

Luther Martin to the Printer, *Maryland Journal*, 18 January 1788

Martin's letter answers "Landholder" VIII, an attack upon Elbridge Gerry, which was first printed in the *Connecticut Courant* on 24 December. An anonymous writer criticized the manner in which Martin defended Gerry, asserting that Martin was harmful, not helpful, to Gerry. In late February another writer, claiming to be the "Landholder," defended himself against Martin's charges and, in turn, was answered in three essays by Martin in March. In April "A Friend and Customer," almost certainly Gerry himself, defended Gerry and Martin against the "Landholder's" attacks.

Mr. WILLIAM GODDARD:

SIR, As the Publication under the Signature of the CONNECTICUT LANDHOLDER, is circulating remote from the place of Mr. *Gerry's* residence, and is calculated not only to injure that honourable gentleman in his private character, but also to weaken the effect of his opposition to the government proposed by the late convention, and thereby promote the adoption of a system, which I consider destructive of the rights and liberties of the respective states, and of their citizens; I beg leave, through the channel of your Paper, to declare to the Public, that from the time I took my seat in convention, which was early in June, until the fourth day of September, when I left *Philadelphia*, I am satisfied I was not ten minutes absent from convention while sitting (excepting only five days in the beginning of August, immediately after the committee of detail had reported, during which but little business was done.) That during my attendance, I never heard Mr. *Gerry*, or any other member, introduce a proposition for the redemption of continental money according to its nominal, or any other value, nor did I ever hear that such a proposition had been offered to consideration, or had been thought of. I was intimate with Mr. *Gerry*, and never heard him express in private conversation, or otherwise, a wish for the redemption of continental money, or assign the want of such a provision as a defect—Nor did I ever hear in convention, or any where else, such a motive of conduct attributed to Mr. *Gerry*.

I also declare to the Public, that a considerable time before I left the convention, Mr. *Gerry's* opposition to the system was warm and decided—that in a particular manner he strenuously opposed that provision by which the *power* and *authority* over the *militia* is *taken away* from the *states* and *given* to the *general government*—that in the debate he declared, if that measure was adopted, it would be the most convincing proof that the destruction of the *state governments*, and the *introduction* of a *King* was *designed*, and that no declarations to the contrary *ought* to be *credited*, since it was giving the states the last *coup de grace*, by taking from them the *only* means of *self-preservation*.

The conduct of the advocates and framers of this sytem, towards the *thirteen states*, in pretending it was designed for their advantage, and gradually obtaining power after power to the general government, which could not but end in *their* slavery, he compared to the conduct of a number of *jockeys*, who had thirteen *young colts* to break—they begin with the appearance of kindness, giving them a lock of hay, or a handful of oats, and stroaking them while they eat, until being rendered sufficiently gentle, they suffer a halter to be put round their necks—

obtaining a further degree of their confidence, the jockeys slip, a curb bridle on their heads, and the bit into their mouths, after which the saddle follows of course, and well booted and spurred, with good whips in their hands, they mount and ride them at their pleasure, and although they may kick and flounce a little at first, not being able to get clear of their *riders*, they soon become as *tame* and *passive* as their *masters* could wish them.

In the course of *public* debate in the convention, Mr. *Gerry* applied to the system of government, as then under discussion, the words of *Pope* with respect to *vice*, “that it was a monster of such horrid mien, as to be hated need but to be seen.” And some time before I left *Philadelphia*, he in the same public manner, declared in convention, that he should consider himself a traitor to his country, if he did not oppose the system *there*, and also when he left the convention.

These, Sir, *are facts* which I do not fear being contradicted by any *member* of the convention, and will, I apprehend, satisfactorily shew that Mr. *Gerry’s* opposition proceeded from a conviction in his own mind, that the government, if adopted, would *terminate* in the *destruction* of the *states*, and in the *introduction* of a *kingly* government.

Baltimore, January 13, 1788.

Cite as: The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Digital Edition, ed. John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Charles H. Schoenleber and Margaret A. Hogan. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/RNCN-03-15-02-0110> [accessed 05 Sep 2012]

Original source: Commentaries on the Constitution, Volume XV: Commentaries on the Constitution, No. 3