A Plain Citizen: To the Honorable the Convention of the State of Pennsylvania Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 22 November 1787

The fate of America is now suspended, as it were, in a balance, and awaits its final doom from you and the conventions of the different states; with whom it rests, either to entail misery on millions yet unborn or to transmit your dear-bought liberties, inviolate, to your latest posterity.

Consider, then, gentlemen, the importance of the business before you. Behold! your bleeding country supplicates your aid to snatch her from the verge of destruction, and cries for your helping hands to guide her tottering footsteps from the brink of ruin! Behold! the various orders of mechanics, the manufacturers, the merchants, and the husbandmen of America, at the recital of whose calamities humanity shudders!

Behold! the American name insulted and despised by all the world! Nay more—Behold! our federal government, the laughingstock and footstool of desperate and abandoned villains at home! And, surely, you will not hesitate to adopt every measure which may be calculated to relieve the sufferings of your distressed fellow citizens, to vindicate the honor and dignity of your injured country, and, to render her once more respectable among the nations of the earth.

The Constitution, which is now submitted to your consideration, is proposed to answer the above purposes; in discussing this, I trust you will bear in mind, that you are to determine upon a form of government calculated, not to suit the sinister views of any particular state, but to promote the general interest and happiness of the United States.

This proposed Constitution has, for some time past, been a general topic of argumentation and has engaged the attention of many able writers, both for and against it; but I am sorry to find that a majority of these have not been guided by that calm and moderate reason, which the magnitude of the subject deserved.

Many of the advocates for the new Constitution are transported, by an immoderate zeal, beyond the bounds of reason and scruple not to assert that it has neither faults nor imperfections, as if it were like the Jewish theocracy, the immediate work of heaven.

The Convention were not possessed of arrogance enough to think this, more than any other human work, entirely free from faults, and, therefore, have provided for its future amendment, in such particulars as the sense of the people may, at any time, require.

Its opponents have had recourse to the most wretched stratagems to prejudice the people against it. They have made use of the most unmerited calumny and detraction in charging the worthy patriots of the Federal Convention with "insidious" and "long-meditated designs of en-

slaving their fellow citizens." When I found the enemies of the new Constitution, instead of confining themselves to argument, thus endeavoring to blacken some of the most respectable characters America can boast of, I confess their cause appeared, to me, to be a very bad one, for reason needs not the assistance of slander to enforce her arguments.

This Constitution comes before you sanctioned by names which do honor to human nature; but, since all are liable to err, let the merits of the system itself, and the situation of your country, be your only criterion.

An idea has been held out by some, who, perhaps may be well-meaning people, that the different state conventions may alter and amend the Constitution at pleasure. As this mistaken notion will, probably, be carried, by some members, into your honorable house, permit me to bestow a few remarks upon it.

That the Convention have given no power to the citizens of any state to make the smallest alteration in the proposed plan of government is an incontrovertible fact; well knowing that the different states, unless when convened together, can never be unanimous in anything. This is evident from the contempt with which many of them have, from time to time, treated the requisitions of Congress. When the impost was required, it was only granted by some of the states, and that upon such terms as each of them pleased. Is there, then, the smallest probability that the alterations, which might please any particular state, would be accepted by the others? Certainly, there is not.

If one state has a right to propose amendments, so have the other twelve; supposing them all to enjoy and exercise this privilege, in its utmost extent, what would be the consequence? The petty interests of a single state, not the welfare and happiness of the Union, would predominate in each state convention; so that, instead of the present regular and federal plan, we should have a parcel of narrow, partial and illiberal proposals, jumbled together in one confused chaos, which would require no less than the omnipotent *fiat* of Jehovah to reduce them to order or to consistency with each other.

I conceive, with due submission to your wisdom, that the chief object you are to consider is whether it will be more conducive to the happiness of your country to adopt the proposed Constitution, as it is, or to reject it and continue to encounter all the evils with which we are beset, under the present Confederation. And, here, you have many powerful incentives to urge the adoption of the new plan.

Our situation is truly alarming and not to be trifled with; liberty, in these states, has been changed into licentiousness, and this, if some remedy be not speedily adopted, cannot fail to shackle the freeborn sons of America with the chains of slavery. I repeat it; unless a firm federal government shall be immediately established, slavery is inevitable. The people are distressed beyond measure; their patience is nearly exhausted; and they are now as anxious to get rid of the present form of federal government, as they formerly were to shake off the yoke of Britain.

Is there not reason, then, to fear that if the proposed Constitution shall be rejected, they will enroll themselves under the banners of some enterprising ruffian, and, at one bold stroke, annihilate all government and introduce anarchy into these states? Should this ever be the unhappy fate of our country, liberty must take her flight from amongst us never, never to return again, and we must become the abject slaves of some hardy villain, who will give us a government and laws, at the point of the bayonet. May Heaven guide *your* councils and avert the impending danger.

Nor are these groundless chimeras of a disturbed brain. Let any man reflect coolly upon the situation of Massachusetts last winter and of Pennsylvania at the present moment; let him inquire into the sentiments of the people in general, who have long murmured against the present plan of government, and look up to the proposed Constitution, as the only relief for all their calamities. I say, let him weigh well these circumstances and declare, if he can, that my apprehensions are vain.

It has been suggested, that another Federal Convention should be called, to revise the proposed plan of government. To this, it is sufficient to answer that a considerable time would be required to carry it into effect, and that, in the meantime, the popular frenzy might rise to extremes and be productive of the most serious consequences. Besides, it is by no means probable, that men, of sufficient prudence and abilities, would be found, hardy enough, to undertake the task, after the virulence, and scurrility the worthy members of the late Convention have experienced; not even the illustrious SAVIOR OF HIS COUNTRY has been exempted from the most illiberal torrents of abuse, that envy or malice, could suggest.

In short, gentlemen, I hope you will find many urgent reasons for ratifying the new Constitution. If it should even be found imperfect in some particulars, I trust you will nevertheless adopt it, when you consider, that the members of Congress, under this Constitution, will represent the people more effectually than even the members of the late Federal Convention; and may be instructed, by their constituents, to make such alterations and amendments in it, as may be found expedient, still further to secure the blessings of liberty to America; which, when ratified by the people, as in the present instance, shall become a part of the Federal Constitution. The members, who shall be first chosen, under the new plan, may be instructed, for this purpose, by the people, if found necessary. That real patriotism, and wisdom, may guide your councils is the sincere wish of A Plain Citizen.

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