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An Old Whig VII

Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 28 November 1787
(excerpt)

... Indeed very few go so far as to controvert the right of the people to propose amendments; but we are told that the thing is impracticable; that if we begin to propose amendments there will be no end to them; that the several states will never agree in their amendments; that we shall never unite in any plan; that if we reject this we shall either have a worse or none at all; that we ought therefore to adopt this *at once*, without alteration or amendment. Now these are very kind gentlemen, who insist upon doing so much good for us, whether we will or not. Idiots and maniacs ought certainly to be restrained from doing themselves mischief, and should be compelled to that which is for their own good. Whether the people of America are to be considered in this light, and treated accordingly, is a question which deserves, perhaps, more consideration than it has yet received. A contest between the patients and their doctors, which are mad or which are fools, might possibly be a very unhappy one. I hope at least that we shall be able to settle this important business without so preposterous a dispute. What then would you have us do, it may be asked? Would you have us adopt the proposed Constitution or reject it? I answer that I would neither wish the one nor the other. Though I would be far from pretending to dictate to the representatives of the people what steps ought to be pursued, yet a method seems to present itself so simple, so perfectly calculated to obviate all difficulties, to reconcile us with one another, and establish unanimity and harmony among the people of this country, that I cannot forbear to suggest it. I hope that most of my readers have already anticipated me in what I am about to propose. Whether they have or not, I shall venture to state it, in the humble expectations that it may have some tendency to reconcile honest men of all parties with one another.

The method I would propose is this:

1st. Let the conventions of each state, as they meet, after considering the proposed Constitution, state their objections and propose their amendments.

So far from these objections and amendments clashing with each other in irreconcilable discord, as it has been too often suggested they would do, it appears that from what has been hitherto published in the different states in opposition to the proposed Constitution, we have a right to expect that they will harmonize in a very great degree. The reason I say so is, that about the same time, in very different parts of the continent, the very same objections have been made, and the very same alterations proposed by different writers, who I verily believe, know nothing

at all of each other, and were very far from acting a premeditated concert, and that others who have not appeared as writers in the newspapers, in the different states, have appeared to act and speak in perfect unison with those objections and amendments, particularly in the article of a bill of rights. That in short, the very same sentiments seem to have been echoed from the different parts of the continent by the opposers of the proposed Constitution, and these sentiments have been very little contradicted by its friends, otherwise than by suggesting their fears, that by opposing the Constitution at present proposed, we might be disappointed of any federal government or receive a worse one than the present. It would be a most delightful surprise to find ourselves all of one opinion at last; and I cannot forbear hoping that when we come fairly to compare our sentiments, we shall find ourselves much more nearly agreed than in the hurry and surprise in which we have been involved on this subject, than we ever suffered ourselves to imagine.

2d. When the conventions have stated these objections and amendments, let them transmit them to Congress and adjourn, praying that Congress will direct another convention to be called from the different states, to consider of these objections and amendments, and pledging themselves to abide by whatever decision shall be made by such future convention on the subject; whether it be to amend the proposed Constitution or to reject any alteration and ratify it as it stands.

3d. If a new convention of the United States should meet, and revise the proposed Constitution, let us agree to abide by their decision. It is past a doubt that every good citizen of America pants for an efficient federal government—I have no doubt we shall concur at last in some plan of continental government, even if many people could imagine exceptions to it; but if the exceptions which are made at present shall be maturely considered and even be pronounced by our future representatives as of no importance (which I trust they will not); even in that case, I have no doubt that almost every man will give up his own private opinion and concur in that decision.

4th. If by any means another continental convention should fail to meet, then let the conventions of the several states again assemble and at last decide the great solemn question whether we shall adopt the Constitution now proposed, or reject it? And, whenever it becomes necessary to decide upon this point, one at least who from the beginning has been invariably anxious for the liberty and independence of his country will concur in adopting and supporting this Constitution, rather than none; though I confess I could easily imagine, some other form of confederation, which I should think better entitled to my hearty approbation; and indeed I am not afraid of a worse.

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