Cassius III: To Richard Henry Lee, Esquire
Virginia Independent Chronicle, 23 April 1788 (excerpts)

SIR, *April* 9, 1788

. . . "If it be found good" you say "after mature deliberation, adopt it; if wrong, amend it at all events; for to say, as many do, that a bad government must be established for fear of anarchy, is really saying we must kill ourselves, for fear of dying." This advice seems to suppose, that Virginia can amend or omit it at pleasure. The arguments drawn from the facility, with which the last convention was obtained, to prove that another may be procured, are not conclusive. The defects in the present confederation were obvious, and experience had proved, that any recommendation from Congress to alter it was ineffectual. It was, then, judged by all America, that the only proper mode of proposing an alteration in the general government, was to appoint a general convention to assemble for that particular purpose. This convention met under many advantages, that can never attend another. Each state delegated her choicest sons, and the convention being dissolved, as soon as they formed the new plan, without a prospect of having any share in the execution of it, it must give the people, at large, the strongest reasons to believe, that they were not actuated by any thirst of power. But there is another reason, which will convince us, that no other convention can, ever, agree on a general plan of government. The last met unrestrained by any local matters, and felt itself at liberty to concede any thing to each other, that they found necessary to the general good. But, if a second convention should be called for the purpose of acceding to amendments proposed by any one, or more states, every state will propose its amendments, and certainly will not forget, such as, would most immediately concern its own particular interest. Thus instructed, the members will consider themselves, as fettered, and of consequence nothing would be done. Let any man, who is acquainted with the history of the last convention, determine, whether any general plan could have been adopted without mutual concessions. All the states came into the former proposition for a convention, because, there was no other way to obtain the general opinion of America on the subject. But after that general sense has been obtained, what reason, which would be satisfactory to those states, who may approve the plan proposed, can be assigned? Will they not say? . . .

Admit, sir, that there are objections to the fœderal government. Are they all discovered? It would be presumption to say, that they are, or can be, until it has at first been put in motion. Should we attempt amendments *now*, it would not prevent the necessity of another convention for that purpose. But should we postpone making amendments, until experience, the only infallible guide—shall have pointed out the real defects, then one convention will answer every

purpose, and thus prevent that danger, which you say will arise from frequent changes in government. Nothing, but experience can point out the bad features of a government. For you know, sir, that the English government, which is supposed to be the best in the world, was not produced by a system formed at any one time, but by additions made, when experience pointed out the necessity of them. Neither is the objection to its immediate adoption a good one, which says, "that if too much power is given by this government to Congress, it ought not to be expected, that they will part with it." Because two-thirds of the legislatures of the different states have a right to demand another convention for the purpose of amending it, and if the government should be oppressive, it will be known and felt by each legislature, consequently we may safely rely on their exercising this right. America has been without an efficient government from the declaration of independence. Until last year, the calamities, which might have been expected from *this* situation, have been suspended by the expectation, that they would be remedied in the manner pointed out by the confederation. Since that time, the wisdom of the convention has been thought the ultimate resource. If the result of *that* wisdom is rejected, and distant plans only talked of, the consequences may be fatal.

"With the constitution came" you say "from the convention so many members of that body to Congress, and of those too, who were amongst the most fiery zealots for their system, that the votes of three states being of them, two states divided by them, and many others mixed with them, it was easy to see, that Congress could have but little opinion upon the subject." What do you mean, sir, by these insinuations? Do you wish to prejudice the public against those members? I know them not all, but those whom I do know, have characters too firmly established to be injured by your licentious pen. You wish, I presume, to have it supposed that all *public virtue* and *love* for your country are centered in your *immaculate* bosom alone. What! are you not the man, who—but I will forbear—*Good Heavens!* could I be roused from the profoundest contempt into anger, I would convince you, that what I have, as yet, said, was but the mild language of friendly reprehension. I would try the utmost exertion of my abilities to prevent your name from sinking into merited oblivion, and endeavor to preserve, for the instruction of posterity the perishable turpitude of your political conduct, by rendering it immortal. But I have done with you. In my humble opinion, your credit is irrecoverably ruined. You have forfeited the esteem of the public, and can no longer lay claim to the confidence of the people. I leave you to *God* and the suggestions of your own conscience.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. IX: Virginia [2] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1990), 749–53.