

A Jerseyman: To the Citizens of New Jersey, *Trenton Mercury*, 6 November 1787

In the history of the American Revolution we shall find the present period more important to the citizens of this great republic than the awful and critical time of its Declaration of Independence. The latter opened the door by which our entrance into national importance was first made; it set us on an eminence in the view of the world; it put us on the list of competition with one of the most powerful nations of Europe, but it gave us only a chance for the establishment of our freedom, as the issue of the contest was very uncertain. This now being gained, the most difficult and important task we have still to go through; it remains for us to convince our enemies that the liberty and independence which we had enterprise and bravery enough to acquire, we have wisdom and perseverance to secure. If this be effectually done, we shall reap the benefit of our labors while we live, and posterity will have cause to bless the memory of those who raised and completed so noble and magnificent a structure; but if the reverse of this picture should be forced upon the view of our citizens, how many and heavy would be the curses of all good men upon our heads. Our recollection will immediately furnish us with the history of a few facts. Our present governments were formed in the times of imminent danger and distress. The enemy was hovering round us, ready to attack us on whatever side there should appear an opening. Our legislators were sometimes, during the very act of framing our constitutions, driven from their places of deliberating; but, as we had been forced to that point where we must throw from our shoulders the oppressive government of a tyrant, it became absolutely necessary that we should immediately substitute another in its stead. Our pressing necessities, if we expected to make a successful opposition, pointed out to us the aid of foreign powers. This could not be obtained while we called ourselves subjects of Great Britain. It was therefore indispensably necessary to declare ourselves an independent nation. This was wisely done, although we were not all aware of the great difficulties we had to encounter. Our national ship was launched into a wide ocean in the midst of storms before she was well equipped or had collected sufficient materials for her voyage. She has been tossed and buffeted about for several years, and oftentimes in the extremest danger; but at length, by her own strength and the aid of those who came to her relief, she has been conducted safely into port. However, on the inspection and examination of our master builders, the timbers are found so disjointed and decayed that it is believed she cannot, without great risk, bear a second voyage unless she undergoes the most thorough repairs.


It is not my intention now to consider minutely either the defects of our present Confederation or particularly to observe upon that plan which has been lately offered to us by those distinguished patriots and saviors of our country. My daily avocations allow me not much time for the study of politics; I shall therefore throw together, in haste, only a few general observations. I take it for granted that scarce anything new can be said on this subject by way of investigation; but I cannot keep still the pulsations of my

heart, nor restrain the desire I feel of endeavoring to forward our speedy progress to a government which promises fair, from its excellent ingredients, to compose a most valuable and durable cement to the different states of the Union, to establish a steady system of justice and good faith among ourselves, and to give us respectability and credit among the nations of the earth.

The great advantages which would be the result of the adoption of the proposed Constitution would be almost innumerable. I will mention a few among the many. In the first place, the proper regulation of our commerce would be insured; the imposts on all foreign merchandise imported into America would still effectually aid our Continental treasury. This power has been heretofore held back by some states on narrow and mistaken principles. The amount of the duties, since the peace, would probably by this time have nearly paid our national debt. By the proper regulation of our commerce, our own manufactures would be also much promoted and encouraged; heavy duties would discourage the consumption of articles of foreign growth. This would induce us more to work up our raw materials and prevent European manufacturers from dragging them from us in order to bestow upon them their own labor and a high price before they are returned into our hands. Agriculture and population will also find improvement and increase. Agriculture is natural to America and will always serve as an increasing source of commerce, while the produce of our farms furnishes so considerable a proportion of it. Induced by the goodly prospects of a happy and durable government, by which life, religion, freedom, and property would be well secured, America will teem with those who will fly from the slavery, persecution, tyranny, and wars of Europe. The civil commotions of Holland will soon open a wide door to let her citizens, and those of Germany, into America. The trumpet of war has already sounded in their ears, and we shall soon behold the industrious laborers of those countries pouring into our ports and crowding our cities.

Another good consequence of the new Constitution will be the power given to Congress solely of coining money. By this means there will be one general currency throughout the United States. The citizens of each state will be well acquainted with the money of the others, which will give great facility and convenience to trade and all negotiations in business. The creditor and debtor, though in different states, will equally know the value of what each receives or pays; the stranger and the traveler will have no difficulty or embarrassment on account of the difference of coins. However slender this tie may appear to some, I have no doubt but the sameness of money in every state will have a powerful influence on our Union.

Needless alarms and fears have been endeavored to be excited as well, no doubt, by our enemies and those among us disaffected to our cause, as by some who act from better principles. Let us take a very short and summary view of the plan. The power of Congress to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts, and excises has been objected to. By whom are those taxes to be laid? By the representatives of the several states in Congress. This is then in perfect conformity to that just maxim in free governments, "that taxation and representation should go hand in hand." To what purpose are these taxes to be applied? It is expressly prescribed by the Constitution, "To pay the debts and

provide for the common defence and general welfare of the United States.” What, would you saddle Congress with the burden and expense of providing for the common safety and not give them the power of raising any money? This would be requiring impossibilities indeed. Congress will also have the power to raise and support armies. What evil can result from this? Even supposing, altho it is scarcely supposable, that the representatives of the people should form designs of enslaving their constituents, how is it possible they could effect their scheme? It is provided by the Constitution, “That no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years.” An army sufficient for such a purpose could not be raised in two years, much less could they complete the business in that time. Every two years the people may change their Representatives if they please; and they certainly would please to change those who would act with so much baseness and treachery. If the President should have such designs without the concurrence of Congress, he might have the honor of commanding an army as long as they would stay with him, but it is not common for an army to remain long in the field without the prospect of any pay. The power of the President of the United States will not be so great as many have represented. His consent is not necessary in passing any law. If he disapproves, he has only a right to state his objections, but if two-thirds of both houses do not join with him, it will be a law notwithstanding. He is to be Commander in [149 ]Chief, and shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed. It will be readily agreed that it would be highly ridiculous to send representatives, and be at the expense of maintaining them, to make laws for us, if we did not give power to some person or persons to see them duly executed. The wisdom and prudence is to be shown in the framing laws; the complete execution of them ought to follow of course.

The President, together with the Senate, may appoint the officers of the United States. We find in practice that, generally speaking, persons best qualified are appointed to offices where the number who appoint are few. They feel their responsibility to the public to be more immediate and certain; for, if the appointment be wrong and the object of it unworthy, the censure can be easily fixed. The consequence will be a greater care and circumspection in the choice. This we clearly saw, at a time during the late war, when the new modeling of our army became absolutely necessary. The appointment of our officers was given solely to our WORTHY GENERAL. He alone became responsible; the consequences were important and happy for America.

The power of the President is still guarded further by the oath which he is bound to take before he enters on the execution of his office, where he swears that he will to the best of his ability preserve protect and defend the constitution of the United States. It is also said by some of the opposers of the new plan of government that, in the person of the President, it verges to a monarchy. By others it is said that it approaches to an aristocracy through the Senate. The Senators are to be also bound by an oath or affirmation to support the Constitution; and, tho their appointments will be for six years, yet, the rotation of the new choice of one-third of them every second year not only provides for experience in business by those who remain, but also against any evil schemes which require time and extensive connections. As to the danger of our state

governments being annihilated, the fourth section of the fourth Article declares that “the United States shall guarantee to every state in the Union a republican form of government.”

Thus every guard which can be reasonably required seems to be made against improper encroachments. Now let me ask what will be the probable consequences of not adopting the proposed Constitution? With respect to ourselves in the first place, scenes of injustice between man and man may disclose themselves, contracts may be broken, and the means of redress possibly not in the power of our legislatures, notwithstanding their best intentions. Besides there are greater difficulties than many people imagine in procuring national movements; and the probability is that all the states would not be forward again in coming into such a measure speedily as forming another federal convention. The fatigue and disgust of our celebrated statesmen, who have lately gone through a four-months’ labor of investigation, would also tend to prevent the attempt. These were men of acknowledged abilities and disinterested patriotism. If the result of their deliberations is not attended to, who will undertake again the arduous task? The same difference of interests, in different states, will remain, but the same friendliness and wish for compromise and accommodation will not exist after repeated vexatious trials and disappointments.

Let us also recollect our situation with respect to foreign powers. Some of them have lent Congress money during the late war. Can Congress insure the payment of either principal or interest? They may require but not enforce. They may ask but, if denied or neglected, there is no effectual remedy. Can this be called an efficient government? No, this part of it is laughed at by all Europe. But will these powers only laugh at our folly. They will in a short time do something more disagreeable to us. They will do justice to themselves by seizing our merchants’ ships and making reprisals on our property. Well but, say they who are more successful in alarming and raising objections than in proposing better constitutions, would you have us adopt this without making alterations, when there are several things in it which had better be mended? Yes, I would—and for the following reasons.

Which state convention will undertake to mend it? Is it probable that any one state would sooner hit upon what should be for the general good of the Union, than the late Federal Convention, which was composed of representatives from every state? And if it was not for the benefit of the United States in general, but only of the individual state who proposed it, would it not in the first place immediately open a wide door for each state to propose many amendments which might be calculated only for the advancement of local interest? And in the next place, is it probable that a future convention (which at this rate would be necessary) would agree on better ground for the whole, than the late one? No, it would be idle to suppose it. It would serve but to procrastinate a delivery from our present distresses and tend very much, by exciting dissensions and quarrels, to our total dissolution as a nation. Although I drew my first breath in New Jersey, and have continued in it during my life, firmly attached to its local interest, yet when I consider the impossibility of its existence at present as a sovereign state without a union with others, I wish to feel myself more a citizen of the United

States than of New Jersey alone. Our advancement and prosperity, nay, our very existence as a nation depends on our Union. That Union must have for its foundation the good of the whole collectively considered. This, I think, is effectually done in the new Constitution. In portraying this plan, the collective interest is so mixed and blended in the general picture of the Union that happily the individual states are only distinguished as branches of that general family, without the whole of which the painting would be incomplete.

In many publications against the proposed system, the writers argue on a presumption that Congress will set themselves up against the liberties of their country. Their proceedings will not be secret. Their Journals are ordered in this very Constitution to be published, from time to time, for the inspection of all. Of whom will that body be composed? Of a Senate, who are to be appointed by the legislatures, who will be chosen by the people, and of a House of Representatives also chosen by the people. If either act wrong, they would doubtless be left out in their next choice.

While virtue and patriotism remain in the people, it will always, with due care, be found in the representatives. When the fountain is pure, the streams that issue from it must be clear.

It is high time to shake off unmanly fears and sneaking jealousies. You have, my countrymen, long been sensible of the insufficiency of our present government. You have sent your best and ablest friends to form another. After four months' close application, they have completed that which they now offer. Make a fair experiment. Further alterations are provided for when necessary. Think seriously and act like men.

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