

# The Democratic Standard.

DEVOTED TO THE SUPPORT OF THE CONSTITUTION AND LAWS—THE DIFFUSION OF GENERAL INTELLIGENCE—AND THE REFORM OF ALL POLITICAL ABUSES.

BY D. P. PALMER.

GEORGETOWN, O., THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 1840.

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From the Richmond Enquirer, of Aug. 7.  
**INTERESTING CORRESPONDENCE,**  
BETWEEN CITIZENS OF ELIZABETH CITY COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AND MR. VAN BUREN.

We have the pleasure of laying before our readers this morning, a very frank and able letter from Mr. Van Buren, in reply to four citizens of Virginia. He developed his opinions in relation to Abolitionism, the Tariff, Internal Improvements, and the Militia Bill of Mr. Poinsett. The last portion of the letter is perfectly new and satisfactory. Mr. Van Buren explicitly declares, that the bill was not submitted to him, before it was transmitted to Congress—and he moreover expresses in relation to the arming and training of the militia, a every Republican would desire. He cruelly dissipates the humbug of the Whigs, on all these points; and this Whig army of 200,000 men, will scarcely enter the field of electioneering again. We recommend the letter to the attention of our readers—and we wonder very much, whether General Harrison has answered the same interrogatories. But he declares he will not answer such interrogatories, whether put by friend or foe. The Little Magician has waved his wand, and dissipated also the panic humbings which Mr. Clay attempted to raise out of this bill, in his speech at the last Haverock dinner. He need not be afraid, if Mr. Van Buren be re-elected, that he will press the bill—because it appears to be no great favorite with him, or any of his friends in Congress. Let the perturbed spirit of the Kentucky Orator, therefore, rest!

ELIZABETH CITY COUNTY, Va.  
June 12, 1840.

DEAR SIR:—The prominent attitude which you now occupy in relation to the coming Presidential contest, confers upon every voter of this widely extended Republic, however humble may be his condition, a right to inquire your views upon each one of those momentous questions which now agitate the public mind.

Prompted, not by an impertinent curiosity, but solely by a desire of ascertaining whether your views or those of Gen. Harrison coincide more nearly with our own, we are induced to propound to you the following questions, viz:

1. Will you, if re-elected President, veto any bill having for its object the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia; or, would you sanction any bill granting appropriations of the public money to any State, soliciting aid for the emancipation of their slaves?

2. Do you think that, at this time, the safety of the public money requires a re-chartering of the United States Bank; or would you sign a bill chartering such an institution?

3. Are you in favor of preserving entire the Tariff Compromise?

4. Would you sanction any bill granting appropriations of the public money, for the purpose of internal improvement, by means of canals, rail-roads, &c.?

5. Do you approve of Mr. Poinsett's scheme for the organization of the militia?

The preceding questions have been proposed to Mr. Harrison. Believing their decision to be of vital importance to the interests and institutions of the South, and hoping you may conceive them to be of such consequence, as to merit an answer.

We are respectfully,  
Your obedient servants,  
JOHN B. CARY,  
A. G. HUDGINS, M. D.  
THOMAS JONES, J. P.  
G. A. CARY.  
Hon. M. VAN BUREN, President U. S.  
Washington.

MR. VAN BUREN'S REPLY.  
WASHINGTON, July 31, 1840.

GENTLEMEN: Official duties growing out of the closing scenes of a greatly protracted session of Congress, added to those which are of daily occurrence, have compelled me to postpone to this time, a reply to your communication.

You have not, gentlemen, in the course you have pursued, misjudged either the extent of your own rights; nor the importance of a free communication of opinion between the constituent and a proposed representative. The authority of

the elector to call in good faith on the candidate for his favor, for an unreserved avowal of his opinions in regard to all matters of public concern that it may become his official duty to act upon, is not only of inestimable value to the success of political institutions like ours, but may, I think, without exaggeration be regarded as indispensable to the maintenance of Republican Government. Viewing the subject in this light, and having satisfied myself that in propounding questions to me you have, as you assure me, been actuated by an unfeigned desire to be able to bestow your suffrages understandingly and to possess yourselves of information which you deem material to that end, I cheerfully comply with your request.

You ask me, first, "whether if elected I will veto any bill having for its object, the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia; or whether I will sanction any bill granting appropriations of the public money to any State, soliciting aid for the emancipation of their slaves?" My attention has been frequently heretofore called to the first branch of your inquiry; and my views in respect to it given. The substance of them was repeated, with additional explanations, in a letter recently addressed by me to a committee composed of citizens of Louisville, Kentucky, in reply to a question, embracing among other things, the particular point now referred to. As my reply to your several questions will, unavoidably, be of considerable length, I have not deemed it advisable to repeat that answer here—but will cause each of you to be supplied with a copy thereof, and cannot doubt your being satisfied that I have at least fairly met the subject. The second branch of your inquiry, though scarcely of less importance, was not brought into view on that occasion. Nearly all now agree that the Federal Government possesses no more power to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States; and the general and undoubtedly the correct principle is, that the Federal Government cannot apply the national funds to objects, upon which they are either expressly prohibited from acting, or in respect to which there is an acknowledged absence of delegated authority. Usage, supposed necessity and apparently uncontrollable considerations of expediency have, from time to time, led to limited expenditures for which it was not easy to find a warrant in the Constitution. But these have always been regarded by the sincere friends of strict construction of that instrument as matters to be regretted, and as far as possible to be prevented. The form of your question presents for consideration the points whether the consent of the slave States could confer on the Federal Government the constitutional power to apply the public funds to the emancipation of their slaves. I unhesitatingly say it could not, and that I never could give my sanction to such a measure. If State consent could confer power where the want of it would otherwise be so manifest, I find it difficult to conceive of any case in which the same result could not, with at least equal propriety, be claimed to follow from the same cause. The establishment of such a principle must, in my best judgment, inevitably lead to the prostration of that partition of powers between the General and State Governments, which the framers of the Constitution intended to erect, and might well be dreaded as an opening wedge to an early and more extended action by Congress upon the particular subject under consideration. We have seen too much of the progressive character of constitutional encroachments in the early stages of the Government, to feel assured that a continued practice of contributing to the emancipation of slaves by the appropriation of money, might not, in course of time, lead to attempts by the Federal Government to accomplish the same object, without either the consent of the slaveholder or indemnity for his loss.

You next ask me, gentlemen, whether I think that, at this time, the safety of the public money requires a re-chartering of the United States Bank; or whether I would sign a bill chartering such an institution. My opinions upon the subject of a United States Bank were asked when I was first a candidate for the Presidency in 1836, and were so fully given as to meet not only your question, but also, I think, every aspect which the subject can be made to assume. They will be found in my letter to the Hon. Sherrod Williams of Kentucky, which has been extensively published, and are therein thus expressed:

"You next ask whether I will sign and approve (if it becomes necessary to secure and save from depreciation, the revenue and finances of the nation, and to afford a sound uniform currency to the people of the United States,) a bill, (with proper modifications and restrictions) chartering a Bank of the United States.

"In the published letter of Mr. Butler to Mr. Garland, which has already been referred to, he thus states my opinions upon the subject of the bank: 'Mr. Van Buren's opinions in regard to the

Bank of the United States, were expressed in the Senate of the United States in 1828, repeated in his letter to the Shocco Springs Committee, whilst a candidate, for the Vice Presidency, and have been so freely uttered by him, that there cannot, I think, be occasion to say much upon that subject. But to close the door to cavil, I state ist. That he holds that Congress does not possess the power to establish a National Bank in any of the States of the Union, nor to establish in such States, the branch of any bank located in the District of Columbia; and 2d. That he is, therefore, decidedly opposed to the establishment of a National Bank in any of the States; and is also opposed to the establishment of any such in the District of Columbia, as unnecessary and inexpedient, and as liable to a great proportion of the abuses which have, in his opinion, been practised by the existing bank.'

"This declaration, with other uniform, repeated and published avowals of my sentiments, in regard to a United States Bank, would I had supposed, be sufficient to save me from further interrogation on that subject; but as you have thought proper to push the inquiry further, and, to that end, to place the matter before me in a form studiously adapted to present the question in its most favorable contingent aspect, you will, I am sure, be neither surprised nor dissatisfied, if I deem it due to myself as well as to the subject to give it more particular and enlarged consideration than I have heretofore felt it necessary or proper to do.

"I am induced to embrace for this purpose the opportunity you have presented to me the more readily, from a deep conviction of the incalculable importance to the people of the United States, that this long agitated and distracting subject should be finally settled, and from a hope that what I have to say upon it may, from the situation in which the partiality of my fellow-citizens has placed me, contribute in some degree to so desirable a result.

"I greatly fear, that whilst there is in any quarter reason to hope that a charter for a new bank can in any condition of the country be obtained from the Federal Government, there will be neither order nor stability in the pecuniary operations of the country. If it can be ascertained that a discredited currency and pecuniary embarrassments will bring a charter, what security have we that such a state of things will not be produced? Is it doing violence to truth and justice, to attribute to expectations of this character, the crusade which we have witnessed for the last two years against the deposit banks, against the efforts of the Administration to restore a specie currency, and against all the fiscal arrangements of the Treasury? Will any candid and well informed man pretend that such things would have been, if it had been considered as settled that the Bank of the United States is not to be revived? I think not. The settlement of the deposit question, by the bill of the last session, will doubtless cause a suspension of this destructive career; but is there not reason to apprehend that it will recommence with the first appearance of any thing like a reasonable chance for the re-establishment of a National Bank? Every thing, therefore, which may serve to arrest or prevent the agitation of this subject, if only for a season, is of great value. In the published opinions to which I have already referred, my opposition to the establishment of the United States Bank, in any of the States, is placed on the want of constitutional power in Congress to establish one. Those who concur in denying this power, nevertheless differ among themselves in regard to the particular views by which their respective opinions are sustained. Some admit that Congress has a right to create such an institution, whenever its establishment becomes necessary to the collection, disbursement, and preservation of the revenue; but insist that no such necessity existed when the charter of the old Bank expired, or has arisen since. With this class, the considerations to which you allude would be essential, and might have a controlling effect—for such persons make the power to establish a Bank dependent upon them. My objection, on the contrary is, that the constitution does not give Congress power to erect corporations within the States. This was the main point of Mr. Jefferson's celebrated opinion against the establishment of the first National Bank. It is an objection which nothing short of an amendment to the Constitution can remove. We know it to be an historical fact that the convention refused to confer that power on Congress, and I am opposed to its assumption by it upon any pretence whatever. If its possession shall at any time become necessary, the only just way to obtain it is to ask it at the hands of the people, in the form prescribed by the Constitution. Holding this opinion, and sworn to support that instrument as it is, I could not find in the circumstances to which you refer, either warrant or excuse for the

exercise of the authority in question; and I am not only willing but desirous that the people of the United States should be fully informed of the precise ground I occupy on this subject. I desire more especially that they should know it now, when an opportunity, the best our form of Government affords, will soon be presented, to express their opinion of its propriety. If they are in favor of a National Bank, as a permanent branch of their institutions, or if they desire a Chief Magistrate who will consider it his duty to watch the course of events, and give or withhold his assent to such an institution according to the degree of necessity for it that may in his opinion arise from the considerations to which your question refers, they will see that my co-operation in the promotion of either of these views cannot be expected. If, on the other hand, with this seasonable, explicit, and published avowal before them, a majority of the people of the United States shall nevertheless bestow upon me their suffrages for the office of President, scepticism itself must cease to doubt, and admit their will to be that there shall not be any Bank of the United States, until the people in the exercise of their sovereign authority, see fit to give to Congress the right to establish one.

"It is because I cannot doubt that the expression of the popular will, made under such circumstances, must have a tendency to arrest further agitation of this disturbing subject, for four years at least, and most probably, from the great moral influence which the often expressed opinion of the majority of the people in a Republican Government is entitled to, for a much longer period, that I am thus full and explicit upon the point to which you have called my attention. However much we may differ upon the abstract question involved in this controversy, no reflecting man can doubt the healthful and invigorating effects which any thing that looks like a settlement of this question must have upon all the business, as well as political relations of the country. The public mind has been long and painfully agitated by it, and needs repose. The fruits of this agitation have been bitter and abundant. Men of business require to be put in a situation that they may adapt their affairs to a state of things which promises permanency. That character is alone necessary to give success to the present system. No national plan for the regulation of the fiscal affairs of the country can fail to succeed, if the mass of our industrious and enterprising population, without regard to local, sectional or political distinctions, are only sincerely desirous for its success. Once satisfy them that things are in this respect to remain stable, and it is not in the nature of things possible that they can refuse their aid and support to that which concerns them so nearly, and upon which their prosperity, private as well as public, is so essentially dependent. If our correspondence shall have the effect to contribute in any degree to bring about a state of things in which we all have so deep an interest, and which should be desired by all, I will rejoice that it has taken place."

My conviction of the truth and justice of these views upon this vitally important question, have been confirmed by all my subsequent experience, and will, I doubt not, from the principles upon which they are founded, endure to the end of my life.

My opinions upon the tariff, which is the subject of your third question, were asked when I was a candidate for the Vice Presidency, by a portion of my fellow-citizens of North Carolina, and freely given. Their application reached me but a short period before the then approaching election, and to secure in every portion of the Union, as general and early a knowledge of my views as was practicable, I caused them to be forthwith published at Albany. They were reiterated in 1836, when a candidate for the Presidency, and contain the general principles by which it is my intention to regulate my official course. It was sincerely friendly to the passage of the compromise bill, and have always been, and still am, disposed to carry it into full and fair effect. The opinions of which I have spoken were expressed in the following terms:

"Although my official acts in relation to the protective system might well be regarded as rendering the avowal unnecessary, I think it nevertheless proper to say, that I believe the establishment of commercial regulations, with a view to the encouragement of domestic products, to be within the constitutional power of Congress. Whilst, however, I have entertained this opinion, it has never been my wish to see the power in question exercised with an oppressive inequality upon any portion of our citizens, or for the advantage of one section of the Union at the expense of another. On the contrary, I have at all times believed it to be the sacred duty of those who are

entrusted with the Administration of the Federal Government to direct its operations in the manner best calculated to distribute, as equally as possible, its burdens and blessings amongst the several states and the people. My views upon this subject were several years ago spread before the people of the State, and have since been widely diffused through the medium of the public press. My object at that time was to invite the attention of my immediate constituents to a dispassionate consideration of the subject in its various bearings, being well assured that such an investigation would bring them to a standard, which, from its moderation and justice, would furnish the best guarantee for the true interests of all. If, as has been supposed, those views have contributed in any degree to produce a state of feeling so much to be desired, I have reason to be gratified with the result.

"The approaching, and, if the policy of the present Executive is allowed to prevail, the certain and speedy extinguishment of the national debt, has presented an opportunity for a more equitable adjustment of the tariff, which has been already embraced by the adoption of a conciliatory measure, the spirit of which will, I doubt not, continue to be cherished by all who are not desirous of advancing their private interests at the sacrifice of those of the public, and who place a just value upon the peace and harmony of the Union.

"The protective system and its proper adjustment became a subject of frequent and necessary consideration, whilst I formed a part of the Cabinet; and the manner in which the President proposed to carry into effect the policy in relation to imports, recommended in his previous messages, has since been avowed with that frankness which belongs to his character. To this end, he recommended a modification of the tariff, which should produce a reduction of the revenue to the wants of the Government, and an adjustment of the duty upon imports, with a view to equal justice in relation to all our national interests, and to the counteraction of foreign policy, so far as it may be injurious to those interests."

In these sentiments I fully concur; and I have been thus explicit in the statement of them, that there may be no room for misapprehension as to my own views upon the subject. A sincere and faithful application of these principles to our legislation, unworped by private interest or political design—a restriction of the wants of the Government to a simple and economical administration of its affairs—the only administration which is consistent with the purity and stability of the Republican system—a preference in encouragement given to such manufactures as are essential to the national defence, and its extension to others in proportion as they are adapted to our country, and of which the raw material is produced by ourselves, with a proper respect for the rule which demands that all taxes should be imposed in proportion to the ability and condition of the contributors, would, I am convinced, give ultimate satisfaction to a vast majority of the people of the United States, and arrest that spirit of discontent which is now unhappily so prevalent, and which threatens such extensive injury to the institutions of our country."

You next ask me, whether I would sanction any bill granting appropriations of the public money, for the purposes of internal improvement, by means of canals, railroads, &c.

My views upon the subject of internal improvement by the Federal Government were given at the same time and upon the same application. They are as follows:

"Internal improvements are so diversified in their nature, and the possible agency of the Federal Government in their construction so variable in its character and degree, as to render it not a little difficult to lay down any precise rule that will embrace the whole subject.—The broadest and best defined division is that which distinguishes between the direct construction of works of internal improvement by the General Government, and pecuniary assistance given by it to such as are undertaken by others. In the former are included the right to make and establish roads and canals within the States, and the assumption of as much jurisdiction over the territory they may occupy, as is necessary to their preservation and use. The latter is restricted to simple grants of money, in aid of such works, when made under State authority.

"The Federal Government does not, in my opinion, possess the power first specified; nor can it derive it from the assent of the State in which such works are to be constructed. The money power, as it is called, is not so free from difficulty. Various rules have from time to time been suggested by those who properly appreciate the importance of precision and certainty in the operations of the Federal power, but they have been

so frequently infringed upon by the apparently unavoidable action of the Government, that a final and satisfactory settlement of the question has been prevented. The wide difference between a definition of the power in question upon paper, and its practical application to the operations of the Government, has been sensibly felt by all who have been entrusted with the management of public affairs. The whole subject was reviewed in the President's Maysville message. Sincerely believing that the best interests of the whole country, the quiet, not to say the stability, of the Union, and the preservation of that moral force which perhaps, as much as any other, holds it together, imperiously required that the destructive course of legislation upon that subject then prevalent, should, in some proper and constitutional way, be arrested, I throughout gave to the measure, of which that document was an exposition, my active, zealous, and anxious support.

"The opinions declared by the President in the Maysville, and his succeeding annual message, as I understood them, are as follows: 1st. That Congress does not possess the power to make and establish a road or canal within a State, with a right of jurisdiction to the extent I have stated; and that if it is the wish of the people that the construction of such works should be undertaken by the Federal Government, a previous amendment of the Constitution conferring that power, and defining and restricting its exercise, with reference to the sovereignty of the States, is indispensable. 2d. An intimation of his belief that the right to make appropriations in aid of such internal improvements as are of a national character, has been so generally acted upon, and so long acquiesced in by the Federal and State Governments, and the constituents of each, as to justify its exercise, but that it is nevertheless highly expedient that even such appropriations should, with the exception of such as relate to light houses, beacons, buoys, public piers, and other improvements in the harbors and navigable rivers of the United States, for the security and facility of our foreign commerce, be deferred at least until our national debt is paid. 3d. That if it is the wish of the people that the agency of the Federal Government should be restricted to the appropriation of money, and extended in that form in aid of such undertakings, when carried on by State authority, then the occasion, the manner, and the extent of the appropriation, should be made the subject of constitutional regulation.

"In these views I concur; and I likewise participated in the difficulties which were encountered, and expressed by the President, in adopting the principle which concedes to the Federal Government the right to make appropriations in aid of works which might be regarded as of a national character—difficulties which arose as well from the danger of considering mere usage the foundation of the right, as from the extreme uncertainty and consequent insecurity of the best rule that had ever been adopted, or that could, in the absence of positive constitutional provision, be established.—The reasons on which these objections were founded are so fully stated in the document referred to, and have been so extensively promulgated, that it is unnecessary for me to repeat them here.—Subsequent reflection and experience have confirmed my apprehension of the injurious consequences which would probably flow from the continuation of appropriations for internal improvements; with no better rule for the government of Congress than that of which I have spoken; and I do not hesitate to express it as my opinion, that the general and true interests of the country would be best consulted by withholding them, with the exceptions which I have already referred to, until some constitutional regulation upon the subject has been made.

"In this avowal I am certainly not influenced by feelings of indifference, much less of hostility to internal improvements. As such, they can have no enemies. I have never omitted to give them all the proper aid in my power, for which, by the way, I claim no particular merit, as I do not believe there is an honest and sane man in the country who does not wish to see them prosper; but their construction, and the manner in which, and the means by which they are to be effected, are quite different questions. Rather than again expose our legislation to all the corrupting influences of those scrambles and combinations in Congress which have been heretofore witnessed, and the other affairs of the country to the injurious effects unavoidably resulting from them, it would, in my opinion, be infinitely preferable to leave works of the character spoken of, and not embraced in the exception which has been pointed out, for the present, to the supports upon which they have reposed with so much success for the last two years, viz: State efforts and private enterprise. If the great body of the people become con-

vinced that the construction of such works should be undertaken by the Federal Government, a previous amendment of the Constitution conferring that power, and defining and restricting its exercise, with reference to the sovereignty of the States, is indispensable. 2d. An intimation of his belief that the right to make appropriations in aid of such internal improvements as are of a national character, has been so generally acted upon, and so long acquiesced in by the Federal and State Governments, and the constituents of each, as to justify its exercise, but that it is nevertheless highly expedient that even such appropriations should, with the exception of such as relate to light houses, beacons, buoys, public piers, and other improvements in the harbors and navigable rivers of the United States, for the security and facility of our foreign commerce, be deferred at least until our national debt is paid. 3d. That if it is the wish of the people that the agency of the Federal Government should be restricted to the appropriation of money, and extended in that form in aid of such undertakings, when carried on by State authority, then the occasion, the manner, and the extent of the appropriation, should be made the subject of constitutional regulation.

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