

Antoine de la Forest to Comte de la Luzerne New York, 15 April 1788

The *federalists'* cause has suffered a dangerous defeat since the account that I had the honor to give you on the 18th of last february of the progress of the new constitution proposed for the United States. Its adoption by Massachusetts had swelled the hopes of all good patriots. There was no doubt whatever that the convention of the people of New Hampshire that was to be held soon after would follow the example set by those of the six other States. But too much confidence in the goodness of their cause, led New Hampshire *federalists* to neglect to enlighten the backcountry inhabitants. They were astonished to see that their delegates had received an explicit instruction from their respective Towns to vote against the new constitution; federalists saw that it was risking the question to press for a decision on it in the convention; they had no other recourse than to adjourn until the 18th of June. This lack of success had the most unfortunate effect on the people of the States of Newyork, Maryland, Virginia and the two Carolinas. The opposition there has taken on new strength; *antifederalists* have insinuated themselves more easily into all the State [conventions] that have taken place since then; at this time the most favorable political [— —] still maintain an uncertain balance.

The State of Rhode Island itself, in spite of its insignificance and the scorn in which the party that has directed affairs there for three years is held, serves to encourage, by its conduct, the obstinacy of the opposition in these states. Its legislature, which steadfastly refused to convene a convention of the people, was no longer able to avoid acknowledging the proposed constitution, and has referred it for consideration by each Town. It well knew that it would be easier to make this plan fail there than in a large assembly where discussion enlightens the mind and where the arguments of *antifederalists* cannot hold out against those of their adversaries; some of these Towns have in effect voted against the new Government. The others have [met?] in order to examine it, have protested against [the] resolution of the legislature, and have demanded the convocation of a convention like the other States. The legislature has rejected this [demand?] and, [in] what is the height of bad faith, informed Congress of the negative vote of the ill-disposed Towns as the decision of the entire State. It is however established that there are almost 7000 votes in [the state?] and that the negative votes amounted to only 2500. *Federalists* can expect nothing more from Rhode [Island], and there is reason to believe that it will yield only to the unanimity of its sister States.

But we hear that several Towns in New Hampshire have revoked the explicit instructions given to their delegates to vote against the new constitution, and are giving them the freedom to follow their own Judgment. It is hoped that the convention in June, bringing together more unrestricted votes, will be able to vote according to its convictions, and *federalists* think they will have a majority of votes there. They count on the same advantage in Maryland and South Carolina, whose conventions are to convene soon and where the two parties already have reckoned their strength. They have fewer hopes for the States of Virginia, North Carolina, and Newyork.

If patriotism could suppress local views and individual interests, the state of national affairs alone would be enough to reconcile all votes in favor of the new Government. Each state acts as it pleases, without considering the general good; the union is without funds to meet its

expenses; its most useful officers have not been paid; Congress meets every day and adjourns to the next, for want of a sufficient representation to proceed with business; one of the States, whose development has been the most rapid, Georgia, is harassed by the Savages and left to its own devices; Pennsylvania was on the brink of an insurrection like the one in Massachusetts, and the government preserved the peace only by pretending to ignore the insult; a [kind?] of civil war has flared up in the district of Franklin between the partisans of the Government of North Carolina and those of independence. No one can foresee what the limits of the [damage?] will be if the new constitution does not soon form a great nation out of all these weak parts.

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