

IN SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

DOCUMENTS

Relating to the "bill regulating the duties and providing for the compensation of Purser in the Navy." (S. No. 33.)

FEBRUARY 1, 1832.

Laid on the table by Mr. HAYNE, Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, 9th January, 1832.

SIR: The reply to your two communications of the 3d instant, on the subject of the bill concerning Purser, has been delayed thus far by inquiries in the offices of the Navy Commissioners and of the Fourth Auditor.

It was supposed that you wished particular and correct results, rather than general impressions; and, so soon as the former were obtained, I have hastened to lay them before you.

Without giving at length the data on which all the following calculations are made, or attempting to state with precision the exact process, I have endeavored to present substantial accuracy.

Your questions, and the replies to them, are as follows:

1. "What rate of per centage is now alluded to Purser on the several articles which they are permitted to furnish to the sailors?"

Answer. Fifty per cent. on tea, sugar, and tobacco; twenty-five per cent. on all other articles, except slop clothing, and on that ten per cent.

This regulation was introduced in A. D. 1809. Before that year the per centage was almost unlimited in practice.

2. "The highest amount of compensation which any Purser has been known to receive in one year?"

Answer. Before A. D. 1809, in an official letter, it was estimated to exceed seventeen thousand dollars, in a frigate of the first class. Since A. D. 1809, the commissions could not by law exceed \$9000, unless the issues to the men were unreasonable in amount. From the best data they might be equal, with a full crew,

In a ship of the line, to about	-	-	\$8,750
In a frigate of the first class	-	-	5,000
In a frigate of the second class	-	-	3,800
In a sloop	-	-	1,800
In a schooner	-	-	850

The above result is grounded on a full complement of men, and on the

average issues of clothing and stores; though in fact the number is not always full, and the issues vary much with the popularity of the Purser, and the discipline of the commander of the vessel.

The whole compensation in each of these vessels, to a Purser, would be the pay and rations of about \$660 per annum added to each of the above amounts of commissions, when the crew was full and the issues liberal.

As the per centage is computed on the invoice, cases have occurred, it is said, since A. D. 1809, where, by a drawback being obtained on some of the articles reshipped and used abroad, a much larger compensation has been received per year. The cases of overcharge, by means of double invoices, or of a departure from the regulations in the per centage, cannot honestly occur, and are presumed not to come within the scope of your inquiries.

3. "What is the whole amount of expenditures by Pursers in the course of a year, on which commissions are charged?"

Answer. In a full crew of a ship of the line of the first class, about

	\$46,000
Viz. Slop clothing, about	\$30,000
Tea, sugar, and tobacco	7,000
All other articles	9,000
	\$46,000

This estimate is founded upon the basis of 700 persons on board, who draw such supplies under the regulations. In other vessels the amount would vary nearly in proportion as the number of their crews.

4. "What the amount of such commissions?"

Answer. Commissions in a ship of the line of the first class - \$8,750

Viz. On slop clothing	\$3,000
On tea, sugar, and tobacco	3,500
On other articles	2,250
	\$8,750

Pay and rations of a Purser per year, about - 660

Making in all, as before stated, in a ship of the line of the first class, with a full crew, the whole compensation, per year, about \$9,410

5. "What would be the probable amount of the ten per cent. it is proposed to deduct?"

Answer. In a ship of the line, with a full crew, taking the expenditures to be as before stated, the ten per cent. on them is - \$4,600

In other vessels the proportions would correspond as before mentioned.

6. "Any suggestions as to the evils of the present system, and the advantages of that proposed?"

Answer. This Department, in former communications during the present session, has submitted some views and documents under this inquiry. I consider the evils of the present system as chiefly its oppressiveness to the seamen; the dissatisfaction it produces; its too great inequality among the Pursers in their compensation; and the difficulties to which it subjects the Department in obtaining this class of officers to serve in the smaller vessels.

On the contrary, the principal advantages anticipated by a change, are a removal of these evils, and, at the same time, the protection of the Government against losses, by the change in the mode of furnishing supplies, and the saving of the Treasury from any new essential burden by the nominal increase of pay to Pursers.

The present corps of Pursers is 43 in number. The compensation to these now is, pay and rations, about - - - \$27,000
 The number at yards is 10; and the additional allowance to those stationed there, is about - - - - - 3,000

 \$30,000

The present commissions on their sales or issues would amount annually, on the force estimated for the current year, to about 62,000
 \$92,000

On the same force, if the changes take effect in their pay which are proposed by the bill, their compensation will amount to about - - - - - \$65,000

Making a diminution in the whole pay received by the whole corps, per annum, under the bill, of about - - - - - \$27,000

And making a saving to the seamen of over thirty thousand dollars per annum.

Again, the 10 per cent. reserved by the Government will, on a like basis, amount to about, per annum - - - - - \$32,000

Which, augmented by the sum now paid from the Treasury, will be about - - - - - \$62,000

This makes only the small annual increase, nominally drawn by the bill from the naval appropriations for the whole corps, of about - - - - - \$3,000

But some of this ten per cent. ought undoubtedly to be deemed a security against losses and accidents, and compensation for purchases; and if Congress deem it desirable to make the per centage a security to cover those, and to cover any balance drawn from the Treasury on account of increased pay, I have no doubt that raising it to 15 per cent. on other articles than slops, will effect both of those objects, and still leave the prices of all articles to the seamen much lower than they are under the present system.

Most of the articles will, by the change proposed in the bill, be purchased in larger quantities under the contract system, and with no temptation to have the price high in order to increase the profits by the per centage on that price. This must make at least from 10 to 15 per cent. difference.

Before A. D. 1809, the annual profit made by the Purser on each

man, was estimated, on one occasion, at over - - - - - \$42 00

Since that, it should not exceed, on each man, about - - - - - \$12 00

And often is estimated from - - - - - \$10 to 14 00

Under the proposed law, the annual profit on each man would probably be nothing, so far as regards what is taken from the man, because the prime cost of the articles, it is presumed, as before named, will be at least from 10 to 15 per cent. lower than formerly. But if no lower, the ten per cent. would, on the probable consumption by each man, be only about \$6½; and 15 per cent. on all articles except slops, leaving ten per cent. on these, would be only about \$7½.

The data on which all these calculations are made, and the precise results, can be given with more minuteness if desirable; but it is presumed that sufficient has been detailed to meet the object of your inquiries.

Respectfully, yours,

LEVI WOODBURY.

Hon. R. Y. HAYNE,

Chairman of the Naval Committee Senate.

Extract of a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, from the Chairman of the Naval Committee House of Representatives United States.

— “The views of your Department as to the details under the proposed bill for making purchases, preserving the goods, &c., and surveying them to ascertain their fitness or unfitness for use; and the probable expense, charges, and losses, incidental to such modes of purchase, preservation, and surveys for use.”

NAVY DEPARTMENT, 27th December, 1831.

SIR: In reply to your communications, received yesterday, concerning the subject of Pursers, I have the honor to remark, that the bill enclosed was one which I had before examined and approved as a member of the Naval Committee of the Senate.

It was grounded principally on the recommendations contained in the annual report from this Department, made December, A. D. 1829.

In aid of those, I herewith enclose a copy of a letter from the Commissioners of the Navy, dated January 9th, A. D. 1830. (A.)

It is proper that, to the facts and arguments contained in these documents, and in the published debate in the Senate on the passage of the above bill, I should add what has occurred in my own experience in the Department the last few months.

I have found the present compensation to Pursers so exceedingly unequal in vessels of different sizes, as to create constant uneasiness among those on board the smaller vessels. Indeed, it is almost impossible to obtain the services of any, now on leave or waiting orders, either in a single sloop or in a schooner.

They complain that in these last they often become involved in debt and losses, rather than finding them profitable; while in frigates and ships of the line, the emoluments are often exorbitant.

The feeling of dissatisfaction caused by this state of things among the Pursers themselves, and among the officers and crews, who complain of the temptations to oppression to which they are exposed under the present laws, is very great, and quite injurious to the service.

In respect to the evils apprehended in case the proposed change takes effect, and to which you allude in both communications, I submit the enclosed communication from the Naval Board, (marked B.)

Respectfully yours,

LEVI WOODBURY.

Hon. M. HOFFMAN,

Chairman of Naval Committee House of Reps.

A.

NAVY COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE,

9th January, 1830.

SIR: In reply to your letter of the 26th ultimo, wherein you request information from the Commissioners respecting the compensation of Pur-

B.

NAVY COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE,

27th December, 1831.

SIR: Upon that part of the letter of Mr. Hoffman to which you were pleased to call the attention of the Commissioners, they would respectfully observe, that the contracts for all supplies for the Navy invariably provide that the articles shall be of approved quality, and before they are received into store they are particularly examined by officers of the yard where they are to be delivered; that, being received in a good state, they are issued for use in the same condition from the stores, and the officer to whom they are issued becomes accountable for them; that, on the return of a vessel into port, at the end of her cruise, the stores are all again examined by officers of the yard, and the officer who returns them is entitled to credit for such as may be in good condition, and is chargeable with any deficiency that may appear, unless he can show that the loss or damage arose from no neglect on his part. On board every national vessel, ample rooms for the safe keeping of goods and stores are provided; no expense attends any survey of them to ascertain their fitness or unfitness for use, such surveys being always held by officers of the Navy.

As to the expense incident to the purchase of supplies, it is not perceived that it will in any degree be affected by the provisions of the bill: the proposed ten per cent. upon the cost of the articles would, it is thought, secure the Government against any loss.

With very great respect,
I am, sir, &c.

JOHN RODGERS.

HON. LEVI WOODBURY.

Navy Commissioners, Office,
27th December, 1881.

Sir: Upon that part of the letter of Mr. Holford to which you were pleased to call the attention of the Commissioners, they would respectfully observe, that the contracts for all supplies for the Navy invariably provide that the articles shall be of approved quality, and before they are received into store they are particularly examined by officers of the yard where they are to be delivered; that, being received in a good state, they are issued for use in the same condition from the stores, and the officer to whom they are issued becomes accountable for them; that, on the return of a vessel into port, at the end of her cruise, the stores are all again examined by officers of the yard, and the officer who returns them is entitled to credit for such as may be in good condition, and is chargeable with any deficiency that may appear, unless he can show that the loss or damage arose from no neglect on his part. On board every national vessel, ample rooms for the safe keeping of goods and stores are provided; no expense attends any survey of them to ascertain their fitness or unfitness for use, such surveys being always held by officers of the Navy.

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With very great respect,
I am, Sir, &c.

JOHN RODGERS

Hon. Jas. Woodcock

