

The Republican Federalist II, *Massachusetts Centinel*, 2 January 1788

To the MEMBERS of the CONVENTION of Massachusetts.

Honourable Friends, and Fellow Citizens, It clearly appeared by the resolutions quoted in my last address, that the utmost extent of the views of Congress, and of the Legislature of this State; in calling a Federal Convention, was, that it should revise the articles of Confederation, and report such *alterations* and *provisions therein*, as shall render the Federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of government and preservation of the union—that neither Congress or the Legislature had the most distant idea of conducting the matter in a mode different from that prescribed by the Confederation—but that on the other hand, they expressly provided, and would have acted unconstitutionally to have done otherwise, that the proceedings of the Convention, before they become a part of the Federal Constitution, should be agreed to by Congress and confirmed by the Legislatures of the several states.

No one I presume will deny that the powers of the delegates of this state, were as *full* and *extensive* as either Congress or any of the Legislatures had *authority* to give—that the powers of the other delegate[s] were in general, more *limited*—and that had any of them been more *ample* than those of Massachusetts, they must have been founded in *usurpation* and therefore have been *null* and *void*. And have the Federal Convention, in pursuance of their powers, reported the *alterations* and *provisions* mentioned in the recited resolve of Congress? If they have, let us call on Congress, to inform us, whether they have agreed to the report, and to transmit it when approved, to the Legislature for their consideration: This would be conducting upon constitutional principles, but the *call* would be vain, there is no such report, *and the original design of forming the Convention has not been carried into effect*.

The Convention nevertheless have reported a new system, and the object of it is, *a consolidation of the union*. Mr. Wilson denies this fact, and says “if this was a *just objection*, it would be *strongly against the system*. But unfortunately for that gentleman, his *memory* appears to be very *defective*, for he forgot that he has said, in the letter to Congress, signed “George Washington, president, *by unanimous order of the Convention*” —“In all our deliberations on this subject, we kept steadily in our view, that which appears to us the greatest interest of every true American, *the consolidation of the union*.” There the Convention have candidly avowed their intentions, and how Mr. Wilson can reconcile his *jarring* and *contradictory* assertions, I am at a loss to determine. The Convention then having kept “*steadily in view*” “a consolidation of the union,” it is incumbent on every one who is zealous for the *infallibility* of the Convention, and liberal in abusing those who *dare* to think for themselves, to admit that the proposed plan *completely embraces* the object of *consolidation*, for otherwise he will call in question the *ability* of the Convention to execute their design—indeed it must be evident to every one who will attentively read the new system, that it secures to all intents and purposes the *consolidation intended*. And here permit me to remark on an argument, in favour of the new plan, often urged and drawn from the respectable

characters of General Washington and Doctor Franklin: Let those gentlemen have *every honour* that can be paid them, they are justly entitled to *it*—but of what consequence is it to the publick, whether the members who assented or dissented to the new plan, were influenced by *virtuous* and *disinterested*, or by *vicious* and *selfish* motives? If the plan is *properly* before the States, is *good*, and will secure to them “peace, liberty and safety” should it not be adopted, were they even sure that every member who subscribed it was in principle a *Caligula* or a *Nero*? And if the plan is bad and will entail *slavery on the land*, ought it not to be rejected should every subscriber excel in wisdom and integrity *Lycurgus* or *Solon*. Surely the *good* or *bad* effects of the system, depend not on the *characters* of the original *framers*, but on the *system* itself, and on those who may administer it; and no man of candour and discernment will urge *characters*, as an argument for or against this system, however respectable the characters of any particular members, or of the members in general of the federal convention, may be: They had no other authority to act in this matter, than what was derived from their *commissions*—when they ceased to act *in conformity thereto*, they ceased to be a federal convention, and had no more *right* to propose to the United States the new form of government, than an equal number of other gentlemen, who might voluntarily have assembled for this purpose—The members of the convention therefore, admitting they have the merit of a work of supererogation, have thereby inferred no kind of obligation on the States to *consider*, much less to adopt *this plan of consolidation*. The consolidation of the union! What a question is this, to be *taken up* and *decided* by *thirty nine gentlemen*, who had no publick authority whatever for *discussing it!* . . .

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