Aristides: *Remarks on the Proposed Plan of a Federal Government*, Annapolis *Maryland Gazette* 31 January 1788 (excerpt)[1]

. . . All Europe is now in suspence; and the result of your deliberations will instruct her in the part she shall act.

With amazement, her nations contemplate a scene, of which the world is too young to furnish a parallel. We assembled our sages, patriots, and statesmen, to consult what mode of government is capable of producing the greatest sum of general good, with the least mixture of general, and partial evil. Not that each individual in this august assembly was expected to offer a system; but that the product of their joint wisdom should be referred to the several states, to be adopted, or rejected, as the great body of the people shall determine on a free and full deliberation.

As the occasion was unparalleled, so also is the plan, which, after many months of painful investigation, is submitted, with an unanimity, also unparalleled.

If there be any man, who approves the great outlines of the plan, and, at the same time, would reject it, because he views some of the minute parts as imperfect, he should reflect, that, if the states shall think as he does, an alteration may be hereafter effected, at leisure. When the convention determined, that the whole should be received, or the whole fail, they did it not on an arrogant conceit of their own infallibity, but on the soundest principles of policy and common sense. Were each state legislature, or convention, to take it up, article by article, and section by section, with the liberty of adopting some, and rejecting the rest, in all probability, so small a part would be approved by nine states, on the narrow view which each has of the subject, and attached as each is to its own supposed interest, that, in its mutilated condition, it would be worse than the present confederation. For thirteen different assemblies, in that way, to approve so much of any plan whatever, as might merit the name of system, the convention well knew to be impossible. Were there any one body of men, invested with full power, in behalf of the whole United States, to consider, and amend the plan, then would it be proper to debate it by sections, in the same manner as it was originally debated.

With a view to defeat totally the plan, another general convention is proposed; not with the power of giving a finishing hand to a constitution; but *again* to consider objections, to strike out, to add, and *again* to make their report to the several states.

In this way, there can never be an end. We must at last return to this,—that whatever is agreed on, by the assembly appointed to propose, must be either adopted in the whole, or in the whole rejected.

The idea of a new convention is started by some men, with the vain expectation of having amendments made to suit a particular state, or to advance their own selfish views. Were this fatal idea adopted, I should bid a last adieu to that elevated hope, which now inspires me, of living under the happiest form of government which the sun ever beheld. Recollect again and again, that almost every state in the union made a determined point of delegating its first characters to this grand convention. Reflect upon the time spent in the arduous work, and the sacrifices which those distinguished persons made to their country. Should the same men be deputed again, would they not, think you, with the same unanimity, subscribe and recommend the same plan? So far as I have been informed, those members, who, in the progression of the plan, had opposed certain parts, and yet afterwards subscribed cheerfully to the whole, have, with the candour which becomes them, acknowledged their errors in debate. Even an illustrious character [Virginia Governor Edmund Randolph], who was of the minority, consisting only of three, I have been told, has since regretted his refusal.

Suppose then a second convention, with a different choice of delegates. These too would either speedily subscribe, or they might propose some other system, to be debated, paragraph by paragraph, in thirteen different assemblies; and then there would be the same probability of a mutilated plan; or they would propose something, to be adopted or rejected in the whole; and there would be the same necessity of another convention. Besides, as the second convention, if it consist of different men, must *inevitably* be inferior to the first, there is little probability that their work will be superior. Never again, in an assembly constituted as that was, will there be found the same liberality of sentiment, "the same spirit of amity, and the same mutual deference and concession."

If it be contended, that the second, being possessed of the various objections from the several states, must be better able to determine, I would ask, what conduct this second convention should adopt? Are they to take the proposed plan, and strike out every thing objected to by nine states, or by seven states, or by any one of the states? Or may they like wise adopt and recommend the entire plan? In short, to appoint a second convention, merely to consult and propose, would be the most absurd expedient, that ever, in a matter of this amazing magnitude, was proposed. Does any man then entertain the thought of another kind of convention, invested with full powers to consult, amend, adopt, and confirm? A scheme like this was never yet, I trust, in agitation. But, if it were, I would propose this single question. Whether it is better to amend, before it be tried, that plan, which may be termed the result of the wisdom of America, or leave it to be amended, at leisure, as mature experience shall direct? . . .

1. The author was immediately apparent. Alexander Contee Hanson had used the pen name "Aristides" for many years, so that it was "equal to a public avowal of the author." "Aristides" was published as a 42-page pamphlet.

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