Philadelphiensis I
Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 7 November 1787

When the advocates of a cause use their endeavours to stop a free and thorough investigation of the subject, we as naturally and as justly infer that the cause is a bad one, as that two and two make four. A good cause, like pure gold may be tried in the fire, and yet retain its full weight and value; or like the utensils of husbandry, grow brighter and fitter for use the more it is handled. The application of this observation in regard to the friends of the new constitution, is easy. They see, that the more this new scheme of government is discussed, the more tyrannical and ill-adapted to the present circumstances of America does it appear. We find, say they, that to reason in favour of the constitution, is only to give its enemies more latitude to condemn: for although we could call in to our aid a sufficient stock of sophistical arguments and circumstances, by which we might dispose the incautious part of the people to join us in establishing this government; yet we have already experienced that by such means, we defeat ourselves; as we thereby give a greater scope for those of more penetration, to write against the constitution. The advocates of this government have also tried an expedient which has been known to succeed upon some occasions, namely, to answer *reason* and *argument* with scurrility and personal invective; but even here they have failed; for the magnitude of the object is so great, as to reduce every little circumstance of this kind, to a mere point. In little matters, this kind of procedure might do well enough; but in an affair of such vast importance to the whole Continent of America, its operation is nugatory.

In this desperate situation of affairs, it need not to be wondered at, that the friends of this despotic scheme of government, were driven to the last and only alternative from which there was any probability of success; namely, the abolition of *the freedom of the Press*. And accordingly, we find in the Independent Gazetteer of the 29th of October, a writer who signs himself a Pennsylvania Mechanic, says, "It appears by a late eastern paper, that the publisher of the Massachusetts Gazette, is determined to publish no sentiments on this important subject, (viz the new constitution) unless the writers leave their names with the printer; that any one who may be desirous of knowing the author, may be informed. No honest man, no true friend to America or to the liberty and happiness of mankind, can object to this—For your imitation, gentlemen, I humbly propose the conduct of this your worthy brother, the publisher of the Massachusetts gazette." This Pennsylvania Mechanic one would take to be a blacksmith, whose true employment, is to construct chains to confine to perpetual slavery, the freemen of America; but be that as it may, we find that he can soon call in more of his fellow craftsmen to his assistance, who even seem to be more expert at their occupation than our mechanic above-mentioned: One of

these tradesmen has given us a small portion of his skill of chain-making, in the Independent Gazetteer of the 31st of October, under the signature of Galba; which small scrap of his workmanship, I beg leave to transcribe, that we may be the better able to judge of its excellency: He says, "Mr. Oswald, The hint in your paper of last Monday, that every one ought to leave his name with the printer who writes for or against the new form of government proposed by the honorable convention, is only, in my opinion, true in part; for what reason is there that the patriotic gentlemen who write in favour of a scheme of government that holds forth peace, happiness and prosperity to our distressed country, should by leaving their names with the printers, be exposed to the malevolence of those wretches who pretend to find fault with it. Indeed I think it perfectly right that those who wantonly write against it should leave their names, that they may be justly exposed to the contempt and indignation of their fellow citizens, as enemies and traitors to their country; and I hope every patriotic printer in the union, will for the future pay proper attention to the justness and absolute propriety of this hint."

Stop and pause a little Galba, I really believe you were not in your right senses when you wrote this your hint; for if you had been studying for seven years how you might effectually injure the new constitution, you could not have hit upon a thought more to your purpose: Your zeal has transported you so far beyond the bounds of propriety and discretion, that the haughtiest lordling and friend to arbitrary government in America, must hang down his head and blush upon reading your ill-timed hint.—I assure you sir, I think you have explained yourself right cleverly: You have given us a specimen of the genius and spirit of our new government: Here we see pretty plainly through your excellent regulation of the press, how things are to be carried on after the adoption of the new constitution: All the writings must be on ONE SIDE. The new constitution appears so glorious and immaculate to Galba, that all those who have sufficient spirit to avow their sentiments on the occasion, are to be called traitors and enemies to their country, if they do not think just as he does: And to render them still more odious and execrable, he would have the printers throughout the union, to publish their names with their pieces, should any of them have the imprudence of writing on the subject.—I wonder that Galba did not propose a suit of tar and feathers; but as the taylors have of late become a little bashful about trying on this sort of apparel, and the conceit is therefore a little stale, he would have those obnoxious writers to leave their names with the printers, that they may be cloathed by their fellow citizens with *indignation and contempt* as with a garment; whilst he would have the patriotic writers in favor of the constitution, entirely exempted from such an abstracted kind of a coat and jacket.—We thank you Galba for your kind and very liberal hint; for it certainly merits our attention. I make no doubt but it is the wish of a thousand of our *well born* as well as of yourself, that the printers would comply with your request: Such a thought is natural enough;—it must natively [naturally] be the wish of every *little petty* tyrant in the United States.—But most of the printers in Philadelphia are men of sentiment; they are lovers of liberty and the rights of mankind, and will necessarily despise such hints, and treat them with the contempt they deserve: There is such a degree of meanness in the requisition especially in that of Galba-longhead, as must insult the understanding and integrity of every independent printer who sees it.

Galba your hint was rather calculated for the meridian of Boston, than that of Philadelphia; and I doubt not, but you and the Boston printers have one and the same object: *Self* is an old fellow: This trite saying will apply.—In Boston the liberty of the press is now completely abol-

ished; and hence all other privileges and rights of the people will in a short time be destroyed: No wonder then that the printers in Boston would exert themselves in favor of this new government: Their present condition is a drawing in miniature and that in which the adoption of the new constitution will certainly place the whole union; so that after the nature of the prince of darkness, they wish to have all their fellow citizens in the same dreadful situation with themselves.—Russell, the printer of the Massachusetts Centinel, has the effrontery to insult the freemen of America so far, as to say in his paper of October the 10th, "That aiming thereby to be just, he is determined not to give place to any piece against the new constitution except the writers leave their names to be made public if desired."—Russell I would not hire a mob to bear you aloft as an object of hatred and contempt, nor would I bribe them to hang you in effigy, although you really deserve it; I am sensible of the danger of inflaming the multitude under a free government; for when a public tumult has once been raised, justice has often been sacrificed to appease it; so that I do not intend to raise a fatal prejudice against you; my intention is to consider the nature and consequences of your conduct, as an advocate for the new constitution, which as far as it respects the liberty of the press, has done more prejudice to your cause, than its enemies can do by the violence of their accusations, however well they may be founded.

On so momentous a subject as the new constitution, it is as plain as any axiom in geometry, that it is of no importance whether or not a writer gives his name; it is with the illustrations and arguments he affords us, and not with his name, we have any concern: Besides this practice would tend to draw off the mind of the writer from the calm investigation of the subject, to recriminations and personal invective: And moreover men of ability, of a modest, timid, or diffident cast of mind, would be detered altogether from publishing their sentiments.—Of what use could it be to the public to know the name of the writer of the piece signed Lucius, that Russell refused to publish? Certainly of no use at all. Non quis sed quid: It was not with the author of Lucius that the freemen of Massachusetts had any thing to do, but with his reasoning, which if it were just ought not to be suppressed, and if it were fallacious should be refuted.—Let candor and impartiality be the characteristics of our printers, in respect to this new government which involves in its consequences the happiness or misery of millions yet unborn: This is the line of conduct which men of honor and integrity will naturally pursue, and I find an unspeakable satisfaction, when I every day behold the printers of Philadelphia following this path almost to a man: And hence I am led to conclude that the Pennsylvania mechanic and his successor Galba, must find their hints to be a little premature; such doctrine might have suited finely about the time of the mock ringing of the bells in this city, for joy and gladness that Congress had *recommended* the adoption of this new plan of government to the different states, which, by the by, they unluckily forgot to recommend to this present hour.

The gentlemen who are friends to the new constitution had better not blab so freely; especially in regard to the freedom of the press; they ought to wait until this government of governments is once established; and then instead of a coat and jacket of *indignation and contempt*, they may speak boldly about a gallows, a gibbet, or at least a dungeon, for such writers as the *Old Whig*, or *Centinel*, who have dared to speak like freemen. I wonder that our *well born* should allow such mean fellows to write against this their government; such base wretches ought not to live in the same country with *gentlemen*; and as soon as our new government is confirmed, these vile enemies to its *splendor and dignity*, shall quit their capring, I'll warrant them; a federal soldier

with a fixed bayonet will soon give such daring dogs their quietis. Ah! what glorious days are coming; how I anticipate the brilliancy of the American court! Behold that gilded chariot, set with diamonds, and drawn by eight Arabian horses; off with your hats you paltrons, here is the president going in state to the senate house to confirm the law for the abolition of the liberty of the press. Men and brethren will not these things be so? Yes most assuredly if we adopt the new constitution in its present form, these things will be so. Rouse then; rouse my fellow-citizens, and show yourselves to be freemen: This is the most important object that ever presented itself to your understanding: The independence of America, which God himself vouched safe through his infinite mercy to confer upon us, must end in a curse, if this tyrannical government be suffered to be established. But forbid it Heaven!

I was told, last Saturday evening [3 November], by a gentleman of veracity whom I met at the meeting at the state-house, that several persons had waited that day on Mrs. Oswald,[(a)] for the purpose of requesting her not to publish any pieces against the new constitution, at the same time intimating, that if she persisted, she would forfeit their interests; and that in consequence of her spirited reply, several had that very day withdrawn their subscriptions for the paper.[1] This is truly an alarming circumstance. Where is the freeman in America that this is not sufficient to rouse from a state of supineness? My brethren, be circumspect on this momentous occasion,—"And, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness. And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." *Amen*.

(a) *Col. Oswald being abroad.*

1. Mrs. Elizabeth Oswald was the daughter of John Holt, printer of the *New York Journal* before the Revolution.

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