
Standing Armies

by Eugene V. Debs

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Among the governmental ideas, peculiarly American, there is not one more distinctly defined than the deep seated opposition to large standing armies. It is a fact universally accepted that large standing armies are flagrantly inimical to the liberties of the people, and no more judicious protests were ever made against the encroachments of centralized power in the United States, than those which relate to the maintenance of a large military force. Of 35 countries, officially reported, the number of men constituting their standing or regular armies is given at 4,938,080. Of these countries there are thirteen of which have standing armies, numbering 3,810,643 men, out of a population of 244,460,980, and costing annually \$609,422,316, as follows:

Country	Population	Standing Army	Annual Cost
Austro-Hungary	37,759,407	289,100	\$53,386,915
Belgium	5,476,668	46,383	8,776,429
Denmark	1,969,454	35,727	2,359,027
France	36,905,788	502,764	114,279,761
Germany	45,194,172	445,402	98,330,429
Great Britain	35,246,562	131,636	74,901,500
Italy	28,209,620	736,502	42,947,263
Netherlands	3,981,887	65,113	8,397,000
Russia	72,500,000	974,771	137,812,202
Spain	16,333,293	90,000	24,802,930
Switzerland	2,831,787	117,500	2,352,100
Turkey	8,866,582	350,000	610,300
United States	50,135,783	25,745	40,466,460
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TOTAL	294,460,980	3,810,643	\$609,422,316

It should be understood that the foregoing figures relate to armies on a peace footing. When war is declared, armies are indefinitely increased. So far as our figures relate to European countries, little need be said about the purpose for which standing armies are created and maintained. They are a necessity of despotism, and the figures relating to the armies of France and Switzerland in no wise modify the conclusion, since if they do not sustain home despotisms, they are required to repel invasions in the interest of despots. Remove the standing armies of Europe, and the people would be free in a day. European wars are, as a general proposition, for the wrong — a conflict of evils. Sometimes a great wrong has been overthrown or shorn of some of its power and the right advanced to a stronger position, but the chief business of standing armies in Europe is to support thrones and keep the people in subjection to royalty and aristocracy.

Referring to our figures, it will be observed that twelve European countries keep constantly equipped in time of peace 3,784,893 men, and pay annually for their support \$568,955,850. This vast number of men earn nothing, they produce nothing, they simply consume. Europe is full of paupers, half-fed, half-clothed wretches, who enjoy few more rights and privileges than beasts of burden, and to keep them in subjection, to kill them if they demand “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is the chief business of standing armies. A standing army has always been regarded in the United States as a standing danger, to be reduced to the lowest practicable number. The figures relating to the regular or standing army of the United States, from 1789 to 1879, are instructive. They are for officers and men as follows :

Year		Strength of Army
1789	One regiment army, one battery artillery	840
1792	Indian border wars	5,120
1794	Peace establishment	3,629
1801	.....	5,144
1807	.....	3,278
1810	.....	7,154
1812	War with Great Britain	11,331
1815	.....	9,433
1817-1821	Peace establishment	9,980
1822-1832	Peace establishment	6,184
1833-1837	Peace establishment	7,198
1838-1842	Florida war	12,439
1843-1846	Peace establishment	8,613

1817	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	51,641
1868-1869	Peace establishment	52,922
1870	Peace establishment	37,313
1871	Peace establishment	35,353
1872-1874	Peace establishment	32,264
1875-1879	.....	27,480

A glance at the foregoing figures fully establishes our proposition that a large standing army is anti-American, and in conflict with the genius of our institutions. In this country wars have been for the right, forced by circumstances and inevitables, and on all occasions the people have responded with alacrity to the call, and the right has been vindicated, and when the war was past, the policy has been to reduce at once the army. It was not wanted and was dangerous. The only requirement for an army is to fight and oversee a few straggling, half starved Indians, who, if they were not shamefully cheated and oppressed, would be quiet and peaceable — such is the testimony of the best informed soldiers of the army.

In view of all the facts, the wide- spread demand for organizing the militia of the various states, is worthy of profound thought. There is neither war nor a probability of war. No foreign nation is anxious to challenge the United States. Canada is much more inclined to annexation than war, and Mexico makes overtures of lasting peace by proposing a commercial treaty upon the most liberal terms. Such facts are well calculated to arouse interest when a demand is made to equip about 4 million soldiers in the various states. The question is asked with ever increasing interest, why so much military ardor and enthusiasm? It begins to leak out that in certain quarters labor troubles are likely to take place in the near future, and that soldiers will be handy to shoot down strikers, who are usually denounced as communists, socialists, and dynamiters.

We have heard much of late, but not too much of the encroachments of monopolists upon the rights of laborers, the wage men and the wealth creators of the land. In various localities the piteous appeals of suffering men and women for work have made the days and the nights hideous. Wages are reduced or entirely suspended. When

such things occur, labor troubles sometimes supervene. At such times, as in the case of the Hocking Valley troubles, soldiers are wanted, that blood may mingle with the tears of the famine afflicted unfortunates. Powder does sometimes produce peace, and bullets, like bread, have a quieting influence. Autocrats, despots, kings and sultans cannot govern at all without such appliances, but prudent and thoughtful Americans cannot be too earnest in their investigation in regard to the purpose of those who are asking for a large military force in all the states of the Union.

It has long been known that the influence of West Point upon society has been vicious in the extreme. As a general proposition, the graduates of that institution are insufferable snobs. They have the idea drilled into them that they constitute a ruling class. They are supported off of the earnings of the people, and acquire a strut and swagger indicative of feelings of superiority, at once disgusting and humiliating, and the knowledge that they are life pensioners upon the government adds indefinitely to their offensive superciliousness. West Point annually inflicts upon the country a horde of these gold-lace parasites, public crib loungers, who toil not, and for whose services there is neither a present or a remote necessity. And now, with this useless burden upon their necks, there is a set of people demanding a military establishment larger than that which obeys the nod of any European despot, and when it is asked what is the necessity for the existence of such a monstrous military machine in the United States, the answer is, there may be labor troubles in the near future. Laboring men, everywhere throughout the broad land, may well regard the movement with deep concern. It means their ultimate subjugation. It is to bring on a conflict between bread and bullets, pay and powder.

It is shown by official figures that the people are now taxed more than \$40 million a year to support a standing army, and though it numbers less than 28,000 men, thousands of these are mere loungers, who might as well be dead as alive, so far as any benefits arising from their existence is concerned. Why, then, seek to increase the burdens of taxation by the creation of more military establishments?

The time has come for working men to give this military craze serious attention. It means mischief.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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