
Standing Armies

by Eugene V. Debs

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Some time since, Edward Everett Hale,¹ writing of "Social Problems," in the *Cosmopolitan*, had a chapter on Republics, in which he said:

Quite fundamental In the republican idea is the abolition of large standing armies. The true republican expects that every man shall be a soldier and do his duty in repelling foreign invasion. It almost follows that in a true republic there are no wars of conquest. The republic of France, at this moment, is taxing itself beyond all measure simply to maintain an army which shall approach the strength of the army of Germany or that of Russia. If you asked the Tsar of Russia, or the Emperor William, in public, why Russia or Germany maintain such large armies, the answer would be an appeal to national pride and a declaration that it is necessary to maintain such forces in order to preserve the independence of the respective empires. But if you could get the Tsar of Russia or the Emperor William into a confessional, and if he should tell you the absolute truth, certain that it would not be proclaimed anywhere else, he would say, "I should not remain on my throne a month if I did not have an army."

Manifestly, Mr. Hale states the republican idea correctly. He states the American idea correctly. It was the intention of the founders of the American republic never to have a large regular or standing army. They knew that such an army would be a perpetual menace to the liberties of the people; hence, congress alone has power to raise and support armies. But here comes in a provision that Congress cannot appropriate money to support armies for a longer period than two years; hence, if the appropriation is not made the armies become practically disbanded.

¹ **Edward Everett Hale** (1822-1909), was a prominent Unitarian minister and author.

The purpose of the fathers of the republic is seen at a glance. They did not intend that the liberties of the people should be crushed by a standing army or a “regular” army, and, therefore, the power to raise and support armies was left with congress, the people’s representatives. But to make it doubly sure that a standing army — always and everywhere a menace to liberty — if raised, should not exist longer than two years, congress itself is forbidden to appropriate money for its existence for a period longer than two years. Every two years the people choose their representatives in congress, and thus hold the power in their own hands.

Let us see what has been the practice of the republic from the first, in the matter of raising and supporting standing armies:

Date	Strength of Army	
1789	1 Regiment Infantry, 1 Battery Artillery	840
1792	Indian Border wars	5,120
1794	Peace establishment	3,629
1801	Peace establishment	5,144
1807	Peace establishment	3,278
1810	Peace establishment	7,154
1812	War with Great Britain	11,881
1815	War with Great Britain	9,413
1817-1821	Peace establishment	9,980
1822-1832	Peace establishment	6,184
1833-1837	Peace establishment	7,198
1838-1842	Florida War	12,530
1843-1846	Peace establishment	8,613
1847	Mexican War	17,812
1848	Mexican War	30,890
1849-1855	Peace establishment	10,320
1856-1861	Peace establishment	12,931
1862	Civil War	39,273
1863-1866	Civil War	43,332
1867	Peace establishment	54,641
1868-1869	Peace establishment	52,922
1870	Peace establishment	37,313
1871	Peace establishment	35,353
1872-1874	Peace establishment	32,264
1875-1885	Peace establishment	27,489
1892	Practically the same as 1885.	

The question arises, what service is this standing army of 27,489 men and officers performing for the country? Some of them are

watching Indians, keeping them on their reservations, where a gang of thieves, paid to deal justly by the savages, are robbing and starving them to death; facts proven and denounced in the United States Senate. A portion of our army is housed up in forts scattered over the country, where the officers, in gaudy attire, attend balls and give gorgeous receptions, assume to be the aristocracy, for which the people are taxed from \$30 million to \$50 million a year, and in addition to this the government military mill annually grinds out a set of officers who are enabled by their salaries, to make angels turn up their noses in silent scorn of their worse than turkey gobbler struttings.

But, within a few months past, this "regular army" has been put to a use never dreamed of by the fathers of the American republic. It has been degraded by the president of the United States, who is commander-in-chief, to stand guard at the Couer d'Alene mines in Idaho, while a Christless gang of capitalists imported scabs, black, white and tan, to displace honest laborers, a work which the standing armies of Europe has performed for a thousand years and will continue to perform as long as workingmen permit it to be done.

There may be in some autocrat-cursed country an exhibition of military power more imposing, more impressive and degrading than was seen at Homestead, Buffalo, in the mountains of Tennessee and Idaho, but we have not read of it; and if in the king-cursed countries some things in the same line have occurred, we may thrust them aside and contemplate what the military machines are now doing in the great American republic, not to drive back foreign invaders, not to keep half-starved savages on their reservations, but to enable capitalists to crush organized labor, where gleaming bayonets, flashing swords, and big and little guns, loaded with shot and shell, command organized workingmen to stand aside while degenerate scabs willingly respond to the command of their masters to accept wages which transform American homes into dens and lairs, fit only for wild beasts, bats, and vermin.

From this time forward, if workingmen so will it, they will find themselves the victims of state standing armies, as much so as the subjects of the Tsar of Russia or Emperor William of Germany, who, as Mr. Hale remarks, could not remain on their thrones a month were it not for their standing armies.

And just here a remarkable feature of the subject comes into view. These standing armies of states are largely made up, rank and file, of workingmen, men from every department of the industries of the

country, who, at a moment's warning, may be called upon to stand guard while scabs, as at Homestead and Buffalo, step in and accept such wages as employers see proper to pay, and thus become the architects of their own degradation.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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