

Louis Guillaume Otto to Comte de Montmorin New York, 26 November 1787

I received Dispatch No. 4. which You did me the honor of writing to me on the 31. of last August. The indulgence with which You deigned to receive my last reports can only encourage me to redouble my zeal and diligence.

The debates. My Lord, for and against the new Constitution continue to absorb public attention and while the individual States are preparing to call conventions in order to adopt or reject this new plan, the two parties abuse each other in the public papers with a rancor which sometimes does not even spare insults and personal invectives. As in these sorts of political commotions, the men and the issues usually disguise themselves so as to become unrecognizable, the partisans of the innovation are called *Federalists* and the others more commonly *Whigs*, although neither of these names has a direct relation to the object in question. This spirit of argument is even pushed to intolerance in regard to foreigners and they absolutely want us to take a side for or against the new Constitution. Some politicians trying to be shrewder than others have even suggested that this Constitution was bad since it was approved by foreign Ministers. According to one side Despotism will be the necessary consequence of the proposed Constitution; according to the others the united States will reach the summit of glory and power with this same Constitution. Indifferent Spectators agree that the new form of Government, well executed will be able to produce good results; but they also think that if the states really had the desire to be united the present Confederation would be adequate for all their needs. Meanwhile they are unable to conceal that after having excited this general ferment there is no longer a means to stop it, that the old edifice is almost destroyed, and that any fabric whatsoever must be substituted for it. In effect it was impossible to carry out a more violent coup to the authority of Congress, than in saying to all America, to the entire Universe, that this body is inadequate to the needs of the Confederation and that the united States have become the laughingstock of all the powers. This principle repeated over and over by all the Innovators seems as false as their spirits are excited; the united States held the place among nations which their youth and means assigned them; they are neither rich enough, populated enough, nor well established enough to appear with more luster and perhaps one ought to reproach them only for the impatience of anticipating their future grandeur.

The new Congress is not yet formed, My Lord; the delegates are arriving slowly and their deliberations will not be very important before the different States have given their opinions on the proposed Government. The task of this Assembly will then become very delicate; it will have to weigh without prejudice the opinions and modifications of the individual States, to judge if nine Members of the Confederation have indeed consented to it and to fix the time of the Elections for the new sovereign body. This process can only take place towards the middle of the following year if it can however be hoped to gather the vote of nine States.

That of Pennsylvania, My Lord, was the most eager to elect Delegates to examine the Constitution. The Federalists there have a majority of two to one and although their deliberations have not yet ended it can almost be foreseen that the Constitution will be

adopted. Other States are putting more circumspection and calmness into their proceedings; several Counties have even specifically recommended to their Delegates to examine the new plan in the greatest detail and not to allow themselves to be carried away by party spirit always detrimental in general affairs.

Until now only Virginia has articulated plausible reasons not to accede to it. One of the first measures proposed by the new Government would probably be the writing of a navigation act. The aim of this act could only be to give Americans a special advantage and perhaps an exclusive right in the exportation of tobacco and as the Virginians are hardly sailors they would find themselves entirely at the mercy of the New England States which have been up to now the Peddlers for the Southerners. The competition of foreign nations would be banished from the new system and tobacco being much more susceptible of being taxed than commodities from other States, Virginia would certainly pay the largest portion of public revenue. It seems to be in the interest of Virginia to attract all the commercial nations to its ports, but it is important to the Northern States to insist on an exclusive navigation and they would almost always be in a large majority in the future Congress.

Be that as it may, My Lord, it still appears that only a foreign stimulus can restore energy to the federal Government, in whatever form is considered appropriate to reproduce it. The assessment of taxes and duties will be the stumbling block that will make the most well thought out plans fail unless the sudden appearance of an Enemy and an imminent danger rekindles that spirit of unanimity that formerly produced such grand results. But as this revolution is not absolutely necessary it would be unfortunate to buy possible advantages with real calamities.

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