Nullification Crisis

by David L. Cockrell, 2006

The Nullification Crisis of 1832 found North Carolina generally opposed to the position of other southern states, particularly South Carolina, regarding a federal tariff on agricultural goods. The "tariff of abominations" that they found so harsh did not radically affect North Carolina's diversified agricultural economy. In 1830 early indications of South Carolina's bold stand against the federal government produced scattered demonstrations throughout North Carolina denouncing such action. At year's end, the General Assembly passed a resolution declaring that, although the tariff was "unwise" and "oppressive," it was not constitutional for "an individual state of this Union to nullify a law of the United States." In the words of Judge William Gaston, "the people [of North Carolina] may disapprove of the tariff but they love the Union more."

South Carolina's adoption of its nullification ordinances in November 1832 sparked renewed criticism from vocal North Carolinians. The editors of the Raleigh Register, one of the state's most prominent newspapers, called these ordinances "revolutionary" and warned that their passage could only lead to "dissolution" of the Union. While a resolution moved through the General Assembly condemning the South Carolinians for their actions, a few moderates, such as Richard Dobbs Spaight Jr., offered to mediate the crisis. Ominously, during the resolution's final passage several lawmakers declined to support the motion. A few editorialists echoed these sentiments, asserting that, despite the fact that South Carolina was in the wrong, any "tyrannical act of oppression would be apt to enlist North Carolina in the cause of her sister state."

Reference:

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