

# The National Tribune

A Monthly Journal devoted to the interests of the Soldiers and Sailors of the late war, and all Pensioners of the United States.

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## IS THE COUNTRY TOO POOR TO PAY ITS SOLDIERS?

We hear it advanced by those who are opposed to the passage of the bill to equalize bounties, that the country is too poor—too poor to pay its honest debts to the soldiers who saved it. Let us see. From the 10th day of March, 1877, when he took his place at the head of the Finance Department of the Government, to the 1st day of November, less than eight months, Secretary Sherman boasts that he has reduced the public debt forty five million dollars, and at the 1st of January, after having control of the finances less than ten months, he expects to be able to say that he has reduced it sixty million dollars, or three per cent. of the entire bonded debt of the United States.

This debt has not matured. The Government was not obliged to pay this forty-five million during the last eight months, but, like a very generous creditor, Secretary Sherman is hastening to pay it before it is due. Every citizen should, of course, take great pride in this achievement, but it contradicts the arguments that are brought forward against the bounty bill, that the Government is too poor. It is the soldiers who are poor. Those who served in the rank and file of our army during the war, and when the struggle ended, went back to their work-shops and their farms. It is they who are poor. What man of them who owes money, is able, like the Government, to pay his debts before they are due? While every one should encourage the reduction of the liabilities of the Government as fast as is possible, there are other debts beside those due the bond-holders that the Government should pay. It owes eight and one-third dollars a month for every month's service, to each soldier who fought to preserve the Union. Some of this debt has been paid. Many soldiers received their bounty when they enlisted, but that makes it the more essential that those who have received nothing, but who fought just as well, should also be paid.

Now how much will this bounty bill cost? That is a question in the wildest dispute. Those who oppose the bill, estimate the sum at hundreds of millions of dollars, but this is a wild absurdity, not tolerated for a moment by anyone familiar with the facts, and the records of the service.

Adjutant General Townsend, who had charge of the enlistments during the war, and has since been at the head of the Adjutant General's office, is the most competent, and, in fact, the only competent authority on this subject. He places the aggregate amount of money necessary to equalize bounties, as provided for in a bill we give elsewhere, at only twenty millions of dollars. He shows, from the records of the army, that the number of men who enlisted for three years, was, as nearly as can be estimated, two millions, forty-two thousand one hundred and fifty. But it is not believed by him, that more than one

million, one hundred thousand men served for that length of time, because the greater part of the enlistments for a three year's time took place in the latter days of the war. Less than one-half of these, he considers, are entitled to bounty under this bill, and, in 1874, he gave it as his official opinion to the military committee of the House, that twenty million dollars, at the most, would be all that is required.

The Paymaster General of the army places his estimate at twenty-eight millions, and reaches this opinion by a different system of calculation than that used by the Adjutant General. He shows from the records of his office that \$385,970,681 has already been paid to soldiers in the shape of bounty money. Taking Adjutant General Townsend's estimate of the number of troops employed for three years he shows that \$440,000,000 would be necessary to pay all of them a bounty of eight and one third dollars per month. This would leave about 54,000,000 as the difference between what has been paid, under the existing bounty laws, and what would be due under the pending bill. But he estimates further that at least 521,000 men were not entitled to bounty, which would reduce this difference to about twenty-eight millions.

To those of us who measure our incomes by the hundreds of dollars, these seem enormous figures. But stop and think that the revenues of the Government amount to hundreds of millions every year; consider that Secretary Sherman has been able in less than eight months to reduce the public debt forty-five millions, besides paying the expenses of the Government and the interest on the outstanding debt, and the amount will not seem so large. The saving that Secretary Sherman has made in four months would pay the entire amount required under this bounty bill. The saving that he expects to make in ten months would pay it three times over, and yet they say that the Government is too poor to give its soldiers what it justly owes them.

These are not idle figures. These calculations are not made for sport, but they are as actual, as real as the multiplication table, and they demand attention. It will not become necessary to pay the entire amount required from the Treasury in a single month, or a single year, or in five years, but the payment of claims that will come in from the soldiers, if this bill is passed, will require a number of years, because so much investigation and examination and clerical labor will be necessary to find out what claims are genuine and which are fraudulent. Allowing that it would take only ten years to pay all these claims, and allowing that the amount of money required would be twenty-eight millions, (the most liberal estimate,) it would only necessitate the expenditure of two millions, eight hundred thousand dollars a year, which is about half as much as Secretary Sherman saves every month. Surely this sum might justly be devoted to rewarding the gallantry and paying the just dues of the country to its soldier citizens.

## ARREARS OF PENSIONS.

The matter of paying arrears of pensions has again come before Congress, in a bill which provides, that all pensions which have been or may hereafter be granted in consequence of death occurring from a cause which originated in the service of the United States since March 4, 1861, or in consequence of wounds or injuries received or disease contracted since said date, shall begin from the date of death or discharge from the service, of the person on whose account the claim has been or shall hereafter be granted, or from the termination of right of the person having prior title to such pension, provided that the limitation herein prescribed shall not apply to claims by or in behalf of insane persons or minor children of deceased soldiers. The bill also provides, that upon the passage of the act, the Commissioner of Pensions shall cause a copy of the same to be furnished each pension agent, whose duty it shall be to inform each pensioner upon his roll who shall be entitled to arrears of pension under this act; and it shall be the further duty of the Commissioner of Pensions to pay, or cause to be paid to such pensioners, or, if the pensioner shall have died, to the person or persons entitled to the same, all such arrears of pensions as the pensioner may be entitled to, or, if dead, would have been entitled to under the provisions of the first section of this act, had he or she survived.

The defects in the present law, which this is intended to rectify, are very plain, and it needs no argument to convince a person familiar with the pension laws of the justice and necessity of the passage of some such measure. As the laws now stand, many living soldiers, and the widows and orphans of many dead soldiers, are deprived of what is justly due them, because, from ignorance, or neglect, or from some other reason, they may have failed to apply for a pension within the limit of time prescribed. If soldiers or their dependents are entitled to pensions at all, it is just that they should be granted from the time of death, or from the time of discharge from the service. The laws, as they now stand, are, as far as they go, eminently just. It is not bad laws that soldiers complain of, but restricted laws, incomplete laws, passed when the subject of pensions was not understood, and the needs of pensioners had not become fully apparent. When a soldier was disabled from wounds received in battle, or from disease contracted in the service, he was discharged, thrown upon his own resources, or the charity of his friends. If he neglected at once to apply for a pension, it does not follow that he deserved none. If a widow was left helpless, and did not at once apply for a pension, it does not lessen her claim upon the Government. Congressmen concede this; no one denies the justness of this bill, but the delay in its passage is due to the fact that precedence is given other matters, often of less importance.