

Martin Oster to le Maréchal de Castries, Norfolk, 19 October 1787

Although absorbed by the troublesome and thorny tasks of maritime Jurisprudence, to which I am perpetually obliged to devote myself, in order to maintain good order in my Vice Consulate, and to save the goods that our traders too lightly entrust to certain merchant captains who come to Virginia, I do not neglect to attend to what goes on outside, and above all, what may concern Politics, in order to keep you informed.

The rumors and Division that are now stirring in my department, over the work of the Philadelphia Convention, a copy of which I have the honor to send you, are creating a fear of great debates, leading to its disapproval, by the Virginia legislature, although it has the admiration of the majority of the States in the Union; I think, My Lord, that it would not displease you to know the reasons. I believe I have understood them well, and I shall have the honor of laying them out for you. they are connected with the egoism of individuals and particularly, with the influence of Governor Randolph, whose character is sufficiently prone to Contradiction, and sufficiently vain, for him to seek to be talked about. This vain glory is in general the flaw of Virginians.

Mr. Randolph the present Governor, having refused to sign the new Constitution, as did several members of his party, as being disadvantageous to Virginia, many are drawing authority from that to take the liberty of criticizing it; but they take care not to disclose the true reasons for their opposition, which they conceal under the Veil of the public good, and the love of liberty. some, through an attachment to the interests of England, are secret enemies of the United States; others fear the reduction of the functions and prerequisites of their offices; others are apprehensive lest good order and regulation lead to the obligation to pay public debts, and private ones; others regret no longer being able to make those prohibitive laws to thwart the interest and commerce of the other states, which they consider, if not as enemies, at least as rivals; others observe with humiliation, that their State legislatures will be reduced to internal regulations, when Congress is fully vested with the power to handle the important matters of general administration; and all, finally, cannot get used to this idea of 13 Provinces, forming a single state, whose Glory and prosperity is to determine the welfare of all the parts that compose it.

Such are My Lord, the active motives of the party opposed to the new Constitution, that everyone admires, and without the execution of which, it is certain, that nothing will ever be permanent in the States, with the sole exception of the ability debtors have to make light of their obligations. in general Virginians are no one's creditors, and it is known, that they are almost all in debt.

Former Governor Henry has not given up at all on the plan he formed last year, of having Paper money introduced in the State. Through his natural Eloquence, and his shrewd insinuations, he has managed to regain the influence that his rejected plan caused him to lose, up to the point of having him named Delegate from his county, which vested him with very extensive powers, and notably, with that of calling for paper money, which men of good faith dread. If the Senate now in session were unmindful enough of the common interests of the 13 Republics, to disapprove of the new Constitution, and adopt the impolitic plan of Mr. Henry, all

those foreigners who now find themselves connected to businesses in this country would be ruined, and the English who since the peace have *squeezed* out of it all the gold and silver, and, who, in general, have secured their debts with possessions, would have reason to congratulate themselves on having contributed to this event by their skillful and political mercantile operations.

The matters that will be discussed this year by the general assembly of Virginia, being of the utmost importance, I shall immediately proceed to Richmond in order to follow its deliberations there, give you an account of all that might merit your attention, and at the same time to solicit there the payment of some claims against the state by some [French] nationals. I do not believe I should leave you ignorant of the fact, My Lord, that all the measures that I have taken up to the present for the repayment of funds have never been fruitless and that I have only to be pleased with the attentions of the legislature. Before going to Richmond, I shall go to Petersburg, where the frenchmen assembled under the Banner of his Majesty, have just called on me to mediate their differences.

Permit me, My Lord, to be so bold as to call to your kind attention my former service and to represent to you that my Vice Consulate is the most spread out, the most active, the most troublesome, the most expensive, and also, the most interesting of all the consulates and Vice Consulates on the Continent.

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