

## **Philanthrop: To the People *American Mercury*, 19 November 1787**

The new proposed Constitution being a system of great magnitude and general discussion as well as of universal concern, every individual has an undoubted right to offer his sentiments upon a subject so interesting to the community at large, tho' sorry indeed I am to discover occasion for further incentives to stimulate the people to adopt, with heart and hand, a system so salutary and so conducive to public welfare, and more than sorry am I that my abilities are not equal to the task of portraying the base designs and wicked machinations of some of its opposers. None but those destitute of honor and devoid of every spark of sensibility could have the audacity to propagate groundless innuendoes, with a view to impose on the generous credulity of weak minds, and thereby, if possible, produce anarchy and confusion in the state. Much pains is daily taken by artful misanthropists to evince that the adoption of the new Constitution will deprive the people of all liberty, alleging that the grand legislature, or Congress, will then have power to oppress the people at pleasure; an idea so absurd could never originate in the breast of an honest man not destitute of reason. Is there a single clause in the Constitution that deprives the people of any liberty which people in any part of the world do or ought to possess? Are not the people at large forever to remain the sole governors (under God) of the land we live in? Are not the Congress and Senate servants of the people, chosen and instructed by them, because the whole body of the people cannot assemble at one place to make and execute laws? And are not the Congress and Senate in regular rotation to return and descend to the private station from whence they were elected by the people, and then and there enjoy the blessings resulting from their good administration, with acclamations from their constituents and a heartfelt satisfaction which to a susceptible mind must be more ample reward than the possession of all the wealth in Peru? Or must they not, upon the other hand, experience and participate [in] all the evils attendant [upon] injudicious or iniquitous laws, and receive the execrations of thousands, and be deemed to everlasting oblivion in the rank of mankind, never more to enjoy the confidence of the people, which must inevitably produce that horror and compunction of mind, only to be described by comparing their situation to the state of the damned? For my own part, I am convinced that while Congress are appointed under the restrictions as limited in the new Constitution, were they as absolute as the Dey of Algiers, no fatal consequences could ever attend the community at large. Will any man of common sense suppose that the grand legislature of thirteen United States can be less interested in the welfare, happiness, and prosperity of the country than any other set of men whatever? Will their salaries for two or even for six years (which seldom amounts to more than their expenses) compensate for loss of character and the ruin which they and their posterity must participate with the bulk of mankind should their negotiations produce ruinous consequences to their constituents? Every man of candor must believe that a Congress and Senate, chosen conformably to the mode pointed out in the new Constitution, will exert every faculty and strain every nerve to work out the salvation of their country, because it will be their interest so to do.

Let us for a moment call to view the most specious reason that can be urged by the advocates for anarchy and confusion and the opposers to this glorious Constitution, and see what weight a rational man could give them. And let us in the first instance allow that all mankind are

actuated by interested motives. The most plausible reason then that can be adduced for violation of faith, and prostitution of sentiments, is private interest; but surely real true self-interest, considered on a large extensive scale, is public good. Can the members of Congress, their friends, and posterity thrive and flourish in a country overwhelmed with misfortunes and subjected, thro their management, to some direful approaching catastrophe? They certainly cannot! Their grandeur, their peace and happiness, is as much connected with, and as inseparable from, the grandeur, peace, and happiness of the community at large as that of a husband and his beloved wife. The conjugal state might with as much propriety be forbidden and celibacy enjoined lest the head of the family should commit acts of violence on his offspring, and be incapable of governing his household, as that the present Constitution should be rejected lest the people selected to preside at the helm of affairs should commit some flagrant act of injustice and thereby disgrace human nature.

There is, in my opinion, no particular body or description of men in North America so deeply interested in the establishment of the new Constitution as the farmer. They of all men will immediately experience the advantage resulting therefrom. Their taxes, instead of being increased, will be lessened, and their produce will instantaneously (or very soon) rise in value, as a field will then be opened for a more extensive trade than ever can take place while there is no stability in government. The merchant will then court the farmer, and the farmer be encouraged to cultivate his lands.

That money must be raised and that government must be supported, no men of common sense will deny. Should this Constitution be adopted, the duties on imports, which is a voluntary tax, will render needless or at least lessen the direct taxation of landed property; whereas at present, while we have, as it were, no government or at least no energy in government, duties of impost and excise are laid in the different states which serve only as a subterfuge for the (I cannot call them merchants) peddler and trader to impose on the honest farmer; because the trader at present makes use of the authority of (what is called) government to enhance the value of his goods by adding to the costs and charges the whole duty stipulated by our assemblies, whereas it is well known that the most sanctified among the traders do not pay more than one-tenth of the duties they charge; so that while the honest unwary people are daily paying taxes, which is strict justice shouldst tend to lessen their foreign and domestic debt, they are only enriching the trader who pockets the whole.

One proposition suggested and artfully propagated by the enemies of our country, and which is daily gaining ground among the weaker brethren, requires notice, and which I could wish to see descanted by some abler pen, as it really has, and if not refuted may have, more weight in defeating the completion of this glorious Constitution than any other consideration whatever, viz.: It is alleged that the Southern States being entitled to send a larger number of delegates than the Northern, they will have it in their power to carry measures into execution that may be peculiarly injurious to the Northern States, as though what would tend, under the proposed Constitution, to the aggrandizement of the former must inevitably involve the latter in ruin.<sup>1</sup> This proposition is so big with absurdity that I have not patience, nor even leisure at present, to point out its fallacy; but hope it may not be considered as chimerical, and that the worthy

Landholder, which appeared in the last *American Mercury*, will not suffer his talents to sleep upon this occasion.

In ardent expectation of seeing the new Constitution speedily established, I remain on all occasions PHILANTHROP.

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