Edward Carrington to Thomas Jefferson New York, 23 October 1787 (excerpts)

I have been honoured with your favor of the 4th. of August. inclosed you will receive a Copy of the report of our late federal Convention, which presents, not amendments to the old Confederation, but an entire new Constitution. this work is short of the ideas I had the honor to communicate to you in June, in no other instance than an absolute negative upon the State laws.[1]

When the report was before Congress, it was not without its direct opponents, but a great majority were for giving it a warm approbation,—it was thought best, however, by its friends, barely to recommend to the several Legislatures, the holding of Conventions for its consideration, rather than send it forth with, even, a single negative to an approbatory act. the people do not scrutinize terms; the Unanimity of Congress in recommending a measure to their consideration, naturally implies approbation: but any negative to a direct approbation, would have discovered a dissention, which would have been used to favor divisions in the States. it certainly behoved Congress to give a measure of such importance and respectable birth, a fair chance in the deliberations of the people, and I think the step taken in that body well adapted to this idea. . . .

. . . in Virginia there may be some difficulty—two of her members in Convention whose characters entitle them to the public confidence, refused to sign the report—these were Colo. Mason and Governor Randolph, nor was that state without its dissentients, of the same description, in Congress—these were Mr. R.H. Lee & Mr. Grayson, but upon very opposite principles—the former because it is to[o] strong, the latter because it is to[o] weak, ~~and Col. H. Lee is by no means an advocate~~. the Governor has declared that his refusal to sign, shall not be followed by hostility against the measure—that his wish is to get the Exceptionable parts altered if practicable, but if not, then he will join in its support from the necessity of the Case. . .

. . . My determination to join in the adoption results from a compound consideration of the measure itself, the probable issue of another attempt, and the critical state of our affairs—it has in my mind great faults—but the formers of it met under powers and dispositions which promised greater accommodation in their deliberations than can be expected to attend any future convention—the particular interests of States are exposed and future deputations, would be clogged with instructions and biassed by the presentiments of their constituents—hence, it is fairly to be concluded that this is a better scheme than can be looked for from another experiment; on these considerations, I would clearly be for closing with it, and relying upon the correction of its faults, as experience may dictate the necessary alterations—but when I extend my view to that ap-

proaching Anarchy which nothing but the timely interposition of a new Government can avert, I am doubly urged in my wishes for the adoption.

Some Gentlemen apprehend that this project is the foundation of a Monarchy, or at least an oppressive Aristocracy; but my apprehensions are rather from the inroads of the democracy—it is true there is a preposterous combination of powers in the President and Senate, which may be used improperly, but time is to discover whether the tendency of abuse, will be to strengthen or relax—at all events this part of the constitution must be exceptionable:—but when we consider the degree of democracy of which the scheme itself partakes, with the addition of that which will be constantly operating upon it, it clearly appears to my mind, that the prevailing infractions are to be expected from thence. as State acts can go into effect without the direct controul of the general Government, having clearly defined the objects of their legislation, [the Constitution] will not secure the federal ground against their encroachments—a disposition to encroach must, in the nature of the thing exist, and the democratic branch in the federal legislature, will be more likely to cover their approaches, than resist them. . . .

1. In his letter of 9 June, Carrington told Jefferson that the Constitutional Convention would have to create "a Fœderal sovereignty with full and independant authority as to the Trade, Revenues, and forces of the Union, and the rights of peace and War, together with a Negative upon all the Acts of the State legislatures." Jefferson replied on 4 August that he did "not go as far in the reforms thought necessary" but would "make the states one as to every thing connected with foreign nations, and several as to every thing purely domestic."

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