National Intelligencer.

& WASHINGTON ADVERTISER.

VOL. VIII. WASHINGTON CITY, PRINTED BY SAMUEL HARRISON SMITH, PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE. NO. 1226.

FIVE DOLLARS PER ANNUM, MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 1808. *PAID IN ADVANCE.*

CONGRESS.

From amongst the great quantity of debate which we have on hand prepared for publication, we have selected the following, on the bill passed at the late session for appropriating a sum of money towards arming the whole body of the militia of the United States. Independent of the interest excited by this debate and the importance of the subject, it has the merit of being concisely reported.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

April 16.

The House resolved itself into committee of the whole, Mr. BASSET in the chair, on the bill making provisions for arming the whole body of the militia of the U. S.

The first section of the bill provides "That the annual sum of dollars be, and the same hereby is appropriated for the purpose of providing arms and military equipments for the whole body of the militia of the United States, either by purchase or manufacture by and on account of the U. S.

The second section provides "That the President of the United States be, and he hereby is authorised to purchase scites for & erect such additional arsenals & manufactories of arms as he may deem expedient, under the limitations and restrictions now provided by law: *Provided also*, That so much of the law as restricts the number of workmen in the armories of the United States to one hundred men, be, and the same hereby is repealed."

Mr. Randolph moved to fill the blank in the first section with *one million* of dollars. It would be perceived, he said, that in consequence of the change in the relations of the United States to foreign governments, a general sentiment seemed be excited of the propriety of our beginning to extend manufactures at home, so as to enable us to provide for ourselves those articles of the first necessity which we are in the habit of procuring from foreign nations. This being the cause, what manufacture should be more properly promoted than that which would ensure the protection of our lives and property? What manufacture were the United States more interested in cherishing and extending, than the manufacture of arms for the public defence—for arming the whole body of the militia? For when this object was accomplished, provided the militia were not suffered to rust in inactivity, & a regular force called out on all occasions, we should not only be prepared against foreign invasion, but it would be *ipso facto* one of the most perfect gaurantees to our present free government that the art of man could possibly devise. Supposing a people free, by this measure permancy would be given to their freedom; for it was not possible that a nation free and armed could have their liberties taken from them, until they were reduced to that state when it is impossible to keep them free—for Mr. R. observed, that in this respects nations were like men; if once they became dissolute it was impossible to compel them to attend to their true interests; but at the same time every encouragement in their power should be given to men and nations, by a good education and good habits, to induce them to remain free and independent; and he did most heartily wish, instead of disputing about abstract points in politics, as the old Greeks and Romans did on nice questions in metaphysics, that the legislatures of the several states & of the U. S. were more frequently employed in acting strictly legislatively; for in their great zeal—and it was laudable but ought to be regulated—they often forgot business in politics—were disputing frequently on abstract points in politics instead of passing laws; and nothing was more common than to hear men say that a particular law might be good, but it involved such and such thing, which had no rational connection with the subject. But to the point: one million of dollars he said would arm but about 100,000 men; in which ratio it would require five or six years to arm the whole, excluding from consideration the intermediate increase of population.

Mr. Smilie was in favor of the bill but objected to the appropriation of so large a sum as a million of dollars; for it would be totally impracticable to procure to that amount, were they to grant it.

Mr. Rhea wished to know what was the specific object of the bill, or how the arms were to be disposed of when procured, for there was no provision in the bill to designate that. He thought the bill was in a very imperfect state, and suggested the propriety of recommitting it to the select committee for the purpose of arranging the necessary detail.

Mr. Randolph said that while every one professed to be in favor of arming the militia, great difficulties were thrown in the way of accomplishing that object. A re-commitment to the committee would produce no effect: for the truth was, that the committee was composed of such discordant though not jarring materials, that it had been with great difficulty that they could concur as far as the bill went. However the marrow and pith of the bill was, the providing of arms for the militia; and when gentlemen objected to the amount of appropriation proposed, from the difficulty of procuring arms, they should not at the same time object to the difficulty of distributing them. Mr. R. said he would give the committee his view on this subject: he could wish to see certain Executive officers of the government commissioners for arming the militia, as they are now commissioners of the sinking fund, and to have an annual and liberal permanent appropriation vested in their hands to be expended under the control of the President of the United States in the purchase and manufacture of arms. So much for getting them together; now for distributing them. It had been said by some that in their particular states it would be proper to distribute these arms to the militia men individually; others had said they could not consent to make them the private property of individuals. This difficulty Mr. R. said might be gotten over when the arms were procured; the arms might be distributed among the several states in proportion to the number of their militia respectively, and those states might distribute or dispose of those arms in such manner as the governments of the several states should by law direct. This mode would accommodate not only the prejudices but the interests of the whole union. In the state of Massachusetts (said Mr. R.) we are told that the militia are armed; it would be useless to give those arms who already have them: It is presumeable then that the legislature of that state would not make such a disposition, but distribute them in arsenals. A similar mode need not be pursued in states where there is an imperious necessity for immediately arming the militia. If gentlemen will bring forward any feasible project for the purpose, I shall have no objection to reimburse those citizens who have under the laws of the respective states provided their own arms. But Mr. R. said it was a very extraordinary thing, while manufactures of every sort were encouraged with a view to supply the wants of the people by their own labor, that it should be confessed that they were unable to manufacture arms even with the aid of government. Did not the House believe, after this bill should pass and the restriction to the number of armories should be removed, that the U. States would open a wide field of emigration, particularly of artificers from Germany? He had been told, he observed, that in one part of Germany, men were anxious to establish manufactures of this article in our country, and had sounded government on the subject. The moment these persons found such a demand created, no doubt they would consult their own interest by transporting themselves hither. Mr. R. said he was not one among those who were extremely anxious to invite emigration to the United States; but while inviting, it was as well to invite those who would contribute to its wealth, and to give security and stability to the government.

Mr. Smilie said if the government were to be the holders of these arms and have it in its power to di-arm the people at pleasure, this would be an armed *government* still, but not an armed PEOPLE. He was willing that the United States should either by manufacture or purchase make the necessary provision of arms for arming the militia, but he had no idea that this object should be accomplished at the expence of the United States. The people should arm to protect themselves and their property. At the same time that he would make an appropriation at this time, he would not vote for a million of dollars. Did gentlemen consider the expence already gone into, and could any gentlemen then say that they could at this time spare a million of dollars for this purpose? He was willing to appropriate a smaller sum; and, as the revenue progressed, from year to year it might be increased.

Mr. Holland could not understand the object of the bill at all, and it could not be expected that they should vote for the bill till its object was known; for assuredly the bill did not proclaim its own purpose as expressed by the gentleman from Virginia. If the arms to be distributed among the people were to be considered the property of the United States he would not vote a single dollar for them; for when the people should be placed in this situation, their liberties would be nearly gone. He wished the bill to be arranged in some sort; that it should declare how the arms were to be distributed, and whether they were to be considered the property of the U. States; for till that were done he could not vote understandingly on the subject. He therefore moved that the committee rise for the purpose of recommitting the bill.

Mr. Ely objected to the sum with which it was proposed to fill the blank, and to the bill itself. He said that in the present state of Europe arms could not be procured thence; that the sum of 300,000 dollars already appropriated this session was as much as could be expended for the manufacture of arms in the United States; and that the manufactories in the U. States could not be so extended during the present year as to manufacture a larger quantity. He also represented the tendency of a bill of this nature if adopted to contravene their own laws requiring the several states to superintend their militia, some of whom had already armed the militia at their own cost, and others compelled the militia to arm themselves; and some, who had it in contemplation so to do, would undoubtedly remit their exertions on the passage of this bill.

Mr. Lloyd hoped the committee would not rise. The purpose for which it was proposed that the committee should rise, had been agitated in the select committee, and he believed it impossible in that committee to fix on any mode or plan for the distribution of these arms. If then the bill were re-commitued, it could answer no purpose but to consume time. He was astonished that gentlemen should rise and express an anxiety in favor of the principle, and yet start so many objections to the bill, all which when examined would have no influence on the House and would not be satisfactory to the nation.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Smilie) objects to the expence, and says if these arms are to be the property of the United States he could not vote for them; he then says he wishes them to be sold out to the people. If this course were to be adopted, what force could be attached to the objection to the expence? Upon the score of economy the argument would have no weight; for the United States would be placed precisely in the same situation as they were before the appropriation.

The gentleman objects to the bill if it is contemplated to place it in the power of the U. States to call upon the people to give up the arms after they are distributed. I will ask the gentleman if he supposes the people would be so unmindful of their own liberties that they will give up their arms at the discretion of the United States? I believe if the people of the United States are once armed they will not be so pusillanimous as to give up those arms if they are to be converted to their own destruction. This then is an evil which would not result, even admitting that we enact that they shall hold these arms at the pleasure of the United States.

Gentlemen have spoken of the money already appropriated this session for the purchase of arms. The arms thus to be purchased are not for the purpose contemplated by this bill; they are purchased for the use of the U. States and to be placed in their arsenals. Then why oppose the sum already appropriated for arms as a set-off against that proposed to be appropriated, when they are for distinct objects; and the appropriation already made will certainly not promote the object of the bill—to arm the people.

The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Ely) says that he cannot see how arms are to be procured, if the money be appropriated; he believes more cannot be had than are already authorised to be procured. This is no doubt the gentleman's own opinion, and I have heard it advanced from another quarter; but some time since I conversed with one of the best gun-smiths in the country, who says that our manufacture may be increased and that many artificers may be found in the U. States; and that in the state of Maryland alone, an additional number of from five to ten thousand may be manufactured. If so many may be had in this state, no doubt other states could furnish a sufficient number to meet the proposed appropriation.

The gentleman from North-Carolina (Mr. Holland) objects to the bill because no mode of distribution is pointed out. If the gentleman, who professes to be anxious to attain the object, will vote for the bill, ways and means may be found to distribute them.

It is said that this system would prevent the states from arming. No such thing as arming the whole body of the militia was ever proposed before this session, and yet the states have not complied with the law, nor ever would have complied with it. Hardly a legislature in the union can agree upon the mode of arming; nor will I ever agree to vote for a bill requiring that every man should provide his own musket. It is said indeed that ten or twelve dollars is a trifling sum; but to some it is serious, for one man may pay a cent towards the same object for which another man pays an hundred dollars, and yet the former feel the expenditure more than the latter; and a law of that kind for compelling every man to pay for his musket may be considered as an oppressive poll tax. For my part I shall cheerfully vote one million for this purpose, and shall as cheerfully vote for the distribution of the arms when they are procured.

Mr. Macon said he considered this as the most important question which the House had had before them this session, and if the bill were to be recommitted, it would put the question to rest, as it would not be got up again during the session. The gentleman from Massachusetts, said Mr. M. wishes the committee to rise to get rid of the bill, because it will prevent state and individual exertion. This is the strongest reason why the question should be immediately decided, and I hope it will be decided Aye or No. The objection made to the bill on account of the sum proposed has no weight; because, as is customary, we begin with the highest sum proposed, and vote downwards till we fix upon a sum which shall appear to meet the ideas of a majority of the House. I have long been of opinion that it is the duty of the nation to arm the militia; I have always thought it wrong to make the poor man contribute the same mite towards the general protection as the rich man. Some are not fit for service in the militia, and some are prevented from serving by religious scruples; it is and always has been my opinion that these should pay their part. The gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Clay) some time ago pointed out a mode by which these arms could be distributed as equally as possible; for it is impossible to bring perfect equality to every man's door; and this bill contemplates the making the whole property of the whole nation pay its proportion towards arming the militia for the general defence. We cannot depend upon Europe to procure arms; nothing would be more absurd, for all Europe is against us. We must look to ourselves, for who can tell when the contest will cease? We must prepare earnestly and seriously for our defence. How many of our militia are now armed it would be difficult to say; but certainly a very great proportion of them are not armed. You are told that you cannot encrease the expenditure for arms to a greater amount than 10 or 15,000 stands a year. If so, we had better apply to some of the great powers of Europe, to take us under their protection; but we have no occasion to do this, for if we but give the same encouragement to armorers as to hatters and other artists, we should soon have enough of them. People who work in iron, and we have many of them in the nation, will serve as gun-smiths with little instruction.

It is said that no arms can be got. For God's sake let us make the experiment. I know it is not good policy to make appropriations for objects to which the money cannot be applied; but let us make the attempt to arm ourselves, when we see that the whole world is in arms against us. It seems that the resolution for giving authority to the President to suspend the embargo, which is of minor importance, is considered more important than this bill. I hope gentlemen will take this subject previously into consideration, and decide upon it according to its merits.

The 300,000 dollars already appropriated have nothing to do with this system. This is the commencement of a system for arming the nation; and as to inequality in distribution of the arms, that matter might be so arranged as to give the arms to the young men as they arrive at age. A gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Clay) who certainly took the best view of the militia systems which I ever heard, told us that 40 or 50,000 men were annually placed on the militia list—five times the number of the arms now annually manufactured for the use of the U. States.

I agree perfectly with the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Smilie) that these arms should not be placed in the hands of the militia to be considered as public property; neither would I sell them to the people; I would give them to be their own property exclusively, so that whether a man moves from Maine to Georgia, or whether he shall always remain in the same place, the arms once given to him shall be his absolute property. And on this subject I agree with the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. Rowan) who told us the other day, that so far as relates to defence, this is a consolidated government, and I hope it ever will be so.

It has been objected that no provision is made by the bill for the distribution of the arms. If that could not hereafter be done done, the objection would lie to the bill itself. The same objection would lie to an act for taking the census. Get the arms, and your successors will find some way to distribute them, as we do to apportion the representation in conformity to a census after it has been taken.

When I reflect on the situation of Europe and our relations with them as manifested by the dispatches on our table, and see the indifference on the subject of procuring arms, I am alarmed. I have now the same sentiments as I entertained when first I came here, or rather more unfavorable to peace than they then were. Day after day affairs have grown progressively worse, until at length one power tells us that she considers us as associated with her in the war, and the other says out of our friendship we will tax you. I agree that we have taken a measure (the embargo) which I believe will try them; but if they find you perfectly defenceless your measure will not have much effect. I rely much on that measure; but you must convince Europe that you mean to resist any invasion on your rights. I love peace as much as any man; but I will vote for an appropriation of the largest sum which we can agree upon. I will vote for an appropriation of 20,000 dollars, if I can get no more; but would rather vote for a million.

This bill is intended as the commencement of a permanent system; the bill for procuring arms already passed this session, was but a temporary measure. I believe it proper for the United States to manufacture what arms they want; and if nothing else, the situation of Europe would convince me of it. Look at the two great powers of Europe. Can you get a gun from either of them? No, sir; not even a flint. Would any man twenty years ago have expected to have found Europe against us? I will venture to say not, sir; and yet that is the case—& no stronger reason could be given for a large appropriation for this purpose.