

Constitutional Convention Delegates Robert Yates and John Lansing to Governor George Clinton, Albany, 21 December 1787

Robert Yates and John Lansing, Jr., along with Alexander Hamilton, were New York's delegates to the Constitutional Convention which was called to revise the Articles of Confederation. In the Constitutional Convention, Yates and Lansing opposed the Virginia Resolutions which called for a total abandonment of the Articles and the establishment of a strong central government. Instead, Yates and Lansing favored a revision of the Articles of Confederation, as exemplified by the New Jersey Amendments to the Articles. On 19 June the Convention rejected the New Jersey Amendments and approved the Amended Virginia Resolutions, thereby committing itself to the creation of a strong central government. Increasingly disenchanted, Yates and Lansing left the Convention on 10 July, more than two months before the Convention adjourned. They never returned.

SIR, We do ourselves the honor to advise your Excellency, that, in pursuance of concurrent resolutions of the Honorable Senate and Assembly, we have, together with Mr. Hamilton, attended the Convention appointed for revising the articles of Confederation, and reporting amendments to the same.

It is with the sincerest concern we observe, that in the prosecution of the important objects of our mission, we have been reduced to the disagreeable alternative of either exceeding the powers delegated to us, and giving our assent to measures which we conceived destructive of the political happiness of the citizens of the United States; or opposing our opinion to that of a body of respectable men, to whom those citizens had given the most unequivocal proofs of confidence. Thus circumstanced, under these impressions, to have hesitated would have been to be culpable. We therefore gave the principles of the Constitution, which has received the sanction of a majority of the Convention, our decided and unreserved dissent; but we must candidly confess, that we should have been equally opposed to any system, however modified, which had in object the consolidation of the United States into one Government.

We beg leave briefly to state some cogent reasons which, among others, influenced us to decide against a consolidation of the States. These are reducible into two heads.

First. The limited and well defined powers under which we acted, and which could not, on any possible construction, embrace an idea of such magnitude as to assent to a general Constitution in subversion of that of the State.

Secondly. A conviction of the impracticability of establishing a general Government, pervading every part of the United States, and extending essential benefits to all.

Our powers were explicit, and confined to the *sole and express purpose of revising the articles of Confederation*, and reporting such alterations and provisions therein, as should render the Federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of Government, and the preservation of the Union.

From these expressions, we were led to believe that a system of consolidated Government, could not, in the remotest degree, have been in contemplation of the Legislature of this State, for that so important a trust, as the adopting measures which tended to deprive the State Government of its most essential rights of Sovereignty, and to place it in a dependent situation, could not have been confided, by implication, and the circumstance, that the acts of the Convention were to receive a State approbation,

in the last resort, forcibly corroborated the opinion, that our powers could not involve the subversion of a Constitution, which being immediately derived from the people, could only be abolished by their express consent, and not by a Legislature, possessing authority vested in them for its preservation. Nor could we suppose, that if it had been the intention of the Legislature to abrogate the existing Confederation, they would, in such pointed terms, have directed the attention of their delegates to the revision and amendment of it, in total exclusion of every other idea. . . .

It is not our intention to pursue this subject further than merely to explain our conduct in the discharge of the trust which the Honorable the Legislature reposed in us—interested however, as we are in common with our fellow citizens in the result, we cannot forbear to declare that we have the strongest apprehensions that a Government so organized as that recommended by the Convention, cannot afford that security to equal and permanent liberty, which we wished to make an invariable object of our pursuit.

We were not present at the completion of the New Constitution; but before we left the Convention, its principles were so well established as to convince us that no alteration was to be expected, to conform it to our ideas of expediency and safety. A persuasion that our further attendance would be fruitless and unavailing, rendered us less solicitous to return.

We have thus explained our motives for opposing the adoption of the National Constitution, which we conceived it our duty to communicate to your Excellency, to be submitted to the consideration of the Hon. Legislature.

We have the Honor to be, with the greatest Respect, your Excellency's most obedient and very humble Servants,

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