



"Ours are the Plans of fair delightful Peace,
"Unwarped by Party Rage to live like Brethren."

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1800.

No. 19.

VOL I.

CONTINUATION OF THE DEBATE

ON
Mr. Nicholas's Proposition
For repealing certain Parts of the Act for raising an additional Army.

Mr. NICHOLAS said, from the manner in which the subject had been treated by gentlemen who opposed the motion, the question again recurred, as he conceived it would, to the position first intended, which was, whether this additional army should now or never be disbanded? Since it was clear, that if it was not now done, the ingenuity of gentlemen opposed to it, would always be able to keep it from dissolution.

Mr. N. then went into an examination of all the arguments which had been used against his motion, shewing either their inapplicableness or futility. The passing of this resolution, he said, would be so far from evincing a want of determination to defend ourselves, it would bid defiance to France, or any other country, with the natural strength of America, her Militia, and shew that she is not dependant on this pitiful army.

Gentlemen speaking on this subject, had stated him as saying it was impossible for the country to bear the expence of this establishment. Perhaps he had stated his opinion in too strong terms. He knew the country would bear very much in case of invasion. He would himself, in case of such an event, go as far as any man. It was the uselessness and misapplication of the expence he condemned. The only specious argument that had been used, was the trifling expence of these troops for a few months. If this were all, he would willingly bear the expence; but, as has been already shewn, it is for years that this expence is contemplated. It is the system of borrowing money to pay these troops, that is chiefly deprecated. This system of borrowing money to pay the interest of money already borrowed, will, if not checked, inevitably hurry us on to ruin and bankruptcy.

Mr. N. took notice of the insinuation, that if this resolution were agreed to, it would convince France that there is a party favourable to her views in this country. He had supposed this topic was exhausted, and that the house would have heard no more on that head; he did not believe that there are now any ears to receive this calumny. But if there were danger of this, he wished to know how gentlemen would have the house to act? He supposed members must sacrifice their opinions, however well calculated to serve the country, that France may not act under such a deception. The consequence of this would evidently be, a suppression of the freedom of opinion, and to destroy the usefulness of every member who is afraid of being called a French partizan, I, said Mr. N., am not afraid of this, and therefore shall not be deterred by clamours, or imaginary dangers, from doing what appears to me my duty.

Mr. MACON observed, that in the opinion of some gentlemen, it appeared that the borrowing of five or six millions was a trifling thing, and that it might be left to be paid by our children. This, he insisted was a conduct as unjust in nations, as in individuals; since those who contract debt ought to pay it. It was much easier to vote expences, than to lay taxes; the people do not directly feel the vote, whereas if they are taxed, they must instantly know it—borrowing money is, on this account, a favourite mode of raising money. The time is now come, when we begin to feel that our revenue from import is lowering. One reason of this is the low price of our produce, as the value of the exports must, in some measure, regulate the imports. When it was said that the American people would put every thing at stake, and make great sacrifices in order to support their independence, he agreed with gentlemen; but, added he, you must convince the people that this is the case, before this expence is incurred, for, however willing they may be to pay their taxes, their ability can only be in proportion to the price of their produce, and as that is now low, they can with difficulty pay

high taxes. Ought we not, asked he, to save all the expences which are not absolutely necessary, especially when we have a very important money concern to settle with another powerful nation (meaning, it is supposed old debts recoverable from the U. States by an article in the British Treaty). If this demand amount to the millions which have been spoken of, where will the money be found to satisfy it? Gentlemen will say another loan must be had; but where must even the interest be got? We cannot make money here, but by means of work. Labour is our only resource, therefore our money ought to be well hoarded.

Mr. M. said, if any good purpose could be answered by keeping up this force, he should have been silent on the subject; but this had not been proved: for, to calculate that it would have any effect upon a distant enemy, was wrong; since nations calculate on the strength and resources of nations, and not upon a few armed troops more or less. If the British, during the war, had conceived, that our regular army had been the whole strength of the country, they would not so soon have given up the contest. We were then obliged to have our force in every place of danger; and if any nation should again invade us, we must again repel the enemy in the same way. It is therefore most prudent to save all the money we possibly can, while the danger of an invasion could not be apprehended, to enable us to meet the enemy, if he should really come to our doors. The burthen of the expence of regular troops, as well as all the other expences of Government, fell heaviest on the labouring poor, who would feel their weight, though the rich might not.

The principal dependence after all, said Mr. M. must be upon the Militia, notwithstanding the little confidence which some gentlemen appear to have in them. He did not wish to take the least honour from the valiant men who were engaged in the brilliant action of the Eutaws; but he could not forget the unrivalled valour of our citizens at the battle of King's Mountain, where there was not a single regular engaged, but wholly men who had left their homes on the spur of the occasion, and yet they conquered regular troops, commanded by an able and experienced officer, so that none escaped either death or capture.

It had been said that it would be difficult to get another army, if it should be wanted some time hence, should these troops be disbanded. Mr. M. believed the very contrary, since the very same men would enlist again, for the bounty, pay and cloaths, expecting to be discharged again in a few months, and this expectation might induce others to enlist. But whenever an army is really wanted, the patriotism of the people will supply the emergency.

Gentlemen calculate on another loan; but are they certain that we can make another loan, at eight per cent. or at any other rate? May not the present deranged state of the commercial world, prevent the possibility of getting one? And should the army be kept up, with the expectation of being paid in this way, in case of failure, would not the event be disastrous, and effectually destroy our credit? It is also possible that the derangements of trade in Europe may prevent a loan from being made there.

The gentleman from Virginia certainly furnished an argument against himself, when he mentioned the importance of America in the two wars to which he alluded. It could not be supposed, that France, if she wished for the friendship of this country, would invade it, unless she expected conquest; and the fate of an invading enemy marching through the country last war, would undoubtedly be a sufficient warning to any nation against making the attempt; for if it did, the invading army would certainly be cut off, and the vain attempt be rendered fruitless.

As to the Militia being undisciplined, and without arms, as the gentleman from Delaware had stated them to be, the knowledge of the use of the gun is universal. He had

never seen an American who could not shoot, which is the principal thing in the use of a gun. This being the case, our young men soon become disciplined soldiers.

Apprehending no danger, therefore, and seeing that if there were any, an easy remedy could be applied; and wishing rather to save money, than to waste it on an useless object of expence, he should vote in favour of the motion.

Mr. NICHOLSON observed, that the member from Delaware had said, that he was not surprised at the introduction of this resolution, as he believed it to be part of a system which had for several years existed; the object of which was to debilitate and degrade the government of this country; and believing this, he was not surprised at the quarter from which it came. When gentlemen undertook to criminate the motives of others, Mr. N. said it would be well if they would offer some evidence of the purity of their own; and he believed the gentleman from Delaware would find considerable difficulty in convincing, not only this committee, but the public at large, that his motives were more pure and patriotic than those of other members who differed from him in opinion. When the mover of this resolution called it up for consideration, he expressed a wish that it might be discussed with temper and moderation; that it was not proposed with a view of inflaming the house, but to correct an undue and useless expence. It might have been expected, that an expression of this wish, would have protected the friends of the resolution from those general imputations which the member from Delaware had thrown out against them; but, instead of a cool and temperate discussion, that gentleman had indulged himself in a furious invective against his opponents, which would have better suited a member of that rapacious and fanatical government which he had described as existing beyond the Atlantic, and against which a principal part of his harangue was directed. Disapproving of this conduct, Mr. N. said he would endeavour to pursue a different line in delivering his sentiments. He should not cease to respect the opinions of others, being willing to believe that gentlemen may pursue a different road from him and yet be actuated by motives equally patriotic with his own—equally desirous of promoting the happiness and prosperity of the country.

Mr. N. was willing to admit, that the conduct of France towards this country had excited one general sentiment of indignation in the people of America, and produced an unanimous zeal for the maintenance of American honour and independence. This proved that the people are willing to expend their money in defence of their rights, but not that they are willing to throw it away in support of useless objects. If the gentleman had gone on a little farther in the history of this business, he might have shewn, that of late, the French had acted a different part, and are now offering us that Olive Branch, which, in a moment of phrensy, they had trod under foot; and that the President of the United States had wisely embraced their offers of accommodation, which step he believed met with general approbation, with an allowance for a few exceptions only.

Mr. N. then took a view of the arguments which had been used against the resolution, combatting them as he went along in a very masterly manner; and shewing the utter inadequacy of these troops to repel an invasion, if such were expected; and the folly of supposing any such thing, from the present situation of France; or, if such an attempt were made, the still greater folly there was in supposing it could be effectual.

But how far, said he, would this spirit of Alarm, which has been improperly excited, and is still endeavoured to be kept up, carry us? Certainly farther than any gentleman can wish. We should not only now be in a state of readiness for war, but for ever hereafter; for, if invasion were always to be apprehended, we must always be ready to meet it. Our preparation must con-

tinue in proportion to our European connections. We never can form a new connection with any power, but we shall be more or less engaged in her quarrels; and if these troops could not now be parted with, he could see no moment when we shall not be in equal danger, and if in equal danger, equal preparation will be contended for. We shall be compelled, therefore, to admit the dangerous doctrine of keeping up a Standing Army in time of peace.

It had been said, that the directing of these 10,000 men to be raised, had produced a good effect, in changing the conduct of France towards us; but it had been truly stated that the law was passed in July, and their overtures were made in August. But independent of this, he would ask gentlemen at what period France had been alarmed, or shrunk from a contest with her enemies? Have preparations of war in other countries produced conciliatory propositions on her part? Has not her spirit rather been roused into action in proportion to the martial disposition of her neighbours? Mr. N. produced instances to shew that it had, and that therefore our small force could not have had the effect ascribed to it.

The argument of the gentleman from Delaware, that a measure of this kind would have been dictated by the French Directory, if they could have influenced our Councils, Mr. N. thought equally unapt with many others. They would rather have advised the raising of more troops, and to have expended our money upon useless objects, thereby to have crippled our finances, and loaded the people with debts and taxes so heavily, as not to care under what government they lived, and so become an easy prey. The wisest course for us certainly would be, to husband our resources, to let our people live easy and happy, and thereby attach them to the government; to make no new loans, to impose no new taxes, and then we should always be prepared for war, when either the honour or interest of the country may require it. If, concluded he, I could believe that we were in danger from any power whatever, I should be ready to exclaim, "Millions for defence: not a Cent for tribute." Not believing this, I shall give my hearty assent to the resolution.

Mr. SHEPARD spoke against the resolution.

Mr. R. WILLIAMS said, from the arguments of gentlemen opposed to the measure, it would seem that this resolution went to the destruction of the whole system of defence. If so, he should hesitate before he voted for it; but it went to make a reduction only trifling as it related to the system, but important in itself. If no change were at any time to be made in our public measures, the house ought to be cautious how it takes its steps.

In order duly to appreciate the arguments against the resolution, it might be well to notice those made use of to get the law passed. Invasion was then the cry; but though nearly two years had elapsed, no invasion had been attempted, or, he believed, thought of. Internal disturbances were also apprehended, but no such thing had appeared worthy of notice. It was, however, still necessary to keep up the alarm. After the former negotiation failed, invasion was talked of as the consequence; now another negotiation is set on foot, and another alarm of the same kind is spread; but the apprehensions of gentlemen having failed once, they cannot be relied on. Experience teaches us that the story of invasion has no foundation. The only plausible argument against this measure, was the possibility of its having an effect on the pending negotiation; but not believing that this could be the case, this consideration would not influence his vote. It appeared, indeed, to him, that it would rather promote the negotiation than otherwise, as it would put it in the power of our Envoys to say to the French Government, "Whilst you refused to give us an audience, and continued hostile, our Government took measures of defence; but now, when you shew a contrary disposition, they immedi-

ately relax and are disposed to meet you. This conduct would also prove, that on an emergency we can raise an army; and when it is removed, we can say to the men who compose it, Return to your homes and employments; we want you no longer.

But it is said, that the disbanding of these troops, would shew to the French that we are not able to keep up an army, and that our resources are inadequate to our wants. How, asked Mr. W. could such an inference be drawn? Because he did not chuse to incur unnecessary expence, would this be a proof that he could not afford it? And if the Government does not chuse to borrow money to defray unnecessary expence, will France say she cannot borrow? No such thing; she will rather admire our prudence.

When gentlemen say that this army must be kept up for what may happen, they use an argument which would always apply for the keeping up a standing force, and he therefore took it for granted, that those who use this argument, mean this force to be permanent.

Gentlemen ask whether the committee have forgotten the insults offered to this country by France? Though the treatment of our Commissioners will never be forgotten, Mr. W. could not agree to carry his resentment so far as to incur extraordinary expence in the support of an establishment for which we have no occasion.

But it is said, that this resolution is the first step to a system which has been long pursued by a party in this house, to debilitate the government in all its systems of defence; and it was expected that next an attempt would be made to renew treaties and commerce. And, said he, is it to disagreeable to renew friendship, commerce and treaties with any nation whatever, that the committee are called upon to dread the consequences? He confessed he himself did not dread this state of things; and that members could not be permitted to differ in opinion, and speak of the tendency of certain measures, without being charged with improper motives, was strange.

The spirit of '76 had been called up. What, enquired Mr. W. has that spirit to do with the present question? The two things are altogether dissimilar. Are we now engaged in a continental war, or is the enemy in our country, burning and destroying our towns, and scattering our villages? This is happily not our situation at present. Were our prospects one-tenth as bad now as they were then, we should soon have an army, and no member on this floor would think ten times the sum now called for, mispent. If our independence were at stake, the money required for our security ought only to be a secondary consideration; for if we lose our country we lose our all. God forbid there should ever be another American army, equally useful with that which fought for our independence, paid off at the rate of two and three shillings in the pound! Were our independence really in danger, men enough would be found ready to repel any invasion. Danger would call forth the patriotism of numbers, that money would not. Our present situation calls for no such sacrifices; we have no occasion for such noble exertions, or they would be made.

It was worthy of remark, Mr. W. said, that whenever any measure had been adopted, its continuance was constantly urged on some point of expediency or policy, notwithstanding the change which may have taken place in the situation of things since it was adopted. But the time was fast approaching when it could no longer be done—our real situation must appear. Our government has been progressing regularly in the accumulation of a public debt, at the same time that it is constantly imposing new taxes on the people; and yet we are told not to mind expences—we can borrow.

When the necessity of an expence is so far fetched, and founded barely on alarm and conjecture, it cannot be said, that a motion to repeal the object of it, does not require serious consideration. For his part, seeing no necessity for these troops at this time, nor prospect of their future use, he should vote for the resolution.

[To be continued.]