

Andrew Jackson to Thomas Miller, May 13, 1829, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

TO T. L. MILLER.¹

¹ Seems to be in the handwriting of A. J. Donelson.

Washington, May 13, 1829.

D'r Sir, I have recd. your letter of the 4th inst., and must plead my numerous and varied engagements as an apology for not responding to it at an earlier period. The remarks you have offered, require no explanation or apology on your part—they are of that friendly, frank character as to deserve my thanks. Mr. Tazwells reasons for declining the mission offered him, were of so candid a nature, that while the loss of services so valuable were matter of regret, it was impossible for me to do otherwise than appreciate the motives which induced his decision.

Upon other matters touched upon in your letter, relative to the appointment of Editors to office, I am constrained to disagree with you. It is true as suggested, that the press being an important essential in the maintenance of our republican institutions, its freedom and purity can not be too carefully guarded. But while we are reasoning upon the policy of a measure, it is proper that all the circumstances in connection with it, should also be duly weighed. I agree with you, that considerations of no sort, neither hopes nor fears, should be held out by Government to Editors of papers, nor indeed to any discription of men, to induce a course of conduct not sanctioned by principle, and by their unbiassed judgement. But is this the case under the present posture of affairs?

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You will recollect that in the recent political contest it was said and truly said, to be a struggle between the virtue of the american people and the corrupting influence of executive patronage. By no act, by no solicitation of mine; and apart from any interference of myself, did the people in their kindness, present me as their candidate. The different presses of the Country acting upon their own impulses, espoused one side or the other, as judgement or other causes operated. Those who stepped forward and advocated the question termed the side of the people, were a part of the people and differing only in this that they were the proprietors and conductors of the press—in many cases purchased by themselves expressly for the purpose of aiding in the “grand cause”. And to what motive other than the love of country and the exercise of a sound judgement could their course be ascribed[?] I was not abroad seeking popularity, nor did I trammel or commit myself by pledges to reward partizans in the event of success. no one has ever accused me of doing so, and hence we are bound to believe that they were disinterested in their support of me. Many maintained and believed, and especially the politicians of the Country, that no efforts of the people, would be found sufficient to counteract the subsidizing influence of government. Upon this ground then, whatever motive could arise founded on self, was of a character to invite chiming in with the powers that were then in existence. Yet many Editors did not, and hence can we resist the impression that they were actuated by the same generous and patriotic impulse that the people were?

If these suggestions be founded in truth, why should this class of citizens be excluded from offices to which others, not more patriotic, nor presenting stronger claims as to qualification may aspire?

To establish such a precedent would I apprehend, have a powerful tendency to place the control and management of the press into the hands of those who might be destitute of principle; and who [were] prosecuting their profession only as means of livelihood and hence, would become mercenary, and to earn their penny would abandon principle, which ought to be their rule of action.

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The road to office and preferment, being accessible alike to the rich and the poor, the farmer and the printer, honesty, probity and capability constituting the sole and exclusive test, will I am persuaded, have the happiest tendency to preserve, unimpaired, freedom of political action; change it and let it be known that any class or portion of citizens are and ought to be proscribed, (and) discontent, and dissatisfaction will be engendered. Extend it to Editors of papers, and I reiterate, that men of uncompromising and sterling integrity will no longer be found in the ranks of those who edit our public journals. I submit it then, to your good sense and calm reflection, what must be the inevitable result of things in this country, when the press and its freedom shall become so depressed and degraded as to be found altogether under the control of men wanting in principle and the proper feelings of men!

I am very respectfully yr. mo. obt. Sevt.