A Landholder IV
Connecticut Courant, 26 November 1787

To the Landholders and Farmers.
Remarks on the objections made by the Hon. 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 honourable 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 indispensibly 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 indispensible 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 neighbour, and there is no judge to decide between them or power of justice to control. But we hope to shew 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 expence 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 expence 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 unmanagable 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 neighbourhood, 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 fœderal 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 expence of supporting such a number will be as much as we ought to incur.

If the Hon. 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 Hon. 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 connexion, 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 honourable, 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.

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