



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > The Creation and Ratification of the Bill of Rights > Events Related to the Creation and Ratification of the Bill of Rights > The Harrisburg Convention Attempts to Amend the Constitution

A Freeman

Pennsylvania Gazette, 17 September 1788

To the PEOPLE of the United States.

So much formality was observed by the opposition to the new fœderal constitution in this state, in forwarding (tho' secretly) a circular letter to every township, and so much pains has been taken to make known every where (but in Pennsylvania) this extraordinary meeting, that to many of you it must have had the appearance of a regular convention.¹ You have been informed, and truly too, that the people were tempted to the measure, by having an exemption from taxes for several years deceitfully promised to them. The authority of Congress was also shamefully asserted to have been obtained. It is not pretended that this was the case universally, for it is believed that in some places no deceptions were observed. At those meetings, however, the numbers were very small, several of them not exceeding one citizen for one hundred who had a right to be there. It appears that several entire counties had so little inclination for the business, that no one inhabitant of them chose to be at the expence or trouble of attending, particularly Lancaster, York, Northampton and Berks,² in which four are the great body of the Germans. But to persons at a distance it must have been a matter of curiosity, to know what was the design of this assembly. It is evident that amendments could not be the real object; for the minority of the convention of Pennsylvania, in their address and reasons of dissent, have given their objections, and the principles of the amendments desired by them, with a deal of reasoning and observations. *To muster* their force for THE ENSUING ELECTIONS of state and fœderal representatives was the object. As the opposition in Pennsylvania has been thus industrious and active to obtain their views in our continental elections, they have no doubt *passed on the word*, eastward and southward; and tho' the virtue manifested by the minorities of several of the states has been such as to remove all apprehensions of similar conduct on their part, yet the friends of peace and harmony on both sides of the question ought to know the concealed and unwarrantable measures, which some people have pursued in Pennsylvania. It was the circular letter that called this meeting, that held out to the freemen of this commonwealth, and of the rest of the United States, the menacing alternative of adopting the amendments they should prescribe, or the miseries of a civil war. There cannot be a sincere desire for alterations, favorable to public liberty or happiness, in the minds of men thus dictatorial and outrageous. The pure spirits among the oppositions of the other states, the men among them who devoutly love their country and mankind, must be disgusted with such proceedings. They must be fearful of entering on the discussion of even proper amendments with men capable of such practices, and wrought up to such an unhappy

frame of mind. In their intemperate debates WISDOM could have no share. TRUTH would be hard to find, and PEACE, LIBERTY AND SAFETY might be lost for ever.

1. A reference to the Harrisburg Convention, 3–6 September.
2. Only York and Northampton of these four counties were not represented at the Harrisburg Convention.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XXXIX: Bill of Rights [3] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2023), 189–90.