Centinel IV
Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 30 November 1787 (excerpts)

To the PEOPLE of PENNSYLVANIA.

. . . What gave birth to the late Continental Convention? Was it not the situation of our commerce, which lay at the mercy of every foreign power, who from motives of interest or enmity could restrict and controul it, without risquing a retaliation on the part of America, as Congress was impotent on this subject? Such indeed was the case with respect to Britain, whose hostile regulations gave such a stab to our navigation as to threaten its annihilation, it became the interest of even the American merchant to give a preference to foreign bottoms; hence the distress of our seamen, shiprights, and every mechanic art dependent on navigation.

By these regulations too we were limitted in markets for our produce, our vessels were excluded from their West-India Islands, many of our staple commodities were denied entrance in Britain; hence the husbandmen were distressed by the demand for their crops being lessened and their prices reduced. This is the source to which may be traced every evil we experience, that can be relieved by a more energetic government. Recollect the language of complaint for years past, [com]pare the recommendations of Congress founded on such complaints, pointing out the remedy, examine the reasons assigned by the different states for appointing delegates to the late Convention, view the powers vested in that body; they all harmonize in one sentiment, that the due regulation of trade and navigation was the anxious wish of every class of citizens, was the great object of calling the Convention. . . .

If you are in doubt about the nature and principles of the proposed government, view the conduct of its authors and patrons, that affords the best explanation, the most striking comment.

The evil genius of darkness presided at its birth, it came forth under the veil of mystery, its true features being carefully concealed, and every deceptive art has been and is practising to have this spurious brat received as the genuine offspring of heaven-born liberty. So fearful are its patrons that you should discern the imposition, that they have hurried on its adoption, with the greatest precipitation; they have endeavored also to preclude all investigation, they have endeavored to intimidate all opposition; by such means as these, have they surreptitiously procured a Convention in this state, favorable to their views; and here again investigation and discussion are abridged, the final question is moved before the subject has been under consideration; an appeal to the people is precluded even in the last resort, lest their eyes should be opened; the Convention have denied the minority the privilege of entering the reasons of their dissent on its journals—

Thus despotism is already triumphant, and the genius of liberty is on the eve of her exit, is about bidding an eternal adieu to this once happy people. . . .

. . . Some of their writers for instance, paint the distresses of every class of citizens with all the glowing language of eloquence, as if this was a demonstration of the excellence, or even [of] the safety of the new plan, which, notwithstanding the reality of this distress, may be a system of tyranny and oppression; other writers tell you of the great men who composed the late convention, and give you a pompous display of their virtues, instead of a justification of the plan of government; and others again urge the tyrant's plea, they endeavor to make it a case of necessity, now is the critical moment; they represent the adoption of this government as our only alternative, as the last opportunity we shall have of peaceably establishing a government; they assert it to be the best system that can be formed, and that if we reject it, we will have a worse one or none at all, nay, that if we presume to propose alterations, we shall get into a labyrinth of difficulties from which we cannot be extricated, as no two states will agree in amendments, that therefore it would involve us in irreconcilable discord. . . .

That the powers of Congress ought to be strengthened, all allow, but is this a conclusive proof of the necessity to adopt the proposed plan; is it a proof that because the late convention, in the first essay upon so arduous and difficult a subject, harmonised in their ideas, that a future convention will not, or that after a full investigation and mature consideration of the objections, they will not plan a better government and one more agreeable to the sentiments of America, or is it any proof that they can never again agree in any plan? The late convention must indeed have been inspired, as some of its advocates have asserted, to admit the truth of these positions, or even to admit the possibility of the proposed government, being such a one as America ought to adopt; for this body went upon original ground, foreign from their intentions or powers, they must therefore have been wholly uninformed of the sentiments of their constituents in respect to this form of government, as it was not in their contemplation when the convention was appointed to erect a new government, but to strengthen the old one. Indeed they seem to have been determined to monopolize the exclusive merit of the discovery, or rather as if darkness was essential to its success they precluded all communication with the people, by closing their doors; thus the well disposed members unassisted by public information and opinion, were induced by those arts that are now practising on the people, to give their sanction to this system of despotism.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XIV: Commentaries on the Constitution, Public and Private [2] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1983), 317–24.