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CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

Debate on the passage of the bill for raising an additional military force.

MONDAY, APRIL 4.

Mr. Stanford's speech concluded.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have now gone through those times nearest to the present, and with permission will recur to times more distinguished, and said to be more trying to political principle than any we have since witnessed—times which more decisively marked political character, so that no one could well mistake or be mistaken. It will be perceived that I allude to '98—and the crisis which then existed; since when great changes have intervened and taken from among us many of those characters whom I could have wished ever to have remained with us. Believe me, sir, the retrospect is not a little painful to me when I perceive myself standing alone (as to my old companions of that day) and advocating a principle which then under like circumstances would have united us as a band of brothers. For indeed I am not aware if I have a single friend of that standing on the floor who intends to vote with me. The gentleman from Virginia, whom I have in my eye (Mr. Randolph) is a younger son of those times. I beg his pardon for the remark, although born out of due time, certainly not out of good time. For he knew when he did come in he took the text, and has maintained it with talents and firmness rare to be met with, and not surpassed by any of us. At that time, and without wishing to excite the sensibility of gentlemen on the other side of the House, for I have never felt otherwise than disposed to exercise a liberal indulgence towards our political opponents, a system of alarm was raised and I hope no one will pretend to say without a cause. I verily believe the state of things was as alarming then as now—and the indignities offered the nation, if not so great, the difference was not considerable. What were they at that time? The arrettes of the then Directory of France; if not as sweeping in language, they had become far more outrageous in practice than either the decrees of Napoleon now, or the orders of the British council so far as we have yet heard—French privateers, one at least, came within your own harbors to maraud and plunder, and was captured within the inner channel, near the mouth of the Delaware, as it were under the limbs of the pine which border on the margin of your ocean. The government sent ministers to treat, and two out of three were refused to be received, and sent off with indignity, such as it is not for the honor of an independent nation to brook. More than all this, I think about this time was laid an embargo on your merchant vessels as now, and acts of hostility were commenced on our own side as well as theirs. Then too was France flushed with victory, and the completest success against her enemies at home, forgetful of right, ruling by power alone, and under the auspices of the same matchless character, emphatically called the conqueror of Europe, had transported one of the finest armies which was ever believed to have been seen in Europe, and after invading and conquering part of Africa, extended his conquests and carried invasion into Asia also, as was understood to be the ultimate plan of the enterprize. What followed amongst us here? The then majority founded upon this alarming and menacing state of things, what appeared to be their favorite system of measures, armies, navies, taxes, loans, and in the end, what might be called their *protecting laws*—for the nation, in which we who were then the minority, acted our full part, became restless under burthens of which they could not see the use. The fightings and invasions and conquerings in the old world could not inspire us with fear, serious fear of invasion. "Nature and Nature's God" forbad such a fear, and kept us, I believe, as distant from the fear as we were geographically from the country with whom we had the difference. For myself I know I did not then feel the alarm which was attempted to be excited, nor do I now feel it; and to follow the dictates of an honest conscience I cannot act as if I did. Gentlemen should recollect when the people at that time came to see and understand the business, in the majesty of their pleasure, to say nothing worse, they dispensed with both men and measures, and brought us into power, as I understood it, to hush the alarm, and literally speaking, to correct the procedure. If I feel any alarm, it is in hearing almost the identical language and arguments of that day, called up and used now to effect the same object, the raising of a standing army. What does my very worthy and beloved colleague tell us? that we were in a state of things, which I think he calls quid war, and that he considers these troops necessary. Why, sir, this was precisely the same argument formerly used, as I shall presently shew—not to be sure that it was doubtful, but downright war, and of course that an army in those days was introduced on grounds more plausible than now, for hostilities were commenced on both sides.

It would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, as my esteemed colleague is used to say, "when a ship claim comes into the House the next thing is an appropriation bill, as of course money must be paid," so in this case whenever a ship attacks you on the ocean we may now look for a standing army as a thing of course also, and with it a standing tax becomes a still more necessary consequence. All this to me is the more surprising, as when menace is held up and insult offered the country on shore, and even inroads made into your territory, when conspiracy withal spreading around in every direction is known to exist—when all this appears, and that too almost at the same time, and at no distant time either, the utmost confidence is reposed in your militia, no greater standing force is wanted—It is but as a speck in the horrizon.

One other view of this subject I must be permitted to take, and it is one which I verily consider worthy of the consideration of the friends of this measure—the majority I mean. I speak from some experience on this head, and if any thing I have said is thought worthy of an answer, I hope this point will not go without notice. In '98 it was one of the most boasted of our political maxims that patronage, and systems begetting patronage, to which so much resort seemed then to be had, were not only unworthy of the then administration, but of our free form of government—that any executive disposed to make the most of his appointments to office, had it in his power to foster and produce a servile spirit of sycophancy and dependence upon his own will and favor, and ultimately extend the vile contagion, till it should corrupt the whole mass and render all that was valuable in our constitution mere name. The substance would be gone. How then shall we get over this common place argument in '98? I well remember we pressed this argument upon the then majority without ceasing, when any new project was before us calculated to create place and office, to be filled by favorites of course. Under principles like these we came into popular favor & power. I must say we, altho' my title to use such phraseology may be questionable in these times; but I am speaking of times when I had as fair a title as any other, and if my political sentiments have undergone any change I do not know it. In the honest confidence of my heart I think I am the same. If I have had my exceptions to the general course of late, they have been confined to measures like the one before us—exhibiting to my view what I can but consider as relaxation from first principles. The contrast I draw is between former and present times, and between former and present measures. I know this argument about patronage was lost on the former majority, and have no reason to expect it will have a better effect now, but gentlemen cannot have forgotten the ramified extent of this business. There was scarce any quarter of the union, where that influence did not extend itself and raise a kind of atmosphere of its own kind about it. Almost every one must have experienced a share of its inconvenience, and I may ask again, are we come to times which require us to revive this exploded system? If we have, gentlemen should look to the consequences. It is not to be doubted, if war should not happen, the popular odium cannot fail to be again excited upon this occasion, and I do in my conscience believe in that event it ought.

Convinced, however, that gentlemen see for themselves the danger of the times and the necessity of the measure, I desire not to impute motives which I am sure would be unworthy of them, but for myself I see differently; I see no danger nor necessity which the militia with arms in their hands would not be more competent to meet in the onset—till at least a regular force could be raised and brought to their relief. But in truth I feel more disconcerted in my hopes for the future than alarmed with my fears for the present. Let me ask how it will be possible in a few years for any political observer or historian to draw a line of distinction between parties, or shew the correctness of this or the incorrectness of that administration? Will it not be such a mixed business that no plain understanding will be able to comprehend a difference. You exploded the patronage system and all the measures that fostered it. But what are you about to do? To raise a standing army! You condemned navies too most decidedly, but have created one in miniature, or of the quid kind, and I believe you have either laid or revived a small tax the present session. For my own part I feel no hesitation in saying if I lacked confidence in the militia I would summon up enough at least to save appearances in this case, for the measure before us cannot give us safety, and all must acknowledge it wears an aspect against our first professions.

Mr. Speaker, served somewhat by my memory, and still better by records on file with respect to our doctrine and principles under the crisis of '98, I have laid my hand upon a number of resolutions and remonstrances from various counties in the good old state of Virginia—a state which I have always held in the highest estimation, not more for her singular felicity and aptness in expressing political opinion, than for the genuine correctness of the opinion itself. In the worst of times she appeared to be a standard among the sister states, and seemed to be always fanning the coal of first principles, and keeping us awake to their due influence. To speak as I felt, I *loved Virginia* politically too well—but have at length begun to *repress a little!*—These old documents, (for documents they are) to which I allude are from different counties in that state, Orange, Spotsylvania, Greenville, Hanover, Prince-Edward and others. But I select one only as coming more immediately to my point, with the reading of which I must beg leave to trouble the House. It comes in the form of resolutions from the county of Henrico, and what will give it peculiar force, and application on the present occasion is, that it comes from the militia of that county remonstrating to Congress against raising a provisional army. Now, I think, Henrico is one of the principal counties in what is commonly called "Old Virginia," and if I am not mistaken, is the county in which stands Richmond, the Capital of the state. If so, then I am the more happy in laying my hand upon this paper, as we may well presume (if we did not know) that the politics of Henrico were those of the state generally.

After speaking highly of the privilege of remonstrance as possessed by the people of the U. S. they proceed, "While the measures adopted by Congress for national defence must merit the approbation of every friend of his country, this meeting cannot but consider the raising a *provisional army* as unwarranted by the present situation of American affairs and destructive to the liberties of the U. S. A militia taken from the body of the people, actuated by the same interests and never losing the character of citizens by assuming that of soldiers, are the only natural and safe guardians of the rights of individuals, and the independence of their country.

"That standing armies are the engines by which most of the despotisms of the world have been created, by throwing an immense patronage into the hands of an administration, by separating one portion of the people from the rest, by creating a dependence on the favor of the Executive, and of course a subserviency to his will—by establishing a body with different interests from the people at large, who forget the purposes for which they were created, and turn those very arms against the peaceable citizens, which were intended for their defence.

"That standing armies ought never to be resorted to, except in cases of the greatest national danger, and when foreign invasion makes it indispensible. It is recommended to our representative in Congress to give his support to such measures as are calculated for national defence within our own limits. But to oppose any measure, which may put it in the power of the executive to involve this country in offensive warfare.

"Among the measures calculated to commit the peace of the U. S. this meeting cannot but consider the arming merchant vessels, and the convoying such vessels sailing to foreign ports as having a tendency to produce that effect."

This paper appears to be signed by Major R. Allen and Mr. J. Seldon in behalf of the meeting, and addressed as it purports to their representative, and although that gentleman (Mr. Clopton) now avows a different view of the times and will give a different vote from what he did then, I have no doubt it will proceed from the honest conviction of his own mind. He is one of those friends with whom I have had the pleasure to act in unison too long—and know his uniform course, and correctness too well to do him intentional injustice.

I am really sorry to be troublesome to my friends; but I must be permitted to allude to another from the same state—he sits behind me, (Mr. Eppes) and although we have not had the pleasure of acting so long together, for the time it has not been the less cordial or pleasing to myself. Some days since, when perhaps the bill for an augmentation of the peace establishment was before us, that gentleman rose, and notwithstanding I had supposed he and I had begun to divide a little in our political thinking, and diverge as it were from the former point of our coincidence; he spoke so much in the old style, I concluded I was mistaken, and privately assured him of the pleasure I felt upon the occasion. Speaking in reply, I think, to a gentleman from New York, what were his sentiments? "We are prepared," said he, "let the enemy come—we have men and arms in readiness to defend the soil against any force they can bring, and these are the fortifications upon which I would choose to rely." So thought the majority of the House at that time, and that bill has slept ever since.

Again, another gentleman from Virginia, whom I see in his place, (Mr. Nicholas) for whose opinions I feel a high respect also, on the very important question of the embargo, declared, that we had no need of any other weapon to bring the enemy to our feet; that it was a measure by which we could starve them into terms of justice towards us; that as a system of policy it was every thing in our hands, and that it was now become time to use it in order to compel that respect which was due to our rights as a nation. I felt the full force, I confess of this reasoning, and but for the single circumstance that I thought it too bold an experiment without some limitation of time, I should have had the pleasure of according with that gentleman in the vote, and more especially indeed as it was to save us the occasion of raising a standing army—[Mr. Nicholas here asked the gentleman from N. Carolina if he referred to him]—Mr. S. answered that he did—[Mr. N. then observed that from the day on which we had met till this, he had believed that somewhat of a regular force was necessary. He had always said it. He allowed then and now, that circumstances would justify it, and was willing to defend the opinion he then gave. He felt sure the gentleman from N. C. would not be disposed to ascribe opinions to him which he did not entertain]—Mr. S. said, notwithstanding his impressions he must have been mistaken in supposing the gentleman opposed to this measure, and would by no means ascribe to him opinions not now avowed. He had however, so understood the scope of the gentleman's arguments.

I have said, Mr. Speaker, that the arguments used on this occasion were precisely the same they were formerly for raising regular troops, and the alarm then if not greater was at least equal. To satisfy gentlemen of this fact, I will just read a paragraph or two from the speech of a principal member of the majority of '98. Mr. Otis said, "He never heard that a standing army was dangerous to the liberties of a country except in time of peace, and that when an army is made up not of citizens, but of the banditti of the community. But we are not now in a state of peace but of actual war. It is true the country is not invaded, but he believed a long period would not elapse before an invasion takes place when it might be too late to raise a body of men for our defence." Again—Mr. Otis "remarked, that when he said we were in actual war, he did not speak figuratively, but literally. War is not declared, but it is made upon us, and it is our duty to defend ourselves against it." Thus then we see both the arguments used and the alarms excited are the same, and we are brought to the same result, a standing army. This is what I regret. If it were not, Mr. Speaker, something like a breach of decorum to quote a sentence or two from your reply to your colleague (Mr. O.) on this subject I would venture to do it. But, sir, with making you the assurance that no disrespect is meant, I am persuaded you will indulge me with the liberty. I read from the debates on the provisional army bill of '98. Mr. Varnum said, "It was not strange that gentlemen should differ in opinion as to the best mode of defence, but they ought not on this account to be charged with a wish of selling the country to a foreign nation, or of making no defence of it. *He believed the militia sufficient to repel any invading enemy until an army could be raised.* When the people know the country is really in danger, they will not stop at trifles, but until that time they will not wish to engage themselves as soldiers. What was the case, Mr. V. asked in 1775. The militia then went into camp, and continued there until the standing army was raised, and they made as good a defence as any standing army could have done." I fully accorded with those observations, sir, when you delivered them and appropriate them to myself now as unanswerable on the present occasion. They accord too in almost the precise language as well as sense with the messages of the President subsequently delivered, and which I have just quoted.

From the same debates I will take the liberty also of reading an observation or two from the speech of a character who at that time held a seat in this House, than whom if a superior ever did hold one in it, I have not the pleasure to know or believe it. My allusion is to the present Secretary of the Treasury. "Is there, said, Mr. G. any person on this floor seriously afraid of an invasion? He was sure he was not." Again speaking of our security against invasion he says, "the immense sea which divides us is a security against it, but the greatest security is our own power and resources, and the conviction that an attack upon this country, can be no object with that. Their object will be plunder, and that will be carried on by attacking our vessels. There was, therefore, no real danger of an army to invade us." Were not these arguments, I would ask, approved as orthodox then? Are they not now as appropriate? as applicable to the times, the crisis and the question before us as then? I believe more so in fact, for we have more men and double the resources otherwise; and if I were to ask the same emphatic question now, "Is there any person on this floor seriously afraid of invasion?" The answer must be in the negative. Such fear has not been avowed. At that time, too, I perceive, among these old debates my colleague (Mr. Macon) took an objection to the bill then under discussion, which I think with more force would apply to the present. It was that so many field officers as were contemplated could not be wanted for garrison duty. Little as I know of military matters I have understanding enough to know that field officers