolution—one term only.

The New Hampshire delegation from the 11th Congress was entirely replaced by five new members, four of them War Democrats, all for one term only: Obed Hall, innkeeper; Samuel Dinsmoor, attorney; Josiah Bartlett, Jr., country physician, son of a doctor, revolutionary leader and Signer of the Declaration of Independence; John A. Harper, postmaster, local politician, militiaman.

The New York delegation included ten new members and only seven holdovers. Among the new members were Pierre Van Cortlandt, Jr., who had studied law under Alexander Hamilton—War Democrat, one term; Samuel L. Mitchell, professor of chemistry and agriculture, who would supervise



Statesman Henry Clay. Guests at his home in Lexington, Kentucky included the Marquis de Lafayette, Virginians James Monroe and William Henry Harrison, Abraham Lincoln, and Lincoln's wife Mary Todd, a close family friend of the Clays.

construction of a steam warship in 1812—he had moved with Clay and the nationalists from the Senate to the House; William Paulding, Jr., lawyer, War Democrat, served as brigadier general of militia during his one term; Thomas B. Cooke, Catskill town banker and justice of the peace, War Democrat, one term.

Pennsylvania had seven new members: Roger Davis, small town physician, War Democrat, elected to the 12th and 13th Congresses; John M. Hyneman, court clerk, two terms, during which he served as a general of militia; Abner Lacock, local Beaver County politician, War Democrat, later supervised construction of the canal system in western Pennsylvania; Joseph Lefever, 51-year-old farmer from Paradise, Pa., War Democrat, one term; William Piper, War Democrat, commanded a regiment during the 12th Congress; Jonathan Roberts, Norristown politician, a leader of Clay's movement from 1811 until the 1840s; William Rodman, Revolutionary War veteran, local politician, War Democrat, one term.

South Carolina was Clay's secret weapon, the Southern flank that he turned against the British party in Virginia. John C. Calhoun was a new member in the 12th Congress, who worked loyally with the patriots for a decade thereafter, until Tory secessionism took over the Palmetto State in the 1820s; Elias Earle and David R. Williams, War Democrats, both returned to Congress after earlier terms—Earle was one of the first ironmasters in the South, Williams was a hat and shoe

manufacturer and progressive agriculturalist who served as a general on the Northern frontier during the 12th Congress; William Lowndes, a real spark of Clay's "War Hawks," considered one of the most brilliant young political leaders of his era, a pro-technology nationalist.

Two of Tennessee's delegation of three were new in the 12th Congress: Felix Grundy, a populist transplanted Kentucky lawyer and War Hawk; and John Sevier, 66-year-old former Revolutionary commander, Indian fighter, governor of the shortlived state of Franklin, first governor of Tennessee, War Hawk, 12th and 13th Congresses.

Kentucky's six-man House delegation was solidly behind Clay, including three who were to be army officers during the term.

How appeasement was canceled

The 12th Congress convened Nov. 4, 1811. Henry Clay, who had never been in the House of Representatives, was immediately elected Speaker of the House, by a vote of 75-44. He proceeded to appoint his War Hawk allies as members and chairmen of the various committees. On Nov. 29, 1811, the new chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, Peter B. Porter (War Dem.—N. Y.), recommended "that the United States be immediately put into an armor and attitude demanded by the crisis, and corresponding with the national spirit and expectations." Porter's resolutions to increase U.S. military forces, to repair and refit navy vessels, and to allow merchant vessels to arm themselves, were adopted Dec. 19.

In debates on this and related bills, the opposition was led by John Randolph of Roanoke, the former terror of the House. Randolph, the sadistic, opium-eating owner of a mass of slaves, was accustomed to swagger into the Capitol in his long boots, brandishing a whip. He met his match in Henry Clay, who reined him in. Later when they fought a duel, Clay put a bullet through Randolph's coat and quieted him down considerably.

A new day had dawned in Washington. Congressman Josiah Quincy, part of the Massachusetts Essex Junto that schemed for New England to leave the American Union, called Clay's patriots "toad eaters"—commoners who had usurped the places of their betters in the government. Henry Clay, moving ruthlessly to political victory, said he was not disturbed "by the howlings of the whole British pack let loose from the Essex kennel."

On Dec. 31, 1811, Speaker Clay left the chair to speak on a bill to increase the U.S. army by 25,000 troops. Clay warned against the balance of power strategy, the playing of a "British card" against the French, while the two rival European powers were fighting a protracted war:

"But England, it seems, is fighting the battles of mankind, and we are asked, shall we weaken her magnanimous efforts? . . . [Say that] the French Emperor is aiming at universal empire; can Great Britain challenge our sympathies, when, instead of putting forth her arms to protect the world, she has converted the war into a means of self-aggran-

dizement; when, under the pretense of defending them, she has destroyed the commerce and trampled on the rights of every nation. . . . Are we called upon to bow to the mandates of royal insolence, as a preparation to contend against Gallic usurpation? Who ever learned in the school of base submission, the lessons of noble freedom, and courage, and independence?

" . . . [Great Britain] sees in our numberless ships . . . she perceives in our 120,000 gallant tars, the seeds of a naval force, which in 30 years, will rival hers on her own element. . . .

"Unless the object [of the bill] is obtained by peaceful means, I hope that war will be waged before the close of the session."

At length a delegation headed by Speaker Clay went to meet with President James Madison. They told Madison that further negotiations with Britain were futile, that Congress was insistent upon action. The President responded that an important segment of the population, particularly in Massachusetts, felt strongly that war must be avoided. Clay told the President, that if he did not proceed to war with Britain, that they would nominate and elect a different President in the 1812 elections. This was very convincing logic.

President Madison began issuing pro-war messages; the Democratic caucus renominated Madison. For insurance, the War Hawks in New York brought about the nomination of pro-war nationalist DeWitt Clinton for U.S. President, on the Federalist ticket!

On March 9, 1812, Madison sent to Congress the letters of British spy John Henry, whom Canadian Governor General James Craig had sent into Boston to foment secession. Three years before, the spy had written to his employer "that a declaration of war is not to be expected; but, *contrary to all reasonable calculation, should the Congress possess the spirit and independence enough to place their popularity in jeopardy by so strong a measure*, the Legislature of Massachusetts will declare itself permanent."

But this extraordinary Congress had defied "reasonable calculation." The issue was indeed decided—all except the question of the budget. Clay asked the administration for a tax package to support a rapid arming of the country. Treasury Secretary Gallatin used his only remaining means of sabotage—he reported back a system of taxes, all of which had been previously imposed and were known to be the most offensive and unpopular taxes available. Clay determined to go ahead with Gallatin's ploy whatever the political result, so as to avoid national bankruptcy. South Carolina Representative Langdon Cheves, Clay's chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, prepared bills for the new taxes.

Now Gallatin, through his personal lieutenant, Pennsylvania Congressman John Smilie, took back his bluff, and opposed the taxes: "In the same session as we vote for war, people won't support both war and taxes."

Without administration backing, no financing could realistically be obtained. Though Clay knew the national econo-

my would suffer vicious distortions without simultaneous mobilization of credit and production, he determined to go ahead, nevertheless.

Madison submitted the question of war to the Congress in a secret memorandum on June 1. John C. Calhoun presented a resolution supporting war. On June 12, by a 19-13 vote in the Senate, 79-49 in the House, Congress declared America's Second War of Independence—the "War of 1812."

It was entirely a defensive war, wherein the lightly armed and ill-prepared republic held its own against the greatest power in the world. We defeated their navy on the Great Lakes, cut off their Canadian-route terrorism, stopped an invasion of New York, and smashed them utterly in New Orleans.

When it was over, the old political parties were finished. The new nationalist movement supervised an astonishing technology development program, which gave America muscle enough to survive a Civil War.

From his prison cell, Lyndon LaRouche now calls for an end to the appeasement of the Communist and terrorist enemies of our republic. He asks for a crash program of space and military science, and an agro-industrial mobilization of production.

Henry Clay did it. Perhaps Americans can remember how.

Before you send your son to Harvard . . .

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