

1864

Address of the Union State Central Committee upon the constitutional amendment extending the elective franchise to citizen soldiers in the field: Union State Central Committee, July 27, 1864

Republican Party (Conn.). State Central Committee.

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ADDRESS
OF THE
UNION STATE CENTRAL COMMITTEE
UPON THE
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
EXTENDING THE
ELECTIVE FRANCHISE TO CITIZEN SOLDIERS IN THE FIELD.

UNION STATE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, }
HARTFORD, JULY 27, 1864. }

Freemen of Connecticut:

On the 15th day of August next, you will be called upon to decide by your votes whether the Constitution of this State shall be so amended that the citizen soldier may be allowed to exercise the elective franchise, whether at home or in the field.

Elsewhere throughout the country this privilege has been accorded, not as a favor, but as a right; and we trust that you will now say, and by an overwhelming majority, that those citizens who protect your firesides from the invader's torch, and your country from destruction, shall be entitled to vote for those who may govern the country which they have periled their lives to save.

Surely, there can be no higher qualification for all the privileges of American citizenship than that acquired by actual service in the army by which those privileges are made secure. And yet there are those, who, to serve the mean ends of a political party, would render that service a brand of degradation, by denying the soldier those very privileges which he has taken up arms to defend.

Two successive Legislatures have passed the amendment, which is now submitted for your ratification, thereby endorsing the principle laid down by Jefferson, Jackson, and other Democratic leaders of the olden time, that "the elective franchise follows the flag under which the soldier fights." In like manner, then, as the flag renders the deck of a ship above which it waves, the soil of the country whose name it bears, regardless of the sea or clime in which it floats, so also will it carry with it all the rights and franchises which the soldier fighting beneath its folds enjoyed at home. This, indeed, was sound democratic doctrine when war was waged with Mexico in the interest of slavery; always more consistent, however, in their devotion to *that* interest than in the maintenance of a political principle, the same leaders of the same party, who, in some States, extended a freeman's privilege to soldiers in the wilds of a Mexican chapperal, now deny it to those who are within our own borders, fighting for freedom and the preservation of our national life.

The soldier who sacrifices his business interests, leaves his family, and surrenders for three years or more his personal liberty to serve his country, can not understand why those less patriotic than himself, many of whom would sooner see their country torn into fragments than share his privations and dangers, should *alone* have the privilege of making laws and lawgivers, which he and his children are bound to respect and obey.

If you reject the amendment, he understands you to say, and you do say, that to enter the *service* of his country is a positive disqualification to vote for the *rulers* of his country; but if you accept the amendment you tell him that he has thereby acquired a new and more exalted title to the highest privileges of a freeman and a free government. You assure him moreover that just so far as he follows the National flag to protect our National honor, just so far you will follow him to protect his National privileges.

Be not deceived with the hope that a question so manifestly just and fair, will not meet with opposition and that your vote will not be needed. We advise you in time that a well organized and bitter opposition to this measure will be made by those who justify secession and apologize for treason. Let every one then discharge this duty for himself, and say by *your own ballot* whether the elective franchise shall be enjoyed by the citizen soldier, or whether you can, with a clear conscience, ask him to accept as a *duty* the dangers and hardships of the battle field, and *volunteer* to fight for the protection of *your* political rights, when by that act, and your vote, or the want of it, he has been made to forfeit *his own*.

JAMES G. BATTERSON, *Chairman.*

GEORGE S. GILMAN,	{	HARTFORD Co.	{	TRUMAN A. WARREN,	{	LITCHFIELD Co.
JAMES NICHOLS,				BRADLEY R. AGARD,		
N. D. SPERRY,				F. W. SMITH,		
JOHN J. JACQUES,		NEW HAVEN Co.		W. A. CUMMINGS,		FAIRFIELD Co.
EDWARD PRENTIS,				W. T. ELMER,		
H. H. STARKWEATHER,		NEW LONDON Co.		H. M. STANNARD,		MIDDLESEX Co.
JEREMIAH OLNEY,				MARCUS LILLIE,		
RICHARD S. LATHROP,		WINDHAM Co.		L. E. PEASE,		TOLLAND Co.

Union State Central Committee.