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# *An ARGUMENT, shewing that a STANDING ARMY is inconsistent with a Free Government, and absolutely de- structive to the Constitution of the English Monarchy.*

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Among 17th century English essayists who substantially influenced early American political thought none was more important than John Trenchard. What follows are excerpts from one of his famous essays, first published in London in 1697, a copy of which is in the Special Collections. Bernard Bailyn says of early American political literature in general, "it serves to link the Revolutionary generation to our own in the most intimate way.")

**T**HIS Subject is so self-evident, that I am almost asham'd to prove it: for if we look through the World, we shall find in no Country, Liberty and an Army stand together; so that to know whether a People are Free or Slaves, it is necessary only to ask, Whether there is an Army kept amongst them? This Truth is so obvious, that the most barefac'd Advocates for an Army do not directly deny it, but qualify the matter by telling us, that a Number not exceeding fifteen or twenty thousand Men are a handful to so populous a Nation as this: Now I think that Number will bring as certain Ruin upon us, as if they were as many Millions, and I will give my Reasons for it.

It's the misfortune of all Countries, that they sometimes lie under an unhappy necessity to defend themselves by Arms against the Ambition of their Governours, and to fight for what's their own; for if a Prince will rule us with a Rod of Iron, and invade our Laws and Liberties, and neither be prevailed upon by our Miseries, Supplications, or Tears, we have no Power upon Earth to appeal to, and therefore must patiently submit to our Bondage, or stand upon our own Defence; which if we are enabled to do, we shall never be put upon it, but our Swords may grow rusty in our hands: for that Na-

tion is surest to live in Peace, that is most capable of making War; and a Man that hath a Sword by his side, shall have least occasion to make use of it. Now I say, if the King hath twenty thousand Men before hand with us, or much less than half that Number, the People can make no Effort to defend their Liberties, without the Assistance of a Foreign Power, which is a Remedy most commonly as bad as the Disease; and if we have not a Power within our selves to defend our Laws, we are no Government.

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But the Conspirators say, we need be in no apprehensions of Slavery whilst we keep the power of the Purse in our own hands: which is very true; but they do not tell us that he has the power of raising Money, to whom no one dares refuse it.

*Arma tenenti  
Omnia dat qui justa negat.*

For 'tis as certain than an Army will raise Money, as that Money will raise an Army; but if this course be too desperate, 'tis but shutting up the *Exchequer*, and disobliging a few Tally-Jobbers (who have bought them for fifty *per Cent.* discount) and there will be near three Millions a Year ready cut and dry'd for them: and whoever doubts whether such a Method as this is practicable, let him look back to the Reign of *Charles* the Second . . . if we could suppose (whatever is the fate of other Countries) that our Courtiers design nothing but the Publick Good, yet we ought not to hazard such unusual Vertue, by leading it into Temptation, which is part of our daily Duty to pray against. But I am afraid we don't live in an Age of Miracles, especially of that fort; our Heroes are made of a coarser Allay, and have too much Dross mix'd with their Constitutions for such refin'd Principles: for in the little Experience I have had in the World, I have observed most Men to do as much Mischief as lay in their Power, and therefore am for dealing with them as we with Children and mad Men, that is, take away all Weapons by which they may do either themselves or others an Injury: As I think the Sheep in *Boccaline* made a prudent Address to *Apollo*, when they desired, that for the future Wolves might have no Teeth.

When all other Arguments fail, they call to their Assistance the old Tyrant Necessity, and tell us the Power of *France* is so great,

that let the consequence of an Army be what it will, we cannot be without one; and if we must be Slaves, we had better be so to a Protestant Prince than a Popish one, and the worst of all Popish ones the F—— King. Now I am of Mr. *Johnson's* Opinion, that the putting an Epithet upon Tyranny is false Heraldry; for Protestant and Popish are both alike; and if I must be a Slave, it is very indifferent to me who is my Master, and therefore I shall never consent to be ruled by an Army, which is the worst that the most barbarous Conquest can impose upon me; which notwithstanding we have little reason to fear whilst we keep the Seas well guarded.

It's objected, that the Officers of our Fleet may be corrupted, or that a Storm may arise which may destroy it all at once, and therefore we ought to have two Strings to our Bow. By which I perceive all their Fears lie one way, and that they do not care if they precipitate us into inevitable Ruin at home, to prevent a distant possibility of it from *France*. But I think this Phantom too may be laid by a well-train'd Militia, and then all their Bugbears will vanish. This Word can be no sooner out, but there's a Volly of small Shot let fly at me: What! must we trust our Safety to an undisciplin'd Mob, who never dream'd of fighting when they undertook the Service; who are not inured to the Fatigue of a Camp, or ever saw the Face of an Enemy? And then they magnify Mercenary Troops, as if there was an intrinsick Virtue in a Red Coat, or that a Raggamuffin from robbing of Henroosts, in two Campagns could be cudgel'd into a Hero.

Why may not the Nobility, Gentry, and Free-holders of *England* be trusted with the Defence of their own Lives, Estates and Liberties, without having Guardians and Keepers assign'd them? And why may they not defend them with as much Vigour and Courage as Mercenaries who have nothing to lose, nor any other Tie to engage their Fidelity, than the inconsiderable Pay of Six-pence a day, which they may have from the Conqueror?

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I dare speak with the greater assurance upon this Subject, having the Authority of as great Men as the World hath produced for my Justification. *Machiavel* spends several Chapters to prove, that no Prince or State ought to suffer any of their Subjects to make War their Profession, and that no Nation can be secure with any other

Forces than a settled Militia. My Lord *Bacon* in several places bears his Testimony against a Standing Army, and particularly he tells us, that a Mercenary Army is fittest to invade a Country, but a Militia to defend it; because the first have Estates to get, and the latter to protect. Mr. *Harrington* hath founded his whole *Oceana* upon a trained Militia; . . . Nay, I believe no Author ever treated of a Free Government, that did not express his Abhorrence of an Army; for (as my Lord *Bacon* says) whoever does use them, tho he may spread his Feathers for a time, he will mew them soon after; and raise them with what Design you please, yet, like the *West-India* Dogs in *Boccaline*, in a little time they will certainly turn Sheep-biters.

Perhaps it will be said, that the Artillery of the World is changed since some of these wrote, and War is become more a Mystery, and therefore more Experience is necessary to make good Souldiers. But wherein does this Mystery consist? not in exercising a Company, and obeying a few words of Command; these are Mysteries that the dullest Noddle will comprehend in a few Weeks.

As to actual Experience in War, that is not essential either to a Standing Army or a Militia, as such; but the former may be without it, and the latter gain it according as they have opportunities of Action.

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In this Discourse I have purposely omitted speaking of the lesser Inconveniences attending a Standing Army, such as frequent Quarrels, Murders and Robberies; the destruction of all the Game in the Country; the quartering upon publick, and sometimes private Houses; the influencing Elections of Parliament by an artificial distribution of Quarters; the rendring so many Men useless to Labour, and almost Propagation, together with a much greater Destruction of them, by taking them from a laborious way of living to a loose idle Life; and besides this, the Insolence of the Officers, and the Debaucheries that are committed both by them and their Souldiers in all the Towns they come in, to the ruin of multitudes of Women, Dishonour of their Families, and ill Example to others; and a numerous train of Mischiefs besides, almost endless to enumerate.