John Calrump

EASTERN-SHORE WHIG AND PEOPLE'S ADVOCATE.

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From the Richmond Enquirer.

INTERESTING CORRESPONDENCE.

We are requested by the Central Committee of the Democratic Party of Virginia to lay the following correspondence before our readers—and they earnestly recommend Mr. Poinsett's luminous, dignified and able letter to the consideration of every citizen of the United States:

RICHMOND, May, 29, 1840.

DEAR SIR:—The interest of the Administration, as far as that depends upon the favorable opinion of the people of the State, and also, as we believe the cause of truth itself, have been greatly prejudiced by the extraordinary use which has been made of your late Report concerning the militia; and the important contest we have at hand, will furnish fresh incentives for a continued resort to artifice and misrepresentation.—From these considerations, we are constrained to address you directly on the subject, and to state to you the substance of the objections made to your plan for re-organizing the militia. You are charged with a design of establishing a Standing Army of two hundred thousand men; with proposing a system without precedent in our annals, tyrannical and oppressive in all its details, and without a parallel in the history of free Governments—a plan, which it is alleged, was submitted to the President, examined and approved by him, and placed before Congress at this particular period in order to organize a body of voters to favor his re-election. You are charged, moreover, with having originated a scheme compelling every man to furnish his own arms and accoutrements, thereby imposing a heavy tax upon the citizens, contrary to the genius of our institutions.

These statements have been so solemnly urged, that they may impress a portion of the people of Virginia with distrust of one, who could have deliberately proposed and advised such a plan. And our opponents have so adroitly employed it, to excite the prejudices of the people that we ask you in the spirit of frankness, to review the whole subject and to set forth the considerations which induced you to propose it at this particular juncture—explain to us the true character of your proposition, and the conclusions to which your deliberate judgment, aided by the objections of your adversaries, have conducted you, and state wherein the plan proposed by you differs from those, which on former occasions have been presented to Congress.

The archives of your own office, and the records of both Houses of Congress, place the means of obtaining the information we ask, more within your reach at Washington than is possessed by ourselves, and we respectfully ask you to enable us to set this matter in its true light before the public. Our object in doing so, is both to subserve the cause of truth by apprising you of the uses which have been made of your proposition in Virginia, and to afford you a fair opportunity of explaining it fully before the nation;

Very respectfully, yours,
THOMAS RITCHIE,
Secretary of the Central Dem. Com. of Va.
To J. R. POINSETT, Esq
Secretary of War, Washington.

MR. POINSETT'S REPLY.

WASHINGTON, June 5th, 1840.

DEAR SIR:—I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, of the 29th ult. stating your belief, that the cause of Democracy in Virginia had been seriously prejudiced by the extraordinary use which has been made of my late report concerning the militia, bringing to my view the substance of the objections made to my plan, and asking me to explain the true character of the proposition so as to enable the Central Democratic Committee, of Virginia, to set this matter in its true light before the public.

I avail myself, with great pleasure, of the opportunity thus afforded me of stating, through you, to my fellow-citizens of Virginia, and to the people of the United States, the motives which induced me to present a plan for the re-organization of the militia at this particular juncture, of explaining the principles on which it is founded; and of correcting as well the errors of some who have opposed it fairly, as the misrepresentations of others who have sought only to deceive and mislead the people.

It must be fresh in your recollection, that Congress, very shortly before the close of the last session, by a vote unanimous in one house, and very nearly so in the other, expressed an opinion that the country was exposed to the hazard of being involved in war; and reposing a trust and confidence in the patriotism and wisdom of the President, unparalleled in the history of our Republic, adjourned after investing him with full powers to avert or to meet the danger. Immediately after the passage of that act, which defined the description of force to which the defence of the country was to be trusted in the event of war, the committee on the Militia of the House of Repsesentatives required me, through their Chairman, to prepare a plan for the better organization of the militia of the United States: and no sooner had Congress adjourned than the President, sensible of the responsibilities imposed upon him by this act, and anxious alike to justify the confidence of Congress and to discharge his duty to the nation, called upon the War and Navy departments to furnish him with statements showing the condition of the defences of the country.—The subject was carefully examined, the state of our fortifications and military preparations, and of our regular and militia forces accurately ascertained and attentively considered. This examination proved, that the maxim bequeathed to us by the Father of his country.—"*In peace prepare for war,*" had been utterly neglected. The avenues to our great commercial capitols and to our most important naval depots were unprotected, and there existed no means of manning the forts that were in a condition to receive their armament. A few regiments of the army were concentrated in Florida, from whence they could not be withdrawn without risking the safety of that Territory, and the remainder were dispersed along the extensive lines of the Northern and Western frontiers. If, therefore, the war which appeared to be apprehended by Congress, should have occurred the defence of the country must have rested chiefly upon the militia of the United States.—From these circumstances, no less than from the tenor of the act by which the only additional force provided for the occasion and placed by Congress at the disposal of the Executive was of this description, its condition became then an object of earnest solicitude, and the result of my inquiries was most unsatisfactory. In some of the States the citizens, liable to militia duty, turn the subject into ridicule, and instead of being armed and equipped according to law appear in masquerade; in others, when mustered, a majority of them are armed with walking canes, fowling pieces, or unserviceable muskets—while in all, the training produces little else than the abstraction of millions annually from the productive industry of the country. In some of the States, training the militia has been abandoned in despair, and the law of Congress on the subject become a dead letter. There were found in the chief towns, companies handsomely uniformed and well drilled; but their number is insufficient to man the works or guard the approaches to their respective cities. With this force only to depend upon the danger to which the country would be exposed on the occurrence of the contingency contemplated by Congress, could not be disguised. I shuddered, when I contemplated the scene of confusion that would attend the appearance of a hostile fleet before any of our principle seaports. The forts manned suddenly with troops unaccustomed to the use of great guns, contrasting their slow and uncertain fire, through which the enemy would pass unharmed until they moored their floating batteries opposite the city, with the rapid fire and unerring aim of the practised gunner by which an enemy would probably be destroyed, or so crippled as to be compelled to abandon the attack: or supposing a force to land on our shores, I foresaw the useless slaughter of our best and bravest citizens, who for want of instruction, would, in all probability, be out-manœvered, and the calamitous scene of the last war in the capture of Washington be acted over again. The result of this action in which raw militia were brought suddenly together and opposed to regular forces in the open field, compared with that of New Orleans, where the same description of troops were assembled some days before, and stationed behind ramparts, teaches an impressive lesson. On the one hand, we see a gallant but untrained army of militia wavering before the steady manœuvres of regular troops, breaking their line, and, panic struck flying from the field, leaving the enemy in possession of the city to burn and [illegible] with it, a band composed of a few regulars and militia, who had the benefit of being brought together a short time in advance, and posted advantageously behind nastily-constructed lines, achieved one of the most brilliant and glorious victories recorded in history, saved the city which was the object of the enterprize, and drove the enemy with disgrace from our soil

Called by the voice of Congress to prepare to defend the country, taught by the event of the last war what might be expected from an enterprizing and great naval power and warned by the English press of the possibility, in case of war with that country, of black regiments being landed within the territory of the Southern States, and that the horrors of a servile insurrection might be added to the ordinary calamities of war, it became the duty of the Executive to seek to organize and render efficient the only means of defence at hand.

The President concurred with me in opinion with regard to the importance of re-organizing the militia at this time; but had no agency in preparing the plan reported to Congress and no previous knowledge of its details. It was prepared, as has already been stated, at the request of a Committee of the House of Representatives expressed at the close of last session, and reported to this Congress upon a call of the House, made directly upon the Secretary of War, and, as is usual in all such cases, sent to that body without being previously submitted to the President. With it or its details he, therefore, had nothing to do. In preparing it, my attention was first directed to the several plans which had been recommended to the consideration of Congress by Mr. Van Buren's predecessors, as well as those proposed by Committees of Congress, and experienced officers of the line and of the militia. In order that you may fully comprehend the subject, and justly appreciate the principles on which the plan under consideration is based, I will briefly recapitulate the leading points in the systems recommended.

The first plan, that of General Knox, was sanctioned by General Washington, after being modified according to the alterations suggested by him. It proposed to divide the militia into three classes. The first to be denominated the *Advance Corps*, and to be composed of young men from eighteen to twenty years of age, inclusive. The second to be denominated the *Main Corps*, and to be composed of men from twenty-one to forty-five years of age, and the third to be denominated the *Reserve Corps*, and to be composed of men from forty-five to sixty years of age. "The whole of the Advance Corps," says the report, "shall be clothed according to the manner hereafter directed, armed and subsisted at the expense of the United States, and all the youth of the said Corps in in each State, shall be encamped together, if practicable, or by legions, which encampment shall be called the Annual Camp of Discipline."

"The youth of eighteen and nineteen shall be disciplined for thirty days, successively, in each year, and those of twenty years shall be disciplined only for ten days in each year which shall be the last ten days of the annual encampment."

"The non-commissioned officers and privates are not to receive any pay during the said time, but the commissioned officers will receive the pay of their relative ranks, agreeably to the Federal establishment for the time being."

General Knox then goes on to estimate for a major-general and staff, four brigadiers with their inspectors and aids, and all the other officers for four legions, amounting to the annual sum of $390,240.

The next project for organizing the militia was presented by Mr. Jefferson, in his message to Congress in December, 1805—He says, "You will consider whether it would not be expedient for a state of peace as well as of war, so to organize or class the militia as would enable us, on a sudden emergency, to call for the services of the younger portions, unincumbered with the old and those having families. Upwards of three hundred thousand able-bodied men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six years, which the last census shows we may now count within our limits, will furnish a competent number for offence or defence, in any point where they may be wanted, and will give time for raising regular forces, after the necessity of them shall become certain; and the reducing to the early period of life all its active service, cannot but be desirable to our younger citizens of the present, as well as future times, inasmuch, as it engages to them, in more advanced age, a quiet and undisturbed repose in the bosom of their families. I cannot, then, but earnestly recommend to your early consideration the expediency of so modifying our militia system, as by a separation of the more active part, from that which is less so, we may draw from it, when necessary, an effective corps, fit for real and active service and to be called to in regular rotation."

So earnest were Mr. Jefferson's convictions of the propriety and necessity of this measure, that a late period of his life, this able statesman & exalted patriot thus writes to General Kosciusko, on the 26th of February, 1810; "Two measures have not been adopted which I pressed upon Congress repeatedly at their meetings. The one to settle the whole ungranted territory of Orleans, by donations of land to able-bodied young men, to be engaged and carried there at the public expense, who would constitute a force always ready on the spot to defend New Orleans. The other was to class the militia according to the year of their birth, and make all those from twenty to twenty-five, liable to be trained and called into service at a moment's warning. This would have given us a force of three hundred thousand young men, prepared by proper training for service *in any part of United States*; while those who had passed through that period would remain at home, liable to be used in their own *or adjacent States*. These two measures would have completed what I deemed necessary for the entire security of our country. They would have given me on my retirement from the government of the nation, the consolatory reflections, that having found when I was called to it, not a single seaport town in a condition to repel a levy of contribution by a single privateer or pirate, I had left every harbor so prepared by works and gun-boats, as to be in a reasonable state of security against any probable attack; the territory of Orleans acquired and planted, with an internal force sufficient for its protection; and the whole territory of the United States organized by such a classification of its male force, as would give it the benefit of all its young population for active service and that of a middle and advanced age for stationary defence. But these measures will, I hope, be completed by my successor, who, to the purest principles of Republican patriotism, adds a wisdom and foresight second to no man on earth."

In 1810, Mr. Madison called the attention of Congress to this subject. Speaking of the militia, he says, "It is for their consideration (Congress) whether further provisions are not requisite for the other contemplated objects of organization and discipline. To give to this great mass of physical and moral force the efficiency which it merits and is capable of receiving, it is indispensable, that it should be instructed and practised in the rules by which they are to be governed. Towards an accomplishment of this important work, I recommend, for the consideration of Congress, the expediency of instituting a system, which shall, in the first instance, call into the field, *at the public expense*, and, for a time, certain portions of the commissioned and non-commissioned officers. The instruction and discipline thus acquired would gradually diffuse, through the entire body of the militia that practical knowledge and promptitude for active service; which are the great ends to be pursued."

In 1812, when on the eve of a war with Great Britain, Mr. Madison repeats the recommendation with great earnestness; and at the close of the war, he says "I cannot press too much on the attention of Congress, such a classification and organization of the militia, as will most effectually render it the safeguard of a free State. If experience has shewn in the recent splendid achievements of the militia, the value of this resource for the public defence, it has shewn also the importance of that skill in the use of arms and of familiarity with the essential rules of discipline, which cannot be expected from the regulations now in force."

In 1812, the Legislature of Kentucky adopted resolutions on this subject, and recommended to Congress the classification of the Militia by dividing it into three classes; the first to be composed of all capable of bearing arms, from 15 to 21 years of age, the second between 21 and 27—the third between 27 and 45 years of age. The principal object of the first class be, to acquire a knowledge of tactics and discipline—of the second, which might be denominated the effective one, to be completely armed and equipped, to march whenever required; of the third, to form a reserve, which need not be compelled to attend musters, unless when called upon to render actual service."

"The progress of all capable of bearing [illegible] through the several classes, promises greater perfection of discipline, than can be effected under the present plan; all would [illegible], have thus passed through a school in which it would have been taught, and perhaps, more than a million of dollars, be annually saved to the community, in the labor of those excused uselessly from attending musters. But the greatest advantage which would result from it, would be the keeping up effective, disposable, and competent military force at all times ready for service, without the danger and inconvenience resulting from a standing army."

The great solicitude felt by Mr. Madison for a more efficient organization of the army, induced him again to call the attention of Congress to the subject. In his last message of December 3rd, 1816, he says; "As a subject of the highest importance to the national welfare, I must again earnestly recommend to the consideration of Congress a reorganization of the militia, on a plan, which will form into classes, according to the periods of life, more or less adapted to military services. An efficient militia is authorized and contemplated by the Constitution, and required by the spirit and safety of the Government. The present organization of our militia, is universally regarded as less efficient than it ought to be made; and no organization can be better calculated to give it its due force, than a classification which will assign the foremost place in the defence of the country, to that portion of its citizens, whose activity and animation best enable them to rally to its standard."

In conformity with these views, and in compliance with a resolution of the House of Representatives, requesting the Secretary of War to report a system for the organization and discipline of the militia, best calculated in his opinion, to promote the efficiency of that force when called into the public service, a plan was submited in 1817 by that officer, which divided the militia into three classes. "Those between 18 & 21 years of age, to be called the *minor class*; those between 21 and 31 to be called the *Junior Class*; and those over 31 and under 45 years of age, to be called the *Senior Class* militia."

The militia of the two first classes to be assembled at cantonments not more than twice a year, and that while so assembled they shall be subsisted and equipped at the expense of the U. S.—one or more arsenals and depots, were to be established in each State or Territory.

The committee of the House to which this portion of Mr. Madison's message, and the plan of the Secretary of War were referred, and of which General William Henry Harrison was Chairman, submitted an elaborate report, accompanied by a bill, adopting the principles recommended by the Executive, and engrafting upon it a system for the military instruction of all the youth in the United States at the public expense. The report sets forth that "to instruct the present militia of the country to any useful extent, would require a larger portion of their time, than they can possibly spare, from the duty of providing for their families, unless they are liberally paid—to pay them, would absorb all the resources of the nation."

"The alternative appears to direct the efforts of the government to instruct such a portion of the militia, as their means will allow, and which would produce the most beneficial results upon the whole mass."

The bill divided the militia into three classes, as proposed by the Secretary of war; and General Harrison says, the "junior or middle class will be composed of men who have small families, or those who have none, who are in the full ejoyment of bodily strength and activity, and whose minds are more easily excited to military ardour and the love of glory, than those of a more advanced period of life. Notwithstanding this classification, it is recommended that the officers and sergeants of the whole militia of the United States, be trained for one month in every year, at the public expense. The estimate, upon the supposition that the officers and sergeants receive full pay for one month, without rations or an allowance of rations or forage, except to the sergeants to whom rations might be necessary, amounts to $1,838,500; and one made upon the supposition that the officers receive only half pay and the sergeants full pay and rations, amounts to $1,578,000; a third estimate, upon the supposition that all the officers receive thirty dollars a month, or leaving them on full pay and rations, requires $,1,[illegible]5,000 per month."

On coming into office, Mr. Monroe called the unremitted attention of Congress to the organization and discipline of the militia, and frequently repeated the recommendation.

In 1825, the then Secretary of War, Mr. Barbor assembled a board composed of regular militia officers, to take into consideration the expediency of reorganizing the militia. Their report, and the numerous letters addressed to the Secretary in reply to a series of queries put to him by the Governors of the several States, all recommended a select body of militia to be trained for the defence of the country, in preference to the fruitless attempt then and now making to disipline the whole mass.

Mr. Barbour says in his report to President Adams; in 1826, "Important changes in the present system are indispensable to make the militia any way equal to the standard assigned it by the wishes of the patriotic;" and again, "It would appear that keeping up a system of the militia so extensive as the present, and burthensome, without any advantage to a large class of citizens, was altogether unnecessary. A different organization, therefore, by which at least a million and a half of our most useful citizens would be relieved from the unprofitable peagantry of military parade for five or six days in the year, constituting so injurious a draft on their industry, must be one which cannot fail to be well received by the American people; and when too it is believed that notwithstanding this relief, a superior efficiency will be imparted to this natural arm of the national defence." The board of Officers composed of General Scott; Major-General T. Cadwallader of Pennsylvania, Adjutant-General Summer of Massachusetts; Adjutant-General Daniel of N. Carolina; Lieutenant-Colonels Eustis, Z. Taylor and E. Cutter, and Major Nourse, of the United States Army, took the same view of the classification, and I have done, and exempted the young men up to the age of twenty one, "because it was thought unnecessary, in time of peace, for government to interfere with the ordinary control of parents, guardians and masters over minors"—and gave it as their opinion, that a well regulated, armed and instructed militia of 400,000 men for the whole Union, would be sufficient for all the purposes stated in the constitution." They proposed "an Adjutant-General as necessary to the establishment of an efficient plan." They proposed "to increase the term of service when the militia may be called out by the President from three to twelve months." They proposed "to enrol and organize one bigade for every congressional district in the United States—the minimum aggregate to be 410,374 and the maximum aggregate 595,270 men." Camps of instruction to be formed for the officers alone, who are to receive pay during the period of encampment. 104 camps are recommended for ten days in the year, each to have an instructor from the regular army or from West Point, and the number of officers annually assembled and paid during the period of encampment, after making liberal deductions for absence from sickness and other causes, estimated at 16,758. The whole expenses calculated at $1 50 cents a day for each officer, at $1 25, and one dollar, varies from $318,123=$276,258=to 234,343 for the ten days.

General Jackson, than whom no man in this country had better opportunities of observing and practically experiencing the deficiencies of the present system recommended in the most earnest manner an organization of the militia by classes. He says in his message of December, 1835: "Occurrences to which we, as well as all other nations are liable, both in our internal and external relations, point to the necessity of an efficient organization of the militia. I am again induced, by the importance of subject to bring it to your attention. To suppress domestic violence, and to repel foreign invasion, should these calamities overtake us, we must rely, in the first instance, upon the great body of the community whose will has instituted, & whose power must support, the government. A large standing military force is not consonant to the spirit of our institutions, nor to the feelings of our countreymen; and the lessons of former days, and those also of our own times, show the danger, as well as the enormous expense of these permanent and extensive military organizations. That just medium which avods an inadequate preparation on one hand, and the danger and expenses of a large force on the other, is what our constituents have a right to expect from their Government. The object can be attained only by the maintenance of a small military force, and by such an organization of the physical strength of the country as may bring this power into operation, whenever its services are required. A classification of the population offers the most obvious means of effecting his organization. Such a division may be made as well be just to all, by transferring each, at a proper period of life, from one class to another, and by calling first for the service of that class, whether for instruction or action, which, from age, is qualified for the duty, and may be called to perform it with the least injury to themselves, or to the public. Should the danger ever become so imminent, as to require additional force, the other classes in succession would be ready for the call. And if, in addition to this organization, voluntary associations were encouraged, and inducements held out for their formation our militia would be in state of efficient service. Now when we are at peace, is the proper time to adjust and establish a practicable system. The object is certainly worth the experiment, and worth the expense. No one appreciating blessings of a Republican Government, can object to his share of the burden which such a plan may impose. Indeed, a moderate portion of the national funds could scarcely be better applied, than in carrying into effect and continuing such an arrangement, and in giving the necessary elementary instruction." "The armor and the attitude of defence afford the best security against those collisions which the ambition, or interest, or some other passion of nations, not more justifiable, is liable to produce. In many countries, it is considered unsafe to put arms into the hands of the people, and to instruct them in the elements of military knowledge. That fear can have no place here, when it is recollected that the people are the sovereign power. Our Government was instituted, and is supported, by the ballot-box, not by the musket. Whatever changes await it, still greater changes must be made in our social institutions, before our political system can yield to physical force. In every aspect, therefore, in which I can view the subject, I am impressed with the importance of a prompt and efficient organization of the militia."

And Mr. Cass, in his report of the same year, uses the following language: "The defective organization of the militia is universally acknowledged. But little practical utility results from the administration of the present system? and if this great element of national defence is worth preservation and improvement, it is time the whole subject should be examined, and that a plan suited to the exigencies of the country, should be adopted. I am unwilling to believe, that there are such inherent difficulties in this subject as to render it impracticable or even very difficult to organize this great so force, peculiarly adapted to our condition & institutions in such a manner as to render it active and efficient in those junctures when the country may be called on to exert its power. I presume few would be found to advocate the maintenance of a standing military force adequate to all the purposes of peace and war. When, therefore, those exigencies arise, from which no nation can expect exemption, and which call for an extension of our physical means, *we must resort to an increase of the army, or to the embodying of the militia.* It is obvious, from the extent of the country, that we can never keep at all the exposed points such a permanent, force, as circumstances may occasionally require. The natural, and, in fact, the necessary dependence must be upon the militia; *and if it be unorganized, we shall be found without the means to repel a foreign enemy*, or to repress internal disturbances should these evils occur." "The baisis of an efficient organization of the militia must be a selection for instruction and service of that part of the population best qualified for these duties. Age and physical capacity present the proper considerations for such a selection. The principle is stated, with his usual force by Mr. Jefferson, in his message to Congress of December, 1805."

"Had the general principles" so frequently "recommended been practically adopted, and a corresponding system established, with the necessary details, first for instruction and then for active service, it cannot be doubted that the course of events which marked the commencement of the late war would have been avoided, and an immense expenditure of blood and treasure saved to the nation. The warning voice, which was not heeded then, may perhaps be heard now, and, if it is, it may produce incalculable benefits."

"A mere organization would avail but little, unless inducements were held out for proper instruction and equipment; and I consider, therefore, some provision for elementary instruction and for such equipment as may be necessary to excite a proper emulation, indispensable to any improvement of our militia system—indispensable I may add, to its very existence. An arrangement for these objects would embrace the first class only. It would, to be sure, involve expenses; for, an adequate compensation must be allowed to the persons required to be embodied at these schools of instruction for a few days in the year; & it would probably be found expedient to continue the present plan of voluntary corps with some changes, and to require them also to meet for improvement. It is in vain to expect, that the whole adult male population of the country can or will furnish themselves with the articles required by law; or that their collection, for any number of days they can afford to devote to this object, and under the usual circumstances of such assemblages, can produce any beneficial effect to themselves or their country. Already, in a number of the States, the system has sunk under the weight of the public opinion, *and the practical question now is, whether we shall remain, in fact, defenceless, or resort to a large standing military force in time of peace—that just dread of all free Governments; or adopt on efficient plan, which will prepare for the public defence the greatest force at the least cost, and without danger.* The blessings we have inherited cannot be preserved without exertion nor without expense. It were idle to sit still and flatter ourselves with the hope that war is never to overtake us, and it would be worse to delay all efficient organization of our physical means till the time for its active employment arrives. Nearly fifty years have elapsed, since the adoption or the persent Constitution. During all that time no essential changes have been made in our militia system, and it has gradually declined in utility and efficiency, and in public confidence; and there is reason to fear its entire abandonment, unless it undergo important modifications. In this long interval, the value of the system seems to have been appreciated by all the Presidents of the United States, as well as those who from the habits of their lives could best estimate its value by their personal observations, as by those whose opinions may have been well formed from the course of events having relation to this matter; and in their annual communications, commencing with the Inaugural Address of General Washington, this subject has been almost constantly pressed upon the attention of Congress. For the purpose of showing its importance, in the opinion of those eminent citizens, I have caused their communications to be examined, and find that the subject has been presented to the legislature and the nation *no less than thirty one times in their official seco.*—