

A Landholder IV, *Connecticut Courant*, 26 November 1787

To the Landholders and Farmers.

Remarks on the objections made by the Honorable ELBRIDGE GERRY to the new Constitution.

To censure a man for an opinion in which he declares himself honest, and in a matter of which all men have a right to judge, is highly injurious; at the same time, when the opinions even of honorable men are submitted to the people, a tribunal before which the meanest citizen hath a right to speak, they must abide the consequence of public stricture. We are ignorant whether the honorable gentleman possesses state dignities or emoluments which will be endangered by the new system, or hath motives of personality to prejudice his mind and throw him into the opposition; or, if it be so, do not wish to evade the objections by such a charge. As a member of the General Convention, and deputy from a great state, this honorable person hath a right to speak and be heard. It gives us pleasure to know the extent of what may be objected or even surmised, by one whose situation was the best to espy danger, and mark the defective parts of the Constitution, if any such there be. Mr. Gerry, tho in the character of an objector, tells us "he was fully convinced that to preserve the Union, an efficient government was indispensably necessary, and that it would be difficult to make proper amendments to the old Articles of Confederation," therefore, by his own concession, there was an indispensable necessity of a system in many particulars entirely new. He tells us further "that if the people reject this altogether, anarchy may ensue," and what situation can be pictured more awful than a total dissolution of all government. Many defects in the Constitution had better be risked than to fall back into that state of rude violence in which every man's hand is against his neighbor, and there is no judge to decide between them or power of justice to control. But we hope to show that there are no such alarming defects in the proposed structure of government, and that, while a public force is created, the liberties of the people have every possible guard.

Several of the honorable gentleman's objections are expressed in such vague and indecisive terms that they rather deserve the name of insinuations, and we know not against what particular parts of the system they are pointed. Others are explicit and, if real, deserve serious attention. His first objection is "that there is no adequate provision for a representation of the people." This must have respect either to the number of Representatives or to the manner in which they are chosen. The proper number to constitute a safe representation is a matter of judgment in which honest and wise men often disagree. Were it possible for all the people to convene and give their personal assent, some would think this the best mode of making laws; but, in the present instance, it is impracticable. In towns and smaller districts where all the people may meet conveniently and without expense this is doubtless preferable. The state representation is composed of one or two from every town and district, which composes an assembly not so large as to be unwieldy in acting, nor so expensive as to burden the people. But if so numerous a representation were made from every part of the United States, with our present population, the new Congress would consist of three thousand men; with the population of Great Britain, to which we may arrive in half a century, of ten thousand; and with

the population of France, which we shall probably equal in a century and half, of thirty thousand.

Such a body of men might be an army to defend the country in case of foreign invasion, but not a legislature, and the expense to support them would equal the whole national revenue. By the proposed Constitution the new Congress will consist of nearly one hundred men. When our population is equal to Great Britain of three hundred men, and when equal to France of nine hundred. Plenty of lawgivers! Why any gentleman should wish for more is not conceivable.

Considering the immense territory of America, the objection with many will be on the other side; that, when the whole is populated, it will constitute a legislature unmanageable by its numbers. Convention, foreseeing this danger, have so worded the article that if the people should at any future time judge necessary, they may diminish the representation.

As the state legislatures have to regulate the internal policy of every town and neighborhood, it is convenient enough to have one or two men, particularly acquainted with every small district of country, its interests, parties, and passions. But the federal legislature can take cognizance only of national questions and interests, which in their very nature are general, and for this purpose five or ten honest and wise men chosen from each state, men who have had previous experience in state legislation, will be more competent than an hundred. From an acquaintance with their own state legislatures, they will always know the sense of the people at large, and the expense of supporting such a number will be as much as we ought to incur.

If the honorable gentleman, in saying "there is no adequate provision for a representation of the people," refers to the manner of choosing them, a reply to this is naturally blended with his second objection, "that they have no security for the right of election." It is impossible to conceive what greater security can be given, by any form of words, than we here find.

The federal Representatives are to be chosen by the votes of the people. Every freeman is an elector. The same qualifications which enable you to vote for state representatives give you a federal voice. It is a right you cannot lose, unless you first annihilate the state legislature and declare yourselves incapable of electing, which is a degree of infatuation improbable as a second deluge to drown the world.

Your own assemblies are to regulate the formalities of this choice, and unless they betray you, you cannot be betrayed. But perhaps it may be said, Congress have a power to control this formality as to the time and places of electing; and we allow they have. But this objection, which at first looks frightful, was designed as a guard to the privileges of the electors. Even state assemblies may have their fits of madness and passion. This, tho not probable, is still possible.

We have a recent instance in the State of Rhode Island, where a desperate junto are governing contrary to the sense of a great majority of the people. It may be the case in any other state, and should it ever happen that the ignorance or rashness of the state assemblies in a fit of

jealousy should deny you this sacred right, the deliberate justice of the continent is enabled to interpose and restore you a federal voice. This right is therefore more inviolably guarded than it can be by the government of your state, for it is guaranteed by the whole empire. Tho out of the order in which the honorable gentleman proposes his doubts, I wish here to notice some questions which he makes. The proposed plan among others, he tells us, involves these questions: "Whether the several state governments shall be so altered as in effect to be dissolved? Whether in lieu of the state governments the national Constitution now proposed shall be substituted?" I wish for sagacity to see on what these questions are founded. No alteration in the state governments is even proposed, but they are to remain identically the same that they now are. Some powers are to be given into the hands of your federal Representatives, but these powers are all in their nature general, such as must be exercised by the whole or not at all, and such as are absolutely necessary; or your commerce, the price of your commodities, your riches, and your safety will be the sport of every foreign adventurer. Why are we told of the dissolution of our state governments, when by this plan they are indissolubly linked? They must stand or fall, live or die together. The national legislature consists of two houses, a Senate and House of Representatives. The Senate is to be chosen by the assemblies of the particular states; so that if the assemblies are dissolved, the Senate dissolves with them. The national Representatives are to be chosen by the same electors, and under the same qualifications, as choose the state representatives; so that if the state representation be dissolved, the national representation is gone of course.

State representation and government is the very basis of the congressional power proposed. This is the most valuable link in the chain of connection and affords double security for the rights of the people. Your liberties are pledged to you by your own state and by the power of the whole empire. You have a voice in the government of your own state and in the government of the whole. Were not the gentleman on whom the remarks are made very honorable, and by the eminence of office raised above a suspicion of cunning, we should think he had, in this instance, insinuated merely to alarm the fears of the people. His other objections will be mentioned in some future number of the LANDHOLDER.

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-02-03-02-0004-0010-0011> [accessed 06 Jul 2012]

Original source: Ratification by the States, Volume III: Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut