The Nullifiers' Reply to the President (1832)

Jackson followed up his proclamation by sending army and navy reinforcements to Charleston Harbor and by requesting a "Force Bill" from Congress that would authorize him to use the military to make South Carolina comply with federal legislation. In the meantime the South Carolina nullifiers published a rebuttal to the president's proclamation on 20 December and mobilized the state militia. Of note, however, was the fact that Jackson in his proclamation had hit on a sore point for the nullifiers: the South Carolinians—much less the southern states—were not united in this struggle. Even as the nullifiers trumpeted their defiance and turned out their soldiers, the unionists in the state decried such measures and created their own volunteer military force. This intra- as well as the interstate resistance would make the nullifiers pause in carrying out their threats even as they continued to engage in heated rhetoric.

The Committee on federal relations, to which was referred the proclamation of the President of the United States, has had it under consideration, and recommends the adoption of the following resolutions:

Resolved, That the power vested by the Constitution and laws in the President of the United States, to issue his proclamation, does not authorize him in that mode, to interfere whenever he may think fit, in the affairs of the respective states, or that he should use it as a means of promulgating executive expositions of the Constitution, with the sanction of force thus superseding the action of other departments of the general government.

Resolved, That it is not competent to the President of the United States, to order by proclamation the constituted authorities of a state to repeal their legislation, and that the late attempt of the President to do so is unconstitutional, and manifests a disposition to arrogate and exercise a power utterly destructive of liberty.

Resolved, That the opinions of the President, in regard to the rights of the States, are erroneous and dangerous, leading not only to the establishment of a consolidated government in the stead of our free confederacy, but to the concentration of all powers in the chief executive.

Resolved, That the proclamation of the President is the more extraordinary, that he had silently, and as it is supposed, with entire approbation, witnessed our sister state of Georgia avow, act upon, and carry into effect, even to the taking of life, principles identical with those now denounced by him in South Carolina.

Resolved, That each state of the Union has the right, whenever it may deem such a course necessary for the preservation of its liberties or vital interests, to secede peaceably from the Union, and that there is no constitutional power in the general government, much less in the executive department, of that government, to retain by force such state in the Union.

Resolved, That the primary and paramount allegiance of the citizens of this state, native or adopted, is of right due to this state.
Resolved, That the declaration of the President of the United States in his said proclamation, of his personal feelings and relations towards the State of South Carolina, is rather an appeal to the loyalty of subjects, than to the patriotism of citizens, and is a blending of official and individual character, heretofore unknown in our state papers, and revolting to our conception of political propriety.

Resolved, That the undisguised indulgence of personal hostility in the said proclamation would be unworthy of the animadversion of this legislature, but for the seldom and official form of the instrument which is made its vehicle.

Resolved, That the principles, doctrines and purposes, contained in the said proclamation are inconsistent with any just idea of a limited government, and subversive of the rights of the states and liberties of the people, and if submitted to in silence would lay a broad foundation for the establishment of monarchy.

Resolved, That while this legislature has witnessed with sorrow such a relaxation of the spirit of our institutions, that a President of the United States dare venture upon this high handed measure, it regards with indignation the menaces which are directed against it, and the concentration of a standing army on our borders—that the state will repel force by force, and relying upon the blessings of God, will maintain its liberty at all hazards.

Resolved, That copies of these resolutions be sent to our members in Congress, to be laid before that body.