



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > Constitutional Debates: Federalist and Antifederalist Essays > The Debate Over the Nature of Union and Republican Government > State Sovereignty and Union

Atticus IV

Boston Independent Chronicle, 27 December 1787

LETTER IV,

From a gentleman in the country, to his friend in town.

“But Heaven hath a hand in these events,
To whose high will we bound our calm contents.”

SHAKESPEARE.¹

Every State, of any considerable magnitude, contains three classes of men. Those who have small estates in land, and little money: those who have large estates in one, or both of these: and those who depend for their support, upon salaries, or wages given for personal service. The influence of the first mentioned class, tends to a mere democracy; that of the second evidently to aristocracy; and, of the last, a monarch is the natural defender, and patron. This latter class will always find, that great men will oppress them; men of small estates will pay them ill; but a monarch will defend them; for they are in turn the instruments of his power. — To make the citizens peaceable, the government of every country, of any considerable extent, should be mixed, and should consist of the combined influence of all these three classes of men.

It is certain that in a country like ours, mere democracy can never be the prevailing government. That class of people who favour it, have no regular system of action. Their force is exerted only by starts, and on sudden occasions. Their domestic concerns soon call them back to their ordinary employments. — They cannot become soldiers themselves, unless they leave their families to perish, and they have not money to hire others to fight for them. They cannot bring the rich down to their class, nor prevent the dependant sort from feeling the influence of money. They pay the learned professions ill, and particularly are apt to leave the clergy unsupported. So that the influence of learning and of religious instruction, is against them. — This class is very apt to lose its patrons. If they become eminent, they acquire riches, or power, and their ideas change. — If they are unfortunate, they sink into the dependant part of the community. — Were the people actually brought to an equality, you could not keep them so. An entire massacre of all the great men (were it possible) once in seven years, would not effect the purpose. So that in so large a territory as that of Massachusetts, whose inhabitants are so variously employed, and of such an active, ambitious and enterprising spirit, a pure democracy can never prevail.

There are also very great obstacles to the establishment of an aristocracy. We have no intailed estates, no hereditary offices.—Our aristocracies are all, such as nature, personal merit, present office, and not *standing laws* have made. Offices and estates are continually changing from man to man. If the father of a family shall amass a large estate, it is soon divided thro' a numerous family, or dissipated by some pamper'd heir. There are only two supposeable cases, in which it is possible for an aristocracy to prevail. Either the people must sink into a state of stupidity and total inattention to public affairs, which I conceive party-spirit must forbid; or they must by insurrections give occasion to the rich and politic to raise an army, and maintain it. otherwise an aristocracy cannot be established. If the laws under our present Constitution, were allowed to have their full effect, it would forever be impossible.

Considering then, the natural obstacles there are to the prevalence of either party: Is not the force of the executive and judicial departments, sufficient to hold the balance between them? Were our state not influenced by the policy of other states, I am certain it would be. Any number of spirited citizens, with law, money, discipline, and experience on their side, would be equal to three times their number without them. That Governour will scarcely be found, who will not dread, more than death, the infamy of having the state subverted when he is at the head. Nor will his dependence on the people for his office utterly enervate the power of that motive for defending the state. Thro' inexperience of a new government, some of the dependant part of the community lost their places in a late grand contest; but they will soon learn to range themselves under the banners of the executive power. You will find most of the learned professions disposed to give strength to the monarchical principle. And by a most natural connection, the kingdom and priesthood always go together.

Did we consider these principles of reasoning only, we should be ready to pronounce, that our constitution was a most happy one, and calculated for a long duration. But we are in a kind of ambiguous connection with twelve other republics; whose separate interests will often lead them to measures injurious to us. If we enact laws, seemingly wise and wholesome, to prevent unnecessary importations; to oblige our rivals in trade to deal with us on equal footing; to relieve the public wants and establish the state's credit, by duties and excises; the neighbouring states are sure to counteract us, and take advantage of our laws for their own emolument.— Then an artificial scarcity of money is created; lands depreciate, every kind of business is stagnated, and taxes which compared with estates are not heavy, yet are too severely felt in the collection. All public and private credit is lost. The people at large not seeing whence their evils arise, charge them on the government and laws. They clamor for tender-acts, paper-money, and all the engines of fraud. Harpy speculators join the din of complaint. The democratic party are roused to arms, and proceed to open rebellion. But here they find themselves weak, being destitute of discipline, and resources for war. They are defeated. But on the field of election they have better success; turn out their former representatives, and executive officers, and choose new ones; and perhaps seem appeased for a while. They find out the weak side of government, and will keep it always in view at their annual elections, and prevent it from ever rising to strength and respectability.

Nor do I conceive that it is possible, without a government over the whole thirteen States, invested with powers to transact all their concerns, which are properly national, with Judicial Courts and all the apparatus of civil power, ever to remedy the contentions in particular States,

between the great men and the adverse party. But we must be tossing from one wretched measure, and expedient to another; continually quarrelling, and making laws which discourage arts and industry, and discountenance honesty itself; till we, being sick of our boasted equal liberty, shall gladly embrace the offer of some hero, of plausible character, to give us a good government, and establish it by the sword.

The Americans are of quick understanding, lively and enterprising: They possess great means of information: They will not therefore be long in finding out that government which shall be a balance to their passions: Under that, and that only, will they rest: From this, I am almost confident that the government, proposed by the Federal Convention, will take place: They who think that it will bear to be much relaxed, or amended, may be honest; but they are short-sighted men. *Powers must be adequate to their end.* And let any man judge from facts that have already appeared, whether any linsey-woolsey, half formed expedients, will deliver us from the wretched perplexity of our affairs. If this does not take place, I am about as certain as I can be of any thing, short of fact and demonstration, that in less than ten years, perhaps in less than five, a bold push will be made to establish a monarchy. And it may succeed to the loss of thousands of lives, and of the liberties of the people. I rather think that a government; either the federal or one very like it, will take place: Or that the states will divide, and the northern establish a mixed government; and the southern a monarchy, *or else go to perdition.*

You seem to be anxious, my friend, lest we should lose all government: Never fear it, we shall have an efficient government, and that very soon: The great first-cause has constructed the universe, better than you imagine. He has inserted in it principles which will give *us* government; and the rage of parties, will only quicken their operation: My fears are, lest we reject the milder government, and be obliged to receive the more severe. The principles, which of late have appeared, are productive of the most efficient governments. The hand of the Supreme is in all these things, and we can do nothing against his established laws.

Your love to your country, my friend, must needs be tender, since every trifle alarms you: A *Mason*, angry at being left almost alone in a favourite opinion; and pleading in one breath for a bill of rights, and in the next for expost-facto laws, (which are destructive of all right) alarms you. A plausible and artful *Brutus* alarms you: But pay a little attention to his argument, and you will see it flatly contradicts itself. In one part of his argument, the Federal government is so *enormously powerful*, that it swallows up all before it, the State governments with all their appurtenances! In the other part it is so *weak*, that it cannot command the obedience of the people: But if it proves any thing, it proves, that we ought to establish a royal government: For I presume this will not be denied, that these States, as governments, utterly unconnected with each other, cannot subsist. We shall become the prey of every invader. From this proceeds Brutus, and says, We cannot subsist as a national republican government; because the people, in different States, differ in climate, manners, interest, &c.—But for a much stronger reason, we cannot subsist, as confederated sovereign States, differing as we do, in climate, manners, interest, &c.—Therefore we cannot subsist as republican governments at all. And I have known several persons, who oppose the federal Constitution, do it in order to compel us at last to submit to a monarchy. I wish that they and all other politicians were more honest. Of this, however, I am secure, that we shall soon have an effective government. The rich, the wise, the brave, the industrious, and enterprising, I am sure, will not be content to lie at the mercy of the idle, and licentious; and be the prey of

harpy speculators. But as to the precise method of bringing it to pass, I chearfully submit to the power that rules the Globe.—Adieu, remember your friend, ATTICUS.

1. William Shakespeare, *King Richard the Second*, Act V, scene 2, lines 37–38.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. V: Massachusetts [2] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1998), 531–34.