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The Political and Social Realities of Zion's Camp

Peter Crawley and Richard L. Anderson*

Ever since Zion's Camp marched out of Kirtland in May 1834, its journey into Missouri has been one of Mormon history's more controversial events. The earliest history judged the camp "frought with delusion and nonsense."¹ More recent scholarly assessments include "a total failure,"² "Joseph Smith's second major failure,"³ and "a quixotic adventure."⁴ The complexities of Zion's Camp, however, do not admit simplistic evaluations; and in spite of numerous descriptions of the camp in print, the basic questions raised by the expedition still persist. In this article the primary documents bearing on Zion's Camp are reviewed in an attempt to evaluate it more accurately in the context of the political and social forces that brought it into and took it out of existence.

Zion's Camp had its beginnings in the violent expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri, in early November 1833. News of the expulsion reached Joseph Smith and the members of the Church in Kirtland, Ohio, on 25 November, with the arrival of Orson Hyde and John Gould from Jackson.⁵ On 5 December, upon receiving a letter from W. W. Phelps supplying additional details of the Jackson tragedy,

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¹E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville: Printed and published by the Author, 1834), p. 163.

²P. A. M. Taylor, *Expectations Westward* (Edinburg and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), p. 18.

³Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, rev. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 159.

⁴Klaus Hansen, *Quest for Empire* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1967), p. 48.

⁵Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 1:446. Hereafter cited as *HC*.

Joseph Smith wrote to Edward Partridge, the bishop in Missouri, instructing Partridge to use the law to obtain redress, but not to sell any of the Mormon land.⁶ Five days later he again wrote to the elders in Missouri, reiterating his instructions to Partridge to hold on to their property and to appeal to the courts, the governor of the state, and the President of the United States for redress.⁷ Finally, on 16 December 1833, Joseph Smith received a long revelation (now Doctrine and Covenants 101) concerning the Jackson County difficulties that was immediately printed in broadsheet form and circulated among the Saints in Ohio and Missouri.⁸ A copy was also sent to Daniel Dunklin, Governor of Missouri.⁹ Explaining why the Latter-day Saints had been driven from Jackson, this revelation enjoined the elders to continue to use constitutional means to obtain redress. In addition, it suggested that the elders attempt to buy out their persecutors in Jackson County, and in this regard, the revelation asserted that at that moment there was enough money in the hands of the eastern branches of the Church to buy out the local Missourians and settle the Jackson County dispute. Most significant for the eventual organization of Zion's Camp, this revelation included a long parable of a nobleman and his vineyard that carried an implicit promise of armed assistance to the exiled Jackson County Mormons from the Church in Kirtland. In the course of this parable it is asked when this help would be forthcoming. The answer: "When I will."

The Mormon leaders in Missouri lost little time in apprising Daniel Dunklin of the Jackson situation. On 6 November 1833, six days after the violence commenced and while the Latter-day Saints were crossing the Missouri River into Clay County, W. W. Phelps, A. S. Gilbert and William E. McLellin crossed into Clay and hastily drafted a statement of their plight which was forwarded to Governor Dunklin by express.¹⁰ A response from the governor came through his legal assistant two weeks later. On 21 November Robert W. Wells, attorney general of Missouri, wrote to Alexander W. Doniphan and David

⁶HC 1:448.

⁷HC 1:453-56.

⁸*Painesville Telegraph*, 24 January 1834. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, p. 147ff. Only a single copy of this broadsheet is extant, in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University.

⁹HC 1:474.

¹⁰HC 1:438.

R. Atchison, two of the four lawyers engaged by the Mormons, making the initial offer of military assistance:

From conversation I have had with the Governor, I believe I am warranted in saying to you, and through you to the Mormons, that if they desire to be replaced in possession of their property, that is, their houses in Jackson county, an adequate force will be sent forthwith to effect that object. Perhaps a direct application had better be made to him for that purpose, if they wish thus to be re-possessed. The militia have been ordered to hold themselves in readiness. If the Mormons will organize themselves into regular companies, or a regular company of militia, either volunteers or otherwise, they will, I have no doubt, be supplied with public arms.¹¹

Two days later, Wells informed Doniphan that Governor Dunklin intended to hold a court of inquiry in Jackson County but first needed to know the Mormons' intentions.¹² And on the 24th, Circuit Judge John F. Ryland wrote to Amos Rees, a third attorney for the Saints and circuit attorney for Jackson County, that he had been requested by Dunklin to inform the governor about the Jackson County conflict and to take steps to punish the guilty and protect the innocent. "I now request you to inform me whether the Mormons are willing to take steps against the citizens of Jackson county," Ryland continued, "whether they wish to return there or not; and let me know all the matters connected with this unhappy affair." Judge Ryland further asserted that "the military force will repair to Jackson county, to aid the execution of any order I make on this subject."¹³ Doniphan communicated his conversation with Wells to A. S. Gilbert on 28 November, and the next day Gilbert wrote a confidential letter to Dunklin expressing grave concern over an immediate court of inquiry inasmuch as the Mormons who would need to testify in their own behalf were scattered over the adjoining counties:

An *immediate* court of inquiry called while our people are thus situated would give our enemies a decided advantage in point of testimony, while they are in possession of their *own* homes, and *ours* also; with no enemy in the county to molest or make them afraid.¹⁴

¹¹HC 1:444-45. A manuscript copy of this letter in the hand of A. S. Gilbert is in the LDS Church Historical Department.

¹²HC 1:446.

¹³HC 1:445-46.

¹⁴HC 1:446-47.

On 6 December 1833 a petition was sent to Governor Dunklin by the elders in Missouri.¹⁵ This petition specifically requested (1) assistance from the governor so that the Mormons could "be restored" to their homes in Jackson and (2) continuing military protection by either the state militia or a detachment of the United States Rangers until peace could be restored. The concluding paragraph requested a court of inquiry after arrangements had been made to protect the Mormons with an armed force, and here it was mentioned that such a force would be needed until the Missouri Mormons could "receive strength from our friends to protect ourselves"—an idea that ultimately would become the underlying concept in the formation of Zion's Camp. A W. W. Phelps letter accompanying the petition underscored the Mormons' determination to return to their homes in Jackson County and repeated the need for armed protection after their return.¹⁶

A formal response to the petition would not be forthcoming from Dunklin until 4 February 1834. It is clear, however, that during December the Missouri elders had some communication with the governor about the possibility of military protection. On 15 December 1833 W. W. Phelps wrote to Joseph Smith of Dunklin's position: "The Governor is willing to restore us, but as the constitution gives him no power to guard us when back, we are not willing to go. The mob swear if we come we shall die!"¹⁷ And in the same month John Corrill wrote a long letter to Oliver Cowdrey in which Dunklin's attitude is further described:

The Governor has manifested a willingness to restore us back, and will if we request it; but this will be of little use unless he could leave a force there to help protect us; for the *mob* say, that three months shall not pass before they will drive us again. And he cannot leave a force without calling a special Legislature for that purpose, unless the President should see fit to place a company of rangers here with power to assist us in time of need. . . . If we could be placed back, and become organized into independent companies, and armed with power and liberty to stand in our own defense, it would be much better for us. But then, as their numbers are double ours this would be paving the way, or laying the foundation for another scene of murder and bloodshed.¹⁸

¹⁵HC 1:451-52.

¹⁶HC 1:452.

¹⁷HC 1:457.

¹⁸*The Evening and the Morning Star*, January 1834. Hereafter cited as *Star*.

Corrill went on to say that he doubted that any grand jury in Jackson would indict a Missourian for a crime against the Mormons.

By early January 1834 the elders of the Church in Clay County were undoubtedly aware that they were reaching an impasse. A council was called and the decision reached that Joseph Smith should be personally informed of the situation in Missouri. Lyman Wight and Parley P. Pratt were delegated to make the journey to Kirtland. On 9 January A. S. Gilbert wrote a second letter to Governor Dunklin in which he expressed serious doubts that a fair court of inquiry could be held in Jackson County because a large part of the Mormons who would need to testify, particularly women and children, greatly feared violent reprisals from the local Missourians. Gilbert then offered a new suggestion: that the Mormons buy out the leaders of the anti-Mormon faction, thereby reducing agitation against the Saints.¹⁹

Pratt and Wight left Clay County for Ohio on 12 January 1834, arriving at Kirtland on Saturday, 22 February.²⁰ The following Monday a council convened at the house of Joseph Smith to hear the reports of Pratt and Wight and to discuss the Missouri crisis. The minutes of this meeting are unfortunately brief, but it seems clear from the foregoing that the following five points must have been considered: (1) After three months no progress had been made toward the recovery of the Mormons' possessions in Jackson County. (2) Governor Dunklin had promised to provide an armed force to guard the Mormons while they returned to their homes in Jackson. (3) The governor was unwilling to retain that force in the county after the Mormons had returned. (4) Unless an appropriate additional armed force—perhaps one made up of members of the Church from Kirtland and the eastern branches—remained in the county after their return, the Saints would certainly be driven from their homes again. (5) A fair court of inquiry probably could not be held in Jackson. Confronted with these considerations, particularly against the backdrop of the implicit promise of assistance contained in the well-circulated revelation of 16 December 1833, Joseph Smith had

¹⁹HC 1:472-73.

²⁰Lyman Wight's Journal as quoted in Joseph Smith and Heman C. Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Lamoni, Iowa, 1897-1903), 1:401-402. Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), p. 116, says that they left on 1 February.

little choice but to respond with a pledge of help from the Church in Kirtland. His failure to do so at this critical juncture would certainly have been interpreted as an abandonment of the Missouri Saints. All at the council meeting must have been convinced that the time for the redemption of the nobleman's vineyard spoken of in the parable was at hand. The minutes of the council report that at the end of the meeting, Joseph Smith arose and said

he was going to Zion, to assist in redeeming it. He called for the voice of the Council to sanction his going, which was given without a dissenting vote. He then called for volunteers to go with him, when some thirty or forty volunteered to go, who were present at the Council.²¹

Later that day Joseph Smith received a revelation (now Doctrine and Covenants 103) confirming the decision of the council and outlining the procedure for the expedition. This revelation also designated four pairs of elders to travel about the eastern branches of the Church to collect money and supplies and to recruit additional men. Preparations for the journey continued for two months, and on 1 May the first contingent of Zion's Camp marched out of Kirtland.²²

Meanwhile, on 4 February 1834, Governor Dunklin wrote to the elders in Clay County in response to their petition of 6 December. He informed them that a court of inquiry would soon convene in Jackson County, and that he had sent an order to the captain of the Liberty Blues, a company of the Clay County militia, to comply with any order that the circuit attorney might issue for the protection of the court and its witnesses. Dunklin reaffirmed his position that he was not authorized to maintain an armed force in the county to guard the Mormons after the trial ended, but he expressed his willingness for the Mormons to return to their homes under guard of the Liberty Blues and be protected by them during the course of the trial.²³ This portion of Dunklin's letter contains a hint of a shift in his position: a suggestion that possibly the only armed guard now available to the Mormons was that which would be called out to guard the court.

²¹HC 2:39.

²²For a discussion of the movements of Zion's Camp see Warren A. Jennings, "The Army of Israel Marches into Missouri," *Missouri Historical Review* 62 (January 1968):107-135.

²³HC 1:476-78.

Twenty days later the court assembled in Independence. Twelve Mormon witnesses, including W. W. Phelps, Edward Partridge, and John Corrill, along with fifty of the Liberty Blues, were in town for the proceedings. After a three-hour wait, they were informed by Amos Rees and R. W. Wells that there was no hope of a criminal prosecution. The implacable hatred of the Jackson Countians was such that no Missourian could be convicted of a crime against the Mormons. "Thus ends all hopes of 'redress'," wrote W. W. Phelps in a letter describing these events that appeared in the March 1834 issue of *The Evening and the Morning Star*, "even with a guard ordered by the Governor, for the protection of the court and witnesses."

On 24 April the elders in Clay County informed Governor Dunklin that Zion's Camp was about to depart for Missouri, at the same time reminding Dunklin of his promise of an armed guard to assist the Mormons in returning to their homes:

We have deemed it expedient to inform your Excellency that we have received communications from our friends in the East, informing us that a number of our brethren, perhaps two or three hundred, would remove to Jackson county in the course of the ensuing summer; and we are satisfied that when the Jackson mob get the intelligence that a large number of our people are about to remove into that county, they will raise a great hue-and-cry, and circulate many bugbears through the medium of their favorite press; but we think your Excellency is well aware that our object is purely to defend ourselves and possessions against another outrageous attack from the mob, inasmuch as the executive of this state cannot keep up a military force "to protect our people in that county, without transending his powers." . . . We do not know at what time our friends will arrive, but expect more certain intelligence in a few weeks. Whenever they do arrive, it would be the wish of our people in this county, to return to our homes, in company with our friends, under guard; and when once in legal possession of our homes in Jackson county, we shall endeavor to take care of them, without further wearying the patience of our worthy chief magistrate.²⁴

Dunklin's terse reply on May 2nd discussed the Mormon arms that had been confiscated the preceding November. But it was strangely silent about the requested force to guard the Mor-

²⁴HC 1:490.

mons back to their homes, failing even to acknowledge the news of the approaching reinforcements.²⁵

News of Zion's Camp also came quickly to the Jackson Countians. A late, but informative, letter was sent on 29 April, for example, by the postmaster at Chagrin, Ohio, to the postmaster at Independence:

The *Mormons* in this region are organizing an *army* (as they are pleased to express themselves) "*to restore Zion,*"—that is, to take *by force of arms* their former possessions in Jackson County, Mo. These facts I have from the mouths of several of them, with whom I am personally acquainted. Some have already set off, and Thursday night is the day set apart for the departure of the grand caravan, with the "*Prophet*" (Joseph Smith) at their head. . . . The elders say that the *Governor of your state* has promised them an armed force of militia to protect them through the state to their former possessions. This is believed by the commonality.²⁶

The response of the local Missourians was swift and violent. During the last week in April the county turned out en masse and burned nearly all of the 170 buildings belonging to the Mormons. Phelps' report in the May 1834 issue of *The Evening and the Morning Star* further asserted that "all that will not take up arms with the mob and prepare to fight the 'Mormons,' have to leave Jackson county."

Joseph Smith and the main body of Zion's Camp left Kirtland on 5 May 1834. Of the Church leaders, only Oliver Cowdery and Sidney Rigdon remained. Five days after Joseph Smith's departure, Rigdon and Cowdery issued a printed circular to the eastern branches of the Church. Primarily an appeal to these branches to supply additional means and men to strengthen the expedition underway to Missouri, this document provides a clear statement of the purpose and expectations of Zion's Camp at the time it departed from Kirtland:

It is, no doubt, known to you, that a large number of our brethren have lately gone up for the deliverance of the afflicted saints, who have been dispossessed of their lands and homes by a lawless band of men, who have risen up in defiance of all law, all equity, and all power, and taken the life of one, and sought the overthrow of all who have embraced the everlasting gospel in these last days. When

²⁵HC 1:491.

²⁶Columbia *Missouri Intelligencer*, 7 June 1834.

these brethren have arrived in the vicinity, or as wisdom shall direct, they will wait for our brethren who have been driven out, to inform the Governor of that state, that they are ready to go back to their lands. The Governor is bound to call out the Militia and take them back, and has informed our brethren of his readiness so to do, previous to this time. When orders arrive from the Governor to the Military Commanding Officers in that vicinity to guard our brethren back, then it is expected that all will march over, the former residents as well as those now on the way. When they are on their own possessions, they have a right to defend themselves and property from destruction and spoilation, and be justified in the sight of the laws of heaven and men. The company now on the way, with the scattered brethren when collected, will be sufficiently strong in the strength of the Lord to maintain the ground, after the Militia have been discharged, should those wicked men be desperate enough to come upon them. But we wish you to see the propriety of more numbers in this situation. For instance, [if] ten men were to go back, the *mob* would suppose that they could overpower them, and would be disposed to assault them, because they were few in number; but were there a large number, even so many that they (the *mob*) knew were sufficient, without the least difficulty, to withstand them, it is consistent to foresee that they would be silent, and either flee the country entirely, or remain inoffensive. . . . Our brethren who have now started on this arduous journey, have a small supply of money, and as the crops of wheat which were put in last fall by our dispersed brethren are in all probability, destroyed, the whole company who may remain after our brethren are taken back, will be obliged to purchase food till grain can be raised, which will be one year from June till wheat harvest. It will be unsafe for our brethren to labor for hire among that people after they return, so you see in what situation they will be placed, unless our brethren abroad rise up and put forth their hands to assist in the name of the Lord. That county abounds with bread-stuff which can be purchased very low, and with the assistance which our brethren abroad are able to render, the goodly land can be sustained and the saints be established to rejoice forever.²⁷

Two objectives, then, were held by the camp as it marched out of Kirtland: to provide sufficient additional men so that the Mormons could protect themselves *after* they had been es-

²⁷*Dear Brethren* [Signed and dated at end:] Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, Kirtland, Ohio, May 10, 1834. The only known copy of this broadsheet is in the LDS Church Historical Department. The text of the broadsheet is copied into Oliver Cowdery's Letterbook, now in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

corted back to their lands by the governor's force,²⁸ and to supply means to sustain the Saints in Missouri until they again became self-supporting. It is apparent that the Mormons viewed Zion's Camp as operating in concert with the executive of Missouri to restore the civil rights of the Latter-day Saints in Jackson County. The circular also expresses the considerable concern that existed over the size of the expedition, a concern that Joseph Smith repeated at the banks of the Mississippi River in a letter to his wife:

But our numbers and means are altogether too small for the accomplishment of such a great enterprise. . . . Now is the time for the Church abroad to come to Zion. It is our prayer day and night that God will open the heart of the churches to pour in men and means to assist us, for the redemption and upbuilding of Zion. We want the elders in Kirtland to use every exertion to influence the church to come speedily to our relief.²⁹

On the other hand, the printed circular betrays a certain optimism with regard to the Mormons' ability to intimidate the Jackson citizens. Word of April's violence in Jackson hadn't reached Kirtland at this point; but these events show that the local Missourians were spoiling for a fight, and the addition of an armed Mormon force in the county would in no way deter them from attacking the Saints.

Zion's Camp arrived at the Mississippi on 4 June. Two days were spent in ferrying the camp across the river, and on the 7th it moved to Salt River, where a branch of the Church known as the Allred settlement was located. More than 200 now comprised the expedition. On 5 June the elders in Clay County petitioned Dunklin for an armed guard:

We think the time is just at hand when our society will be glad to avail themselves of the protection of a military guard, that they may return to Jackson county. We do not now know the precise day, but Mr. Reese gives his opinion, that there would be no impropriety in petitioning your Excellency for an order on the commanding officer, to be sent by return mail, that we might have it in our hands to present when our people get ready to start.³⁰

²⁸Cf. John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis: Printed for the author, 1839), p. 21; and William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883), pp. 23-24.

²⁹Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 June 1834; Joseph Smith Letterbook, 1838-43. In LDS Church Historical Department.

³⁰HC 2:84.

After a four-day pause at the Allred Settlement, the camp resumed its march on 12 June. That same day Joseph Smith dispatched Orson Hyde and Parley Pratt to Jefferson City, as George A. Smith remembered, "to accept His Excellency's proposal to reinstate the Saints on their lands in Jackson County and leave them there to defend themselves."³¹ On 15 June, Hyde and Pratt returned to the camp with the news that the governor "refused to fulfill his promise of reinstating the brethren on their lands in Jackson County."³² Certainly Dunklin's response was unanticipated by the Mormons. As late as 14 June, for example, John Corril could write to the Kirtland elders: "For as we design to be governed in all cases by the laws of the land, we shall therefore return under the protection of the Governor, as he has promised us."³³ Dunklin's refusal, of course, insured that Zion's Camp would not march into Jackson County. With its principal objective—that of protecting the Latter-day Saints after their return to Jackson—out of reach, all that remained for the camp was to move into Clay County while Joseph Smith deliberated with the Missouri elders about possible compromises and more formally organized the leadership of the Church in Clay.

Seven days after Pratt and Hyde brought the news of Dunklin's refusal, Cornelius Gilliam, sheriff of Clay County, rode up to the camp to confer with Joseph Smith. Gilliam received a statement of intention from the Mormons, which he published in the Clay County *Upper Missouri Advertiser*, that includes what might be considered the official version of the purpose of Zion's Camp at its termination:

It is not our intention to commit hostilities against any man or body of men. It is not our intention to injure any man's

³¹"History of George Albert Smith," ms.; original in LDS Church Historical Department.

³²Ibid. This account agrees with Parley Pratt's and Orson Hyde's, but conflicts with Lyman Wight's report quoted in Smith and Smith, *History of the Church* 1:472-73, which asserts that Hyde and Pratt "brought the intelligence that the Governor would execute the law, whatever it might be." Wight's entry could be sarcastic. Also, there is some question as to the exact date Pratt and Hyde returned to the camp. Wight's Journal just referred to, for example, states that it was 13 June; and Charles C. Rich's "Original Manuscript Diary of the Mormon Journey to Zion's Camp, Missouri" (typescript in the LDS Church Historical Department) asserts that it was the 14th. Rich's entry for that date reads: "we traveled till 10 O Clock met parley pratt on his return from the governor stoped and held a Council Decided that we should go on armed and equiped started at 12. O Clock traveled 25 miles Camped on a small Creek"

³³*Star*, June 1834.

person or property, except in defending ourselves. . . . It is our intention to go back upon our lands in Jackson county, by order of the Executive of the State, if possible. We have brought our arms with us for the purpose of self-defense, as it is well known to almost every man of the State that we have every reason to put ourselves in an attitude of defense, considering the abuse we have suffered in Jackson county. We are anxious for a settlement of the difficulties existing between us, upon honorable and constitutional principles.³⁴

Several sources assert that one purpose of the camp was to carry supplies to the exiled Saints.³⁵ But no evidence has materialized that any supplies were actually delivered to the Saints in Clay County. The financial records of Zion's Camp show that on 21 June there remained \$233.70 in the camp treasury, which was divided equally among the members.³⁶ These records also show that no monies were disbursed to the Clay County Mormons. Individual assistance, however, was given by some members of the camp; after their discharge, a number remained in Clay to help the Saints salvage their crops.³⁷

Both Pratt's and Hyde's accounts shed some light on the reasons behind Daniel Dunklin's shift in position. According to Parley Pratt,

We had an interview with the Governor, who readily acknowledged the justice of the demand, but frankly told us he dare not attempt the execution of the laws in that respect, for fear of deluging the whole country in civil war and bloodshed. He advised us to relinquish our rights, for the sake of peace, and to sell our lands from which we had been driven.³⁸

And Orson Hyde recalled that the governor

referred us to the courts of the respective counties in which our aggrivances originated; and said that he entertained no doubt but that these courts, that had full jurisdiction, would do us ample justice in the case. He knew better. He knew that both magistrates, constables, judges and sheriffs were

³⁴Quoted in *Missouri Intelligencer*, 12 July 1834.

³⁵E.g., HC 2:106; Pratt, *Autobiography*, p. 122.

³⁶Reproduced in Wilburn D. Talbot, "Zion's Camp" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1973), pp. 132-36; original in the LDS Church Historical Department. "Extracts from Heber C. Kimball's Journal" *Times and Seasons* 6:840.

³⁷*Missouri Intelligencer*, 28 June 1834.

³⁸Pratt, *Autobiography*, p. 123.

engaged in the mob, and were sworn to destroy us. He well knew that to refer us to the courts for justice, was like referring us to a band of thieves to sue for the recovery of stolen property. The courts would do nothing—the Governor would not if he could; and the President of the United States, at the head of all political power, could not correct one error in any branch below him, neither redress us in any way.³⁹

Dunklin did have good reason to fear civil war. The abortive court of inquiry and the violence of the preceding April were ample evidence that the Jackson Countians would go to any lengths to keep the Mormons out of the county. Moreover, as the camp approached, Independence took on the appearance of a city under siege: sentries were posted along the Missouri River, and troops paraded the streets, “determined to repel, with spirit, the threatened invasion.”⁴⁰ Dunklin was also informed that the Jackson citizens expected reinforcements from the adjoining counties, and, inaccurately, that both sides were arming themselves with cannon.⁴¹

On 6 June Dunklin had written to John Thornton, an influential Clay Countian, urging Thornton to effect a compromise between the Mormons and the Jackson citizens and suggesting that the best course would be for the local Missourians to buy out the Mormons.⁴² He repeated this advice to the leaders in Jackson County, and according to the report of this communication in the *Upper Missouri Enquirer*, “should the Mormons refuse to accede to an honorable and fair adjustment of these difficulties, the Governor will not restore any to that county, but such as hold lands.”⁴³ It is inconceivable, however, that the governor sincerely believed that a compromise could be reached. It must have been apparent to him that, without his intervention, the local citizens could keep the Mormons out of Jackson without expending a penny simply by refusing to do anything other than continue to make threats. After the collapse of the efforts to effect a compromise on 16 June, the governor still refused to act, despite his rather strange assertion to the Jackson leaders that

³⁹*Deseret News*, 12 May 1858.

⁴⁰John K. Townsend, *Narrative of a journey across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River* (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1839), p. 25.

⁴¹Dunklin to J. Thornton, 6 June 1834. HC 2:84-87.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³As quoted in *Missouri Intelligencer*, 21 June 1834.

he would restore only Mormon landowners in the event the compromise failed. Thus it would appear that by the time Zion's Camp reached the Mississippi River, Dunklin had decided upon a policy of "benign neglect" regarding the Mormon problem, knowing that without his forceful intervention the Mormons had no recourse but to abandon their efforts to recover their Jackson County lands. The opening sentence of Dunklin's comments on the Mormons in a letter of 15 August seems to bear this out:

Upon the subject of the poor deluded Mormons & the infuriated Jacksonites, it is unnecessary now to say anything, & I hope it will continue so. There can be no difficulty in ascertaining the correct course for me if I am co[m]pelled to act. I have no regard for the Mormons, as a separate people; & have an utter contempt for them as a religious sect; while upon the other hand I have much regard for the people of Jackson county, both personally and politically; they are, many of them, my personal friends, and nearly all of them are very staunch democrats: but these are all secondary considerations when my *duties* are brought in question.⁴⁴

Most probably, therefore, Dunklin originally made his promise of military assistance to guard the Mormons back to their homes in good faith. But in the intervening six months, as the situation in Jackson County deteriorated, he perceived that an armed conflict would inevitably ensue if the Mormons returned to the county, and he pragmatically withdrew his promise in order to avert a civil war.

Whether the camp would have been able to protect the Saints had they been restored to their lands in Jackson is questionable. The combined Mormon force would have totaled between 400 and 500 men.⁴⁵ On the other hand, 400 to 500 Missourians were involved in the destruction of Phelps' house and printing office on 20 July 1833.⁴⁶ Corrill remarked in December 1833 that the "mob" was twice the size of the

⁴⁴Dunklin to J. H. Haden, 15 August 1834; original in the Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, Missouri.

⁴⁵The *Star* for November 1832 reports a Mormon population in Jackson County of 465 "disciples" [baptised men and women] and 345 children and nonmembers; the March 1833 issue reports about 500 "disciples." *The Evening and Morning Star Extra*, February 1834, asserts that upwards of 1,000 Mormon men, women, and children were driven from Jackson County in November 1833.

⁴⁶*Star*, December 1833. Cf. *The Evening and Morning Star Extra*, February 1834.

Mormon force then in Missouri; and in June 1834 he reported that, at a moment's notice, two or three hundred Jackson Countians turned out to fight the Mormons on a false alarm.⁴⁷ One Lexington citizen wrote to his father that 900 men from Jackson and 700 others from adjoining counties—undoubtedly inflated estimates—had been raised to attack the Mormons if they attempted a return.⁴⁸ And at the 16 June meeting ostensibly to discuss a compromise, the chairman of the Jackson committee declared

in the presence of five or eight hundred persons, appealing to high heaven for the truth of his assertion, that they would dispute every inch of ground, burn every blade of grass, and suffer their bones to bleach on their hills, rather than the Mormons should return to Jackson county.⁴⁹

It appears, therefore, that had Dunklin kept his promise and escorted the Mormons back to their lands, a second violent confrontation would have erupted, with the Mormons at a disadvantage.

The destiny of Zion's Camp, in a real sense, was in Dunklin's hands. His promise of a guard was a precipitating factor in the camp's creation. And his decision not to provide armed assistance removed any opportunity for the camp to play a lawful role in recovering Mormon lands. Nevertheless, in retrospect it would seem that Joseph Smith had no other reasonable alternative at the 24 February council meeting but to respond as he did with the formation of Zion's Camp. Given the Mormons' belief in the eschatological significance of Jackson County, it was impossible for them simply to walk away from their holdings in Jackson without making some substantial effort toward their recovery, particularly with the governor's promise of help lingering in their minds. The camp was the embodiment of such an effort. It further brought into sharp focus just what the Mormons could expect from the Missouri government. Having made that effort and having tested the limits of governmental support, the leaders of the Church could move from a single-minded concentration on Jackson County to examine other alternatives for the Latter-day Saints in Missouri.

⁴⁷*Star*, January 1834, June 1834.

⁴⁸*Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 23 July 1834.

⁴⁹*Missouri Intelligencer*, 28 June 1834.