THE CASE OF ALBERT GALLATIN AND JEFFERSONIAN PATRONAGE

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Yes, O! ye silly frogs, beware, . . .
For fish and fowl, and man and beast,
Contribute to his [Jefferson's] daily feast.
Ev'n his own young, on flats and shallows,
He lies in wait for, gulps and swallows.
And think you he will spare the bodies,
Of such a simple set of noddies?
No, he will gulp you without sparing,
As hungry whales gulp shoals of herring.
Or ant-bears, who with stomachs hollow,
An hundred thousand ants will swallow,
And like your music, let me tell ye,
Best, when he hears it from his belly.

—New York Evening Post, April 13, 1804

The carnivorous President, Thomas Jefferson, in the first transfer of party power in United States history after his election by the House of Representatives in 1801, first started gulping Federalist office-holders upon arranging his cabinet soon after taking office on March 4, 1801. The most stormy response to all of Jefferson's appointments centered on the choice of Swiss-born Albert Gallatin of Pennsylvania as Secretary of the Treasury. The controversy which swirled around the choice of Gallatin for what was considered the most important cabinet post reveals much of the entire patronage issue during Jefferson's first Administration.

In choosing the heads of the six executive departments, Jefferson fixed one eye on the merits of the appointees and another on political expediency. Yet, in the words of Claude G. Bowers, "Never for a moment had [Jefferson] wavered in the determination to give the

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portfolio of State to [James] Madison and that of the Treasury to Gallatin." ¹ Jefferson selected half of the cabinet members from New England — Henry Dearborn and Levi Lincoln of Massachusetts, Secretary of War and Attorney-General, respectively, and Gideon Granger of Connecticut as Postmaster-General — in carrying out his "favorite political purpose," writes Bowers, "the ultimate redemption of that section." ² Secretary of the Navy was to be Robert Smith of Maryland after Robert Livingston and Samuel Smith had declined the post.

Of all these top-level appointments, that of the Genevan and naturalized American, Albert Gallatin, provoked the greatest amount of adverse comment in the young nation's press, partly because the Treasury Department had been regarded as a Federalist stronghold since the days of Alexander Hamilton and partly because of Gallatin's known opposition to past policies in the department. Yet Gallatin drew the heaviest fire from critics of his appointment mainly because of his foreign background. He was born in Geneva in 1761 and orphaned at the age of nine, coming to the United States at the age of nineteen. When he received his patrimony in 1786 he invested it in "Friendship Hill" in western Pennsylvania, where frontier politics favored his liberalism but where even his landowning status did not override his European past.

Albert Gallatin, who had dropped his first two names of Abraham Alfonse upon coming to America, participated in the conference at Harrisburg in September 1788 called for revising the United States Constitution approved by the Pennsylvania convention in December 1787 by a vote of 42 to 23. In the Harrisburg meeting, Gallatin proposed decentralized government through a single congressional chamber, a weakened executive, and a Supreme Court whose only appellate function would be by writ of error from the state courts. In 1789-1790 Gallatin also sat in the convention which revised the Pennsylvania state constitution. He was elected to the state legislature in 1790 as a representative from Fayette County and re-elected uncontested in 1791 and 1792. In the Pennsylvania legislature Gallatin established his high reputation in public finance which caused that body to elect him to the United States Senate on February 28, 1793, by a vote of 45 to 37. Yet when the Third Congress opened in December 1793, Gallatin's eligibility was challenged on the grounds that

¹ Claude G. Bowers, Jefferson in Power, The Death Struggle of the Federalists (Boston, 1936), 56.
² Ibid., 59.
he had not been a citizen of the United States for nine years. By a vote of 14 to 12 on February 28, 1794, the Federalist Senate denied Gallatin the chair to which he was probably entitled.

Undaunted, Gallatin returned to western Pennsylvania where he exerted a great ameliorating influence on the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 which had been prompted by Hamilton’s excise law of 1791. In recognition of his services, Gallatin was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1794 where he served three terms between 1795 and 1801. In the House, Gallatin fathered the committee of ways and means, directed the fight for the election of Thomas Jefferson, and attained an eminence in the field of finance which assured his appointment as Secretary of the Treasury in May 1801. Gallatin was to serve in that capacity until May 1813 (or officially until February 1814), a record in United States history.3

Opposition to Gallatin’s appointment as Secretary of the Treasury stemmed partly, as noted above, from his earlier opposition to the policies of Alexander Hamilton. In the few days that Gallatin sat in the Senate in 1793 before being ruled ineligible, he had incurred the wrath of Hamilton by calling for information on the condition of the Treasury. Also, as a representative during John Adams’ entire Administration, Gallatin had been, in the words of his biographer, John Austin Stevens, “a perpetual thorn in the sides of Hamilton’s successors in the department.” 4

Henry Adams was quite mistaken when he wrote that “Mr. Gallatin himself was perhaps of the whole Administration the one who


4 John Austin Stevens, Albert Gallatin (Boston, 1883), 185.
suffered least from Federal attacks." 5 On the contrary, Senate opposition against Gallatin was known to be so strong that his nomination was delayed until the Senate had recessed so that newly elected Republican senators could help tip the scales toward confirmation of his appointment. Republican editor William Duane of the Philadelphia Aurora noted, "We repeat it, the apprehension of a full investigation and exposition of past abuses [in the Treasury Department], is the great cause of opposition to Mr. Gallatin." 6 Soon afterward, the Boston Columbian Centinel erroneously announced Gallatin's appointment on March 21, 1801. Thus, the controversy over Gallatin's selection was launched months before the nomination was finally announced in the summer.

"Lucius" in the Federalist Gazette of the United States struck one of the most recurring notes in the strident press opposition to Gallatin's appointment when he asked on March 21, 1801, "Where was Gallatin during the revolution? In Geneva he staid [sic] till the bloody scene was over; and where was Duane? he was too obscure to be known any where. It is the curse of this nation that such worthless fugitives are permitted to diffuse among the weak part of our community the contagion of their corruptive principles." 7

Another nativistic attack on Gallatin occurred in the Boston New-England Palladium:

Allured by Albert's fame from home,
Hither the venal Swiss shall come,
For his French masters ably cater,
And teach us how to play the traitor. 8

"Leonidas" in the Boston Columbian Centinel commented on April 18, 1801:

It is confidently asserted, that to complete this catalogue Albert Gallatin, a Genevan, who cannot yet speak our language intelligibly, and who was Secretary to one of the Conventions of Insurgents in 1793, is to be Secretary of the Treasury, and to hold the purse strings of this Infant Nation!!! Disinterested people! You not only invited to your shores, the oppressed and the unhappy, the disorderly and discontented of all nations, but you commit to their kind care your rights and your blessings — your altars and your fire-sides — your wives and your daughters — your treasures and your government. 9

6 Philadelphia Aurora, March 19, 1801.
7 Gazette of the United States, March 21, 1801. Gallatin was in this country during the Revolution, but as Muzzey wrote in his sketch of Gallatin in the DAB, op. cit., "He [Gallatin] had come to America for his own freedom, not hers."
8 Reprinted in ibid.
9 "Leonidas," "The Consistent Federalist," XII, Boston Columbian Centinel, April 18, 1801.
Republican editors such as Samuel Harrison Smith of the capital's National Intelligencer, semiofficial organ of the Jefferson Administration, were quick to point out that many other illustrious Americans first came to the United States as foreigners, naming the first Secretary of the Treasury as an excellent case in point. The Gazette of the United States, however, would not be deterred by this argument:

What a stupid wretch is Sammy, to suppose that the American people will be gulled by this comparison. Every body who is acquainted with the history of America, knows that Alexander Hamilton was a soldier in our Revolutionary War, that he was the friend and companion of the illustrious Washington, that he was a brave, humane, and meritorious officer, that after having fought to secure us our liberty from foreign tyranny, he exerted his abilities in the Cabinet to procure us the blessings of a free government, and that in the origin of the American nation, he (as did every man who was here at the peace in '83 and who did not assist our enemies) became in every sense of the word, a real and true American.10

The Boston Independent Chronicle only stirred up another hornet's nest when it sought to explain the choice by pointing out that the portfolio of the Treasury Department went to a foreigner simply because no American was qualified for the job!11 A much more able defense of Gallatin is found in an earlier issue of the same newspaper:

The character of Mr. GALLATIN is far beyond the shafts of ridicule. His great talents are not disgraced by any excentricities [sic] of mind, or manners. The vile buffoonery which sports with ignorance, can never please where Mr. GALLATIN is known. The love of liberty directed his steps to America. He was no speculator, no monopolizer, no demagogue. He loved the liberty of the law, and he attached himself to our cause, because he found us a free people. He visited every part of the Union, and is among the best judges of our resources. He has converted a large estate into an interest in our soil. He cultivates the soil he has purchased. He is united to an American by marriage, and he has a family born in the country. Of our commerce he has an extensive knowledge. With our Finances, he has explained to the world his intimate acquaintance; and from his pure morals, extreme prudence, and comprehensive powers, ranks among the best and greatest men in America.12

Most cruel of all the attacks on Gallatin were the slurs on his

10 Gazette of the United States, May 14, 1801. Actually, Gallatin did participate in a non-combat mission of a few months for the patriot forces during the Revolution, but as he himself said late in life, "As I never met the enemy, I have not the slightest claim to military services." Henry Adams, ed., The Writings of Albert Gallatin (New York, 1960), II, 621.
11 Boston Independent Chronicle, August 27, 1801.
12 Ibid., May 11, 1801. Raymond Walters, Jr., points out in Chapter 11, "Frontier Businessman, 1795-1801," Albert Gallatin: Jeffersonian Financier and Diplomat (New York, 1957), 133-142, that Gallatin was unsuccessful both as a land speculator and a farmer. Both he and his second wife, the former Hannah Nicholson, regretted that Gallatin had invested his entire patrimony in "Friendship Hill," his western Pennsylvania clearing in the wilderness.
A contemporary political cartoon which also heaps ridicule upon Gallatin's French accent. The guillotine casts aspersions upon Gallatin's egalitarian ideas.

French accent. Federalist newspapers everywhere entertained their readers with examples of Gallatin's bouts with the English language. One of the most extreme specimens of this type of abuse appeared in the *Gazette of the United States*, which quoted Gallatin as saying: "For ze par wisch oituke een dzattafair oido mos sinzerly deman ze pardone of moi contree. It is ze political zin of wisch oi gladly take zis akelshon to express mois zinzere repetans." 13

When Gallatin submitted to Congress his first annual report on affairs in the Treasury Department — a reform for which he had argued for years — the occasion was seized as another opportunity to ridicule his use of the English language. Commented the *Gazette of the United States*:

13 *Gazette of the United States*, April 7, 1801.
Since unhappily we are doomed to have the monied-matters of the Treasury conducted by a foreigner, one would suppose we might at least have the Treasury language managed by an American. In the late report of the Secretary, there is such a derangement and confusion of the auxiliary verbs and prepositions that in some places the language is totally unintelligible. Mr. Gallatin should be reminded of the anecdote of the unfortunate Frenchman, who on falling into the Thames cried out "I will be drowned, nobody shall save me." 14

Fortunately, Gallatin's temperament seems to have cushioned the body blows of Federalist bludgeons. Henry S. Randall has described Gallatin's personality: "With as clear a logic as Madison's he possessed nerves of a far more steel-like texture. He was neither passionate nor aggressive; no excitement reached him, no abuse for an instant disturbed his serene, cold, intellectual equanimity." 15 Historian David S. Muzzey also noted Gallatin's "calmness of temper unruffled by the personal attacks of the New England Federalists, who sneered at his foreign birth and French accent and grossly misrepresented the part he had taken in the Whiskey Rebellion." 16

Ironically, it was Gallatin alone of the cabinet members who opposed the President's decision to remove Federalist office-holders in order to create a more equitable distribution of offices between the two parties. As Henry Adams pointed out, "No other member of the Cabinet offered active support to Gallatin in this struggle against the use of federal patronage." 17 Soon after taking office, Gallatin submitted to Jefferson a circular letter advising all Treasury officers who appointed others to subordinate posts, "talent and integrity are to be the only qualifications for office." 18

This letter was never sent, however, because Thomas Jefferson had other ideas about patronage. He wanted to restore party harmony — especially in New York and Pennsylvania — and build party strength by at least balancing Federal offices between Federalists and Republicans. Thus Jefferson moved steadily toward more and more removals on partisan grounds until time and natural vacancies allowed the Republicans to dominate the public service just as the Federalists had done. 19

14 Ibid., January 6, 1802.
16 Muzzey, 106.
19 This is the consensus among historians today, although Edward Channing, *The Jeffersonian System, 1801-1811* (New York, 1906), 17, points out that Jefferson distributed the offices of the commissioners of bankruptcy under the act of 1801 impartially between Republicans and Federalists.
Scholars still dispute the actual number of removals made by Jefferson, just as the extent of "correcting the procedure" was hotly debated in the newspapers of the time. Jefferson himself wrote to William Duane on July 24, 1803, that because of death, resignation, and removal "of 316 offices in all the United States subject to appointment and removal by me, 130 only are [now] Federalists." On the basis of this statement, Edward Channing concluded that President Jefferson rotated one-half of all Federal offices during his first term. As others have estimated, however, the number of removals in Jefferson's first term was as low as thirty-nine, or as high as one hundred and five — removed mainly during the years 1801 and 1802. Whatever the actual number of removals, it seems clear that so far as the struggle in the press was concerned, Claude G. Bowers was fully justified in concluding, "The victory was easily with Jefferson." 

Despite the lowest form of ridicule and abuse which the Federalist newspapers could contrive, Albert Gallatin served twelve distinguished years as Secretary of the Treasury, longer than any other man in American history. He later became United States agent at the Russian mediation of the War of 1812 at St. Petersburg in 1813 and at the definitive peace settlement at Ghent in 1814. Gallatin was United States ambassador to France, 1816-1823, and later to Great Britain, 1826-1827. Upon retiring to private life, Gallatin became president of John Jacob Astor's National (later Gallatin) Bank, 1831-1839. Gallatin was one of the founders and the first president of the council of the University of the City of New York in 1831, president of the New York Historical Society in 1843, and founder of the American Ethnological Society in 1842 before finally dying at the age of eighty-eight in 1849.

Other Jefferson appointees performed creditably, also. Leonard D. White has observed that although the President's "selections for office were made within the ranks of the Republican party, . . . they were confined to gentlemen who were men of integrity, who had the

20 Quoted in Walters, 161.
23 J. M. Merriam, "Jefferson's Use of the Executive Patronage," *ibid.*, II (New York, 1887), 47-52, p. 50. Merriam points out that he used the more authoritative figures of the *Executive Journal of the Senate*, whereas Miss Salmon relied on those of the *Annual Register* of 1829-1830.
24 Bowers, 71.
confidence of the community, and were 'respectable' in the eyes of their neighbors." 25

Jefferson experienced such difficulty with the opposition Federalist press, which still controlled the majority of the nation's newspapers, partly because he himself overstated his case both in his first inaugural address and in his reply later to a group of dissident New Haven petitioners. The pendulum of Presidential opinion swung to both extremes, alienating first Republicans and then Federalists, until the latter offered a bitter toast in 1803: "The open air, neglect, and a hard frost to the plants of exotic patriotism, that will thrive only in the hot-bed of office." 26

In conclusion, the Federalist press was a generation too soon in deploving the advent of the spoils system, but its opposition was clearly based on purely partisan grounds. Jefferson's attitude toward patronage, which may have been stiffened by the controversy raging around him, merely suggested that the victors deserved at least half of the spoils. Far from being the advocate of a "system of hunting the Federalists like wild beasts," as the New York Evening Post charged, Jefferson, according to Leonard D. White, "raised a standard that in retrospect commands honor, and by his prudence delayed for a generation the practice of rotation in federal office, already breaking into state circles." 27

Nor did the prolonged attack in Federalist newspapers on Jefferson's courage and moderation harm him at the polls, as the election of 1804 abundantly testifies. Indeed, as Gaillard Hunt has concluded, "The applications for office during Jefferson's administration prove beyond dispute that prevailing public sentiment on the subject of appointments and removals was in favor of their being made for political reasons. Jefferson recognized and followed this sentiment, and he achieved a popularity which increased instead of diminishing." 28

Yet because of his stand on the patronage issue, Jefferson was the long-suffering target of an "unbounded and unprovoked abuse . . . unprecedented in a free government," as the Boston Independent Chronicle stated. 29 This abuse became so virulent that the same news-

26 New York Evening Post, June 15, 1803.
27 White, 354.
29 Boston Independent Chronicle, August 10, 1801.
paper headlined an article concerning Federalist opposition, there is no truce with these men.\textsuperscript{30}

Jefferson winced under the lashings of the "cannibal newspapers"\textsuperscript{31} on the issue of Federal patronage, but he stood his ground and the course of time proved his good judgment, not only with the case of Albert Gallatin but with the generally excellent quality of his entire Administration. For the moment the President defied the tidal wave of adverse newspaper opinion, and he did so with impunity. Although other issues would seriously impair Jefferson's prestige later — notably the Embargo of 1807-1809 — the opinion of time itself would fully justify the hope of an unidentified New York Federalist editor quoted by the Philadelphia \textit{Aurora} soon after Thomas Jefferson's first inaugural speech: "His public assurances . . . have inspired us with a hope that he is not the man we thought him. — We thought him a philosopher, and have found him a virtuous and enlightened philanthropist — We thought him a Virginian, and have found him an American — We thought him a partisan and have him a president."\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, November 30, 1801.
\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in Roy J. Honeywell, "President Jefferson and His Successor," \textit{The American Historical Review}, XLVI (1940), 64-75.
\textsuperscript{32} Philadelphia \textit{Aurora}, March 17, 1801.