Uncus
Maryland Journal, 9 November 1788 (excerpt)

. . . It would be useless to *refill* a news-paper with repetition of the *Centinel's* objections—*Nothing done by the Convention pleases him!* In No. 1, he says, "if it were not for the stability and attachment which time and habit give to government, it would be in the power of the enlightened and aspiring, if they should combine, at any time, to destroy the best establishments"—If this be true, the forming a bill of rights would have been as needless as its existence would have been useless;—for, in the *first* instance, *it* would be no kind of security to the people—and in the *last*, the people do not want such a security, having already *every "stability and attachment which time and habit"* can render necessary to fix in their minds, the greatest horror of tyranny, and the most sacred and exalted ideas of *that liberty*, which they have *ever* enjoyed, and to which they know they are entitled. Speaking of the constitution of Great-Britain he says, "the only operative and efficient check upon the conduct of administration, is *the sense of the people at large*;" and are not *the sentiments of "the people at large" of these States, as tenacious of their liberties* as those of England?

To proceed with the contradictions and inconsistencies of Centinel, would perhaps be thought an insult to the understanding of an enlightened community; but would not much ink have been saved, and the little expended to better purpose, had he declared, in *a few words*, that man is *an imperfect creature*, and, that owing to a difference of constitution, climate and education, he did not believe they would ever all think *exactly* alike; and, as it was not *certain* that, *even* should a law, dictated by *that wisdom* which cannot err, be offered *them*, they would all agree to it, it would be the *best* to have *none*?

The *Centinel* seems almost *expiring with fear*, for "*the liberty of the press*"—By his idea of the subject, one would think he had just made his escape from a *Turkish Haram*, or had been buoyed from the gloomy regions of a *Spanish mine*. It is almost impossible that a man, who was educated in any of the Christian nations of Europe, and really so, that any one, who is an inhabitant of any of the United States of America, should be ignorant that "the liberty of the press" is what the people, for whom the late Convention were acting, look upon as a privilege, with which every inhabitant is born;—a right which Nature, and Nature's God, has given, and too sacred to require being mentioned in the national transactions of these states. Had *it* been reserved by a particular article, posterity might imagine *we* thought *it wanted* written laws for security; an idea we would not choose should disgrace the legislature of the United States. If in England, "the only operative and efficient check upon the conduct of administration is *the sense of the people at large*," what *greater* security for the "liberty of the press" would the *Centinel* wish for, than "*the sense of the people at large*" of these states.

The "*sense of the people at large*" obliges the august Emperor of China, once a year, to hold the plough—the "*sense of the people at large*" obliged David, absolute monarch of Israel, to "go forth and speak comfortably to the people."—*It*, in a great degree, influences the Monarch of France, and *it* has ever had great influence on the court of Great-Britain;—and when we reflect how well acquainted each member of the Convention were with "*the sense of the people at large*" of these states, is it not surprising, with what minuteness they have barred against *every encroachment* upon the liberties of the people, which would not have disgraced "*the sense of the people at large*," whom *they* represented? *No man* can possibly be admitted into Congress, unless born, or having resided within these states for a term of years sufficient for him to inform himself of "*the sense of the people at large*" for whom he is to make laws. . . .

The *Centinel's* long and laboured harangue respecting courts of justice being appointed by Congress in each State, to try common actions of debt, &c. must be a creature of his own designing, or deluded imagination. To fix that matter beyond the reach of dispute, the new proposed plan has expressly limited the jurisdiction of Congress, as to such authority; "to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatever, over such districts, (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States and acceptance of Congress, become the seat of government of the United States; and to exercise like authority over all places purchased by the consent of the legislature of the State, in which the same shall be, for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals, dockyards, and other needful buildings, &c." The authority which the proposed plan gives to Congress, to form treaties, regulate trade, decide disputes between different States, and between individuals respecting lands &c. the *Centinel* seems either artfully, or ignorantly to suppose, they can and *will exercise*, respecting the internal police of each State.

Does the new proposed plan give Congress more power than is absolutely necessary they should possess, to enable them to act for the interest—secure the trade—protect and support the honour of the States? If not, is it not absurd to object by saying, when they are in possession of *this* they can soon gain *more*? By this rule they never must have *any*. Most people no doubt, will agree with *Centinel*, in this particular, that the freedom of a nation does not so much depend on what a piece of parchment may contain,—as their virtue,—ideas of liberty—and "*the sense of the people at large*." It was not *Magna Charta* written on parchment, which united the English Barons to oppose King John; but, the united opposition of the Barons that *forced* from King John *Magna Charta*. Is it a sufficient reason to debar a *virtuous people* from the benefit of any laws, because perfect ones would not constitute the happiness of a *vicious people*?

When the Americans shall have lost their virtue—when those sentiments of liberty which pervade the breasts of freemen, shall cease to glow in their bosoms, *bills of right* will not secure their liberties. But whilst they practice *virtue*, and retain *those sentiments*,—from whence can a *Congress* be collected, who will *dare* infringe their liberties; or be ignorantly hardy enough to attempt "*the liberty of the press*." Should it be thought best at any time hereafter to amend the plan; sufficient provision for it is made in Art. 5, Sect. 3, without placing ourselves in the situation of a conquered people; or being obliged, like the devoted Polanders, when divided among three powers, to sue for such *conditions* as we could obtain.

Baltimore, *November* 8.

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