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THE SENATE OF 1909
A STUDY OF THE VOTING ON
THE PAYNE-ALDRICH TARIFF ACT

AN ABSTRACT OF
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by
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One of the main functions of the United States Congress is to determine the foreign trade policies for the country. The most common method of regulating the importation of foreign made goods is the enactment of tariff measure. The tariffs that were passed throughout the nineteenth century favored the protection of the domestic made product. At the time of the 1908 presidential election there was a strong sentiment within the country in favor of a downward revision of the high tariff rates. Thus the main purpose of the sixty-first Congress which convened on March 15, 1909 was the revision of the Dingley Tariff Act of 1887. The social, political and economic backgrounds of the senators influenced the way that these men voted on the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act of 1909.

The majority of the ninety-two senators were middle aged men who had been born in the rural areas of the United States. If they did not remain in the state where they had been born or in the same geographical area, the men moved westward as the territories were opened up for settlement. Most of the senators had received a public school education and had attended college. One half of the senators had graduated from a four year college. Two-thirds of the thirty-eight eligible senators had served in the army, either in the United States forces or in the Confederate forces. However, the majority of the ninety-

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two senators had not served in the armed forces.

Holding elected positions on the local, state and national levels gave the senators political experiences that helped them when they were members of the 1909 Senate. Fourteen of the senators had previously been governors of their respective states.

The economic backgrounds of the senators were the most important. Sixty-nine of the senators were lawyers before they had entered politics. All of the senators were aware of the economic interests of the states they represented, either through business connections or through their own personal interests. By the time these men had been elected to the Senate many of them were wealthy and had financial interests in the major companies in the United States.

The final voting on the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act took place on August 5, 1909 with forty-seven yeas and thirty-one nays cast by the senators. In addition, fourteen senators were not present in the Senate chamber for the final voting. All those who voted in favor of the bill were Republicans. Twenty-four Democrats and six "progressive" Republicans voted against the measure. These "progressive" Republicans were interested in the economic welfare of the average citizen.

The voting on the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act can be

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considered a party vote of the Republicans versus the Democrats, a sectional vote of the Eastern and Western States versus the Southern and Midwestern States, a protective vote for the domestic made product, and a personal vote of the economic interests of the individual senators.

In the senatorial elections of 1911, 1913 and 1915 the Republicans were not widely reelected and the Democrats gained in numbers. Of the sixty Republicans who were in the 1909 Senate, only twenty-two of them were still serving in 1916. Of the thirty-two Democrats that served in the 1909 Senate, twenty-two were still there in 1916.

The Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act was never very popular. It was a high protective tariff that became effective for the entire country as the result of the economic interests of the ninety-two senators who served in the first session of the 1909 Senate.