

## **One of the People, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 17 October 1787**

At this important period, on which the existence of America as a people depends, one of the people begs leave to lay before them, in a dispassionate and cool manner, some facts, which may tend to illustrate to them their true interest, and repel the poison which the late dissenters from the House of Assembly, in their insidious and inflammatory address, have endeavored to infect them with.

It is not now a question between those who have distracted the state by the names of Republican and Constitutionalist which calls for your attention; it is a subject of far greater magnitude involving in it not the fate of this state alone, but of all America. A Constitution is offered to the people of the United States by their delegates in Convention. On the awful *fiat* of the people of America does this Constitution now depend. This Convention, composed of the most celebrated characters, the collected wisdom of America, have appealed to you to judge of their proceedings. Suffer not yourselves then to be carried by the artful and designing declaration of sixteen men, whose names are recorded for a disgraceful abandonment of you, their constituents. The Confederation was formed in a hasty manner at a time of danger and distress. It was calculated for the moment when a war raged in our country. It was not calculated for civil purposes, nor for times of peace, and these states were only kept together by a sense of common danger. But the moment peace was established, and that sense of common danger was extinct, it was found inadequate to the government of this extensive country. It wanted that energy which in all governments has been found necessary for the well regulating the people. It exposed us to ruin and distress at home and disgrace abroad. At the peace, the United States were esteemed, revered, and dreaded by foreign nations. America held a most elevated rank among the powers of the earth; but how are the mighty fallen! disgraced have we rendered ourselves abroad and ruined at home. Bankrupt merchants, poor mechanics, and distressed farmers are the effects of the weakness of the Confederation. America saw it and assembled those amongst her sons celebrated for wisdom and a knowledge of government; and she has not been disappointed in her representatives. That assembly has produced a work which immortalizes its fame, which will, if ambition and envy suffer it to be adopted by us, raise us to that station which America should hold among the nations of Europe.

The people of Pennsylvania, in general, are composed of men of three occupations, the farmer, the merchant, the mechanic; the interests of these three are intimately blended together. A government then, which will be conducive to their happiness and best promote their interest, is the government which these people should adopt. The Constitution now presented to them is such a one. Every person must long since have discovered the necessity of placing the exclusive power of regulating the commerce of America in the same body; without this, it is impossible to regulate their trade. The same imposts, duties and customs must equally prevail over the whole; for no one state can carry into effect their impost laws—a neighboring state could always prevent it—no state could effectually encourage their manufactories—there can be no navigation act. Whence comes it that the trade of this state, which abounds with materials for shipbuilding, is carried on in foreign bottoms? Whence comes it that shoes, boots, made-up clothes, hats, nails, sheet iron, hinges, and all other utensils of iron are of British manufactory?

Whence comes it that Spain can regulate our flour market? These evils proceed from a want of one supreme controlling power in these states. They will be all done away, by adopting the present form of government. It will have energy and power to regulate your trade and commerce, to enforce the execution of your imposts, duties and customs. Instead of the trade of this country being carried on in foreign bottoms, our ports will be crowded with our own ships, and we shall become the carriers of Europe. Heavy duties will be laid on all foreign manufactures which can be manufactured in this country, and bounties will be granted on their exportation of our commodities. The manufactories of our country will flourish—our mechanics will lift up their heads, and rise to opulence and wealth. So convinced of this are the mechanics of Philadelphia, that they have petitioned for calling a convention. The farmer is particularly interested in carrying into immediate execution this Constitution. Flour, the staple commodity of the state, is become a drug. No brisk market offers for it, and the tiller of the earth is obliged frequently to sell the produce raised by the sweat of his brow for less than the price of his labor. This is not owing to the want of demand abroad, for it is sufficient, but for the want of power at home to regulate our foreign trade. This power once granted, America would be able to regulate her own market and not receive from any foreign power the small pittance they please to bestow for the staff of life, and America could starve them into a generous price. Lands under the present Confederation have fallen since the peace at least one-third or one-half. It surely is a melancholy consideration to the farmer, to think that the independence which he shed his blood for should reduce the value of his estate near one-half. However melancholy it may be, experience evinces its truth. No foreigner who has money will venture it in a country which has no fixed government. A stable energetic Federal Constitution will cause property again to rise to its real and true value and will invite monied men from all the countries of Europe. Yet to such a Constitution, so fraught with blessings to our distressed country, have our worthy representatives set themselves in battle array and have come forth in a public address armed with the weapons of hypocrisy and palpable falsehood; and fearing to trust the people with a candid inquiry and discussion, have endeavored to strangle the infant in its birth, by opposing the calling of a convention on pretexts the most idle and false that can be imagined. The assertion as to the House not having received official accounts from Congress is false, for an official account most assuredly had arrived and was communicated to them, not at the time of the first debate, but after the adjournment of the House on that evening. That account, too, under the hand of the Secretary of Congress to the Speaker of the Assembly. The House had not dissolved, and business of importance required their attendance—several bills were lying on the table, which had been agreed to and waited for the House to pass them into laws. Their duty, their oaths, called on them to attend. They should, if they thought the calling of a convention improper, have stood in their places and opposed it. They should have attended and entered a protest against it. This was the mode pointed out by the constitution. Their absenting themselves was a desertion of their trust, a betraying of their constituents, and of mischievous consequences to the state, as it directly tends to a dissolution of all government.

How absurd it is to say, that they had not received official information from Congress. Where was such information to be attained? Not in the house of Major [Alexander] Boyd, nor from the major's hands—not in the public streets—but in the State House and from the Speaker. They knew such information was in the House, they knew the Speaker was in possession of it, for he

had shown it to them. One here is at a loss what most to be surprised at, the impudence of the falsehood or insult offered the understanding of the people. The complaint of the shortness of the time, and the necessity of consulting the people, is idle. The House were not to determine whether Pennsylvania approved of the Constitution or not. All the power the Assembly were possessed of was to call a convention of the people to consider of the Constitution. In opposing this, they have attempted to take away from the people the power of judging and determining for themselves. Their language amounts to this: "We are better judges what suits the people than they are. We are acquainted with government. We think this a bad form, and will not even submit it to the people;" and yet these are the men who talk of their great regard to your interest, their love of liberty and the constitution. There is one good advice given you in the address, "read the Federal Constitution;" and when it is read, I am convinced every dispassionate man will pronounce that it is not liable to any of the objections its enemies have raised. It is affirmed that the deputies from this state had not power to recommend to the people, under their appointment, a new constitution. The deputies from this state were empowered, they had power to make such *alterations and further provisions as may be necessary to render the federal government fully adequate to the exigencies of the Union*. Had objections such as these prevailed, America never would have had a Congress, nor had America been independent. Alterations in government are always made by the people. It is said that this Constitution will annihilate the state government. On what section of the Constitution do these men ground this assertion? It breathes nothing like it—it interferes not with the internal government of any state—it supports and adds a dignity to every government in the United States. They complain of the power granted to Congress of levying taxes. This is a power without which no government can exist. Finance is the very nerve of government, and unless Congress have power to effect the collection of the taxes, the power of assessing and recommending their collection is a shadow.

When Congress, at the conclusion of the war, recommended a duty of five percent, the trifling state of Rhode Island, whose extent is not greater than one of our counties, refused their acquiescence, and this prevented a measure most beneficial to these states, and by which a great part of the federal debt would have been discharged. It is most shameful to say that this tax will be collected by soldiers. The power is not given to a foreign prince, but to a Congress, chosen by the people. Pennsylvania, which has been always highly federal, has suffered by the want of this power. She has ever been most forward in complying with the requisitions of Congress, whilst other states have hung back, preferring the interest of their particular state to that of the Union. The taxes fall heavy on the landed men of this state. A general impost throughout the states will lighten their burthen, and the greater part of our taxes will be paid by duties on foreign manufactures and the luxuries of life. This government will not be attended with greater expense than the present Congress, for under this Constitution they do not sit perpetually, as the Congress now do. The freedom of the press and trials by jury are not infringed on. The Constitution is silent, and with propriety too, on these and every other subject relative to the internal government of the states. These are secured by the different state constitutions. I repeat again, that the Federal Constitution does not interfere with these matters. Their power is defined and limited by the 8th section of the first Article of the Constitution, and they have not power to take away the freedom of the press, nor can they

interfere in the smallest degree with the judiciary of any one of the states. It is essentially necessary that the judiciary of the United States should have an appellate jurisdiction both in law and fact, in cases of disputes between a state and citizens of another state, and between citizens of different states. This could not have been done under the old Confederation, but by an application to Congress for a federal court, the expense of which was borne by the party who was cast, and amounted to 5000 £. No man, under these circumstances, would risk an appeal, though his property had been unjustly taken from him by a prejudice so natural to inhabitants of the same state. It is said that this Constitution was disapproved by three persons, and that they refused signing it. However respectable their names may be, they cannot certainly be placed in competition with those of a [George] Washington, a [William] Livingston, a [Benjamin] Franklin, a [James] Maddison, a [John] Rutledge, and a Rufus King; and one of those who refused to sign has been notoriously ill-disposed to any federal government. It was unanimously approved and signed by all the states present—and the only matter of surprise is, that in so large a body only three individuals dissented from it. Such an instance of unanimity upon a great national object can scarcely be paralleled in any country, and can only be ascribed to the influence of that BEING in whose hands are the hearts and understandings of all men. The government which is offered to you is truly republican, and unites complete vigor and the most perfect freedom; for the people have the election of the Representatives in Congress, the legislature the appointment of the Senate, and the people the choice of Electors for electing a President—and in the House of Representatives must all money bills originate.

It is the privilege of every citizen to deliver with freedom his sentiments, and the duty of every lover of truth to detect falsehood. These are the motives which have induced me to endeavor to undeceive you, to state the truth, and guard you against designing ambition. And should my feeble voice be heard amidst the noise of party, and incline my countrymen to judge with coolness and impartiality—should it prevail against the loud brawls of dissimulation and untruth—it will afford the most pleasing sensations the human mind is capable of, as it will preserve this country from the dreadful consequences of rejecting a Constitution, which alone can free them from confusion, anarchy, distress and ruin. Let us accept with gratitude the Constitution offered to us and make a fair trial of it. It is not unchangeable. If upon experiment it is found not to answer the end of all government (the happiness of the people) it can be altered, for two-thirds of the legislatures of the states can effect this change.

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