

J.Q. Adams Promotes Internal Improvements

by Anton Chaitkin

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In 1806, while trying to stiffen Americans' resolve to stand up to the British, Sen. John Quincy Adams introduced a resolution calling for the Treasury Department to issue a plan for "internal improvements," to build canals and roads to develop the West, as a national project of the United States. That's what is meant by nationalism, against the foreign enemy!

Within a few weeks, another Senator offered an identical resolution, and the Treasury Department was ordered to draw up a plan, which it did. Unfortunately, the government at the time was President Thomas Jefferson and Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin, and on domestic policy they were insane; and the project was never put into effect, in that purely national form. (When Quincy Adams became President, railways were built at government expense, with Army engineers, but using railroad companies often owned jointly by private individuals and municipal or state governments; and canals were built by the states, subsidized by the federal government.)

In 1809, the next President, James Madison, appointed Quincy Adams as U.S. Ambassador to Russia. While there, Adams proposed to industrialize Russia through a deal with the Czar to have Robert Fulton build steamboats in Russia, and put them on the rivers to integrate that nation and turn it into a modern country. (Two years earlier, Fulton's new steamboat had been introduced onto New York's Hudson River. Earlier, Alexander Hamilton had subsidized Fulton to go to France, where he had worked on designing a submarine to destroy the British Navy.)

The Adams-Fulton Russia steamboat deal fell through because of the imminence of the War of 1812 between the U.S. and Britain. But Adams' own later actions would lead to the building of Russia's railroads.

John Quincy Adams' Presidency (1825 to 1829) was a brilliant success. Specifically, he launched an infrastructure-building spree that revolutionized the transportation network of the country.

In his first Annual Message to Congress, President Adams spoke of the government's powers and duties to foster progress. He did not wait upon public opinion, he led it:

"The great object of ... civil government is the improvement of the condition of those who are parties to the social compact, and no government ... can accomplish [its] lawful ends ... but ... as it improves the conditions of those over

whom it is established. Roads and canals, by multiplying and facilitating the communications and intercourse between distant regions and multitudes of men, are among the most important means of improvement. ..."

He said that the people and nations of Europe are beginning to take up this concept of "internal improvements," to conquer nature with infrastructure building. And, "while foreign nations less blessed with freedom than ourselves are advancing with gigantic strides in the career of public improvement, were we to slumber in indolence or fold up our arms and proclaim to the world that we are palsied by the will of our constituents, would it not be to cast away the bounties of Providence and doom ourselves to perpetual inferiority?"

In groundbreaking ceremonies for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, Adams said: "[A]t the creation of man, male and female, the Lord of the universe, their Maker, blessed them, and said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.' To subdue the earth was, therefore, one of the first duties assigned to man at his creation; and now, in his fallen condition, it remains among the most excellent of his occupations. To subdue the earth is pre-eminently the purpose of this undertaking. ... [we pray for] this joint effort of our great community, ... that He would make it one of His chosen instruments for the preservation, prosperity, and perpetuity of our Union."

Industrializing the United States

Let us now see how the United States was industrialized, by John Quincy Adams and his allies.

First of all, President Adams assigned the United States Army to begin developing the railroads of the country. We had no trains, no railroads, no tracks, no nothing. He assigned the Army engineers of West Point to make the surveys, the plans, and the designs for railroads. Eventually 60 such railroads were planned in that way.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, chartered in 1827, was the first of these, to which Adams assigned Army engineers. These were mostly private owned companies, *financed by government*. They got money from state governments, from city governments, and federal land grants also, later on.

Adams' protégés, William Seward and Edward Everett, became governors of New York and Massachusetts, respectively, and built the great railroads there, using state funds and U.S. Army engineers.

The Bank of the United States at this time was led by the very close personal friend of John Quincy Adams, the Greek scholar Nicholas Biddle, who marketed the railroad bonds that were issued. Our nation's bank marketed those bonds, in a whole complex of government-led activities, with private cooperation, to build up the country.

The Erie Canal was finished in the year John Quincy became President, 1825, as a state government project. President Adams now launched a new era of canal-building.

In 1823, under President James Monroe, about 100,000 acres of federal land was donated to the states, for them to sell

FIGURE 1



to settlers, and use the money from the land sale to build roads. Under President J.Q. Adams, the U.S. government suddenly, in 1827, gave 2 million acres to the states, including Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, to build canals, and a substantial amount for road-building. The next year, about another million acres of land was granted.

How would you finance these constructions? Well, you could sell land. The government used every method possible to do this, because you had a lot of free-trade crazies running around saying nothing should be done. So you use every method you can to get this done. And we also had substantial work for river improvements, clearing those snags in the rivers, so we could get through the Ohio and westward.

Here's the way this thing worked. There were two great features of the canals that were built (**Figure 1**).

First: Follow the line of a shipment up the Hudson River, to just north of Albany, then west on the Erie Canal, out to Lake Erie. Go down Lake Erie to three canals, one of them over from Toledo, through Indiana, all the way down to the Ohio River. Go back up that canal and trace the branch down to where Cincinnati is on the Ohio River. Trace also the canal down from Cleveland on Lake Erie, in through the heart of Ohio to Portsmouth on the Ohio River.

These canals linked up with the Erie Canal. They brought settlers to the Midwest, who built agriculture and industry. *This created New York City as a great metropolis*, with this trade that was mostly flowing into New York. It also created Chicago. Trace the shipment line out there to Lake Michigan. You have a canal built from Chicago, then only a little dump, to the Illinois River, that connected to St. Louis on the Mississippi River.

So all of a sudden, you have a system of canals linking up a whole new vast area.

The second feature of the canals, which is crucial to understand: Inside Pennsylvania, canals were built primarily for the purpose of getting coal out of the mines, down to Philadelphia for manufacturing, and to go by sea to Boston, New York, and other cities, to build up industry; these Pennsylvania canals also helped integrate eastern Ohio into the Pennsylvania industrial machine.

Next we come to the heart of the issue, as to how we industrialized the United

States. Before the 1820s, we were producing less iron than we had been in the colonial period! We were smashed by the British, and we did not really recover that capacity until we did things on an entirely different scale. The nationalists—Henry Clay leading Congress, and then with the Presidency under John Quincy Adams—passed protective tariffs. The first really good tariff was in 1824, and then a huge one in 1828. This is a tax against foreign imports, to favor our manufacturing, so producers could make a profit and pay a decent wage.

At the same time, anthracite coal production was suddenly started up in Pennsylvania. None was produced before this point. What happened? We built these canals at state expense, and it was now only a penny a ton to move that coal. So they poured it out into factories. They started building iron forges, protected by the government from foreign competition. And we thus started building iron mills; we didn't do it before that.

Adams proposed that the government would build an astronomical observatory. This was laughed at. But his work in these areas, including creating the Smithsonian Institution, helped set up the government base for science in America. John Kennedy, whose program got us to the moon, focussed quite a bit on the integrity and pioneering spirit of John Quincy Adams.

Adams introduced in January 1826, a bill to create a U.S. Naval Academy. It was passed by the Senate, defeated in the House. In February 1827, he introduced a bill for a naval expedition to explore the South Seas and Antarctica; it passed the House, and failed in the Senate. But these things he originated were successfully pushed through not long after, by his faction.