

Phocion, Providence *United States Chronicle*, 17 July 1788

To the PEOPLE of the State of RHODE-ISLAND.
Fathers, Brothers, Friends and Fellow-Citizens,

The period has now arrived when ten of the States, of the late Confederacy, have withdrawn from you, or you from them; and there is the utmost probability that we shall hear, in a short time, that the eleventh and twelfth States have also joined the other ten.—We shall then be left in a contending world, to shift for ourselves, surrounded by great, powerful and confederated neighbours. This critical situation claims your immediate and most serious attention. I anxiously wish that some able person would undertake particularly to point out, on the one hand, the peculiar advantages which will result to us, as a people, from the adoption of the new national Constitution, and on the other, the certain destruction which will probably come upon us, if we should not join in the grand American Confederacy. A multiplicity of avocations will permit me to make only a few cursory and hasty remarks, dictated however by the purest and most sincere regard for your real welfare and happiness.

Groundless reports, designed misrepresentations, and absolute falsehoods have been used to raise *innumerable visionary spectres without substance* to affright the people, and to prevent them from coolly and dispassionately considering the merits of this excellent Constitution.—Such a jealousy hath thereby been excited that it is extremely difficult for a man of the purest and best intentions to obtain attention, and more difficult to obtain confidence, if he suggests any thing contrary to the reigning opinion, and he must have some considerable degree of courage to attempt it. But as I well know the good sense of the people in general, in this State, who during the late war were as forward and zealous in the common cause of our “dear country,” as any in United America,—whose unremitting exertions were such as repeatedly gained them the applause and the thanks of the illustrious Commander in Chief, and will merit and obtain commemoration in the pages of history—I cannot but hope their candour and moderation will procure a cool and dispassionate consideration of the following remarks.

Let us reflect a moment on the peculiarly happy situation which this State will enjoy, compared with the other States, in point of commerce and intercourse with the world at large, *in case she should join in the General Confederacy*. This State is embowelled by a great and excellent bay of water, leading a great distance towards the heart of the country, and furnishing at Newport one of the finest harbours for shipping on the Atlantic ocean.—And in case this State should adopt the new Constitution, it will soon become the great entreport and mart of New-England.—It consists almost wholly of one great extended line of sea-port towns, lying around the noble bay of Narragansett. Let us in contemplation travel round the extensive shore. Beginning at Connecticut and going round the bay to the northward and eastward, we shall find the towns lying in the following order:—*Westerly, Charlestown, South-Kingstown, North-Kingstown, East-Greenwich, Warwick, Cranston and Providence*, on the main land upon the west side of the bay:—*Barrington, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton and Little-Compton*, on the main land upon the east side of the bay:—on the islands *Newport, Middletown, Portsmouth, Jamestown and New-Shoreham*:—In the whole EIGHTEEN towns, every one of which are

washed by the waters of the great Atlantic ocean.—These make almost two-thirds of the towns in the State—for there are but TWELVE other towns in the State, viz.—in the county of Washington, *Exeter, Richmond and Hopkinton*;—in the county of Kent, *West-Greenwich and Coventry*;—and in the county of Providence, *Scituate, Foster, Gloucester, Smithfield, Cumberland, North-Providence and Johnston*. These twelve may be called the inland towns of the State—from the remotest of which a person may ride, in less than four hours, to some one of the principal market-towns on the bay; so that the above-mentioned inland country towns in this State may rather be considered as the environs, suburbs, or parts of the great towns which must unavoidably arise round this noble bay, *should this State become a part of the General Confederacy*.—And in proportion as the large sea-port towns increase in numbers and wealth, in the same proportion will all the country towns increase also in their value and population. No people were ever more blinded to their own interest than the people of this State have been with respect to the new Constitution.—The system of government now proposed is beyond all comparison better for the State of Rhode-Island than the Five per Cent. Impost System of 1781; yet we find that many who advocated that system are zealous opposers of this. By the regulations to be established, pursuant to the new Constitution, all State impediments or barriers are taken away, and a free, unfettered trade to all the inland country will be opened to the sea-port towns of this State, in the same manner as to Boston, New-York or any other sea-ports on the continent; and of course there will be nothing to prevent the sea-port towns of this State from enjoying all the advantages naturally arising to them in point of situation for commerce. Under the old Confederation, the trade of Rhode-Island government might be confined within her own limits by the restrictions, duties and embargoes of the neighbouring States.—But by the proposed Constitution, the whole extended country is opened to her industrious and enterprising spirit, and she will experience all the advantages of her sea-ports and harbours which she could if the whole country was within her jurisdiction. The people in the eastern parts of Connecticut, of the western parts of Massachusetts and of the southern parts of Vermont, will find the ports of Rhode-Island State most convenient to resort to for trade, which will therefore naturally center here. Rhode-Island has lost all her trade to Connecticut in consequence of the duties and restrictions imposed by Connecticut on our trade thither⁴—and the citizens of this State have been obliged to pay silver and gold, altogether the last season, for the beef, pork and produce of Connecticut, which were heretofore paid for in goods, imported by our own people.—This is palpably striking to every man's observation, and will account for the vanishing of a great part of the business which used to be transacted in this State, but is now transferred from it.—But if we should join the new Confederacy, our former inland commerce must necessarily be restored, and business of all kinds must revive and flourish through the State.

Under the new Constitution there will be nothing to prevent the town of Providence from becoming a large city.—She will have all the privileges which a town at the head of a great river always has of carrying on manufactures to advantage, and of being the principal mart of the adjacent country on every side.—She is planted near 50 miles inland, towards the heart of the country, from the general line of the ocean. Twice every 24 hours the friendly tide heaves a due proportion of the waters of the Atlantic into

the bay, on which the town is built, by the flowing and re-flowing whereof the air is rendered salubrious, and a passage is opened for her navigation and commerce to every quarter of the world. The spirit and enterprize of her merchants have been such as to do honour to themselves, the town, and the State, and have shewn them capable of any commercial undertaking. This town being in the direct way between the cities of New-York and Boston; and the passage from New-York to Providence being cheap, safe, and commodious by water, and the navigation around Nantucket and Cape-Cod dangerous and tedious, will always necessarily cause Providence to be a great thoroughfare for people, goods, and business between the capital towns of Boston and New-York. From all these considerations, is it not probable that, under the new Constitution, the town of Providence will become (what Antwerp has heretofore to the adjacent country on the river Scheldt) *one of the principal marts of New-England?*

But there is another consideration of vast importance to the people of this State, which will probably be a consequence of the new Constitution, in case of its adoption here. The time will come when this country shall have grown populous, rich and powerful, that she will act in some degree as all other commercial countries.—She will in process of time promote the establishment of a NAVY. And there is not an harbour from one end of the continent to the other so likely to be the place of its common rendezvous as THE HARBOUR OF NEWPORT. The navigation to and from Newport will always be easy and open to the middle and southern States, and to the West-Indies.—New-England will probably furnish a considerable part of the men and ships.—As they will belong to the continent at large, they will be placed where they can be most safe, most at hand, and best answer the purposes of a navy:—AND NEWPORT MUST THEREFORE BE TO THE UNITED STATES, WHAT BREST IS TO FRANCE, OR SPITHEAD, OR PORTSMOUTH IS TO ENGLAND; and will therefore also probably become a great market town.—From the view we have taken of this State we find it but little more than one great sea-port, eighteen of her thirty towns adjoining upon it; and he must be but a short-sighted politician indeed who cannot see that it will proportionably benefit the people of every town in the State, if they can find a ready market for the articles their industry may enable them to have for sale.

There is another argument in favour of this State's adopting the new Constitution, which I do not recollect to have seen in print, or to have heard orally mentioned.—The smaller States have been much more unanimous on the question of ratifying the new Constitution than the larger ones—*New-Jersey, Delaware and Georgia* having adopted it without a dissenting voice, and *Connecticut and Maryland* with remarkable unanimity.—There is a natural and powerful reason for this. Those wise and judicious States clearly saw that if the Constitution was rejected, in the hurly-burly of confusion and anarchy which would arise, they should be swallowed up by their more powerful neighbours. They were informed, and they were informed truly, *that it was the wish of the larger States not to allow them an equal voice in the administration of the Continental Government.—That this was the principal source of contention in the great Convention at Philadelphia.—That it was carried to such serious lengths, that the Delegates were more than once on the eve of breaking up, and returning to their several States, with the melancholy tale that they could not agree.—That owing to the unwearied and most indefatigable exertions, day after day, of that patriot and true friend of his country, the Hon. Doctor SAMUEL W.*

JOHNSON, of Connecticut, with a few others, it was finally agreed that the small States should retain their equal voice in the Senate, and should be represented in the House of Deputies in proportion to their numbers.⁵—That it was with very great reluctance the large States agreed to this, which nothing induced them to consent to, but the firm and fixed determination of the smaller States to risque the horrible and tremendous consequences of having no general government, rather than yield that favourite point, so highly important to them.—This we have found to be one of the principal objections of the antifederalists of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Virginia.—It was therefore wise and prudent in the smaller States to agree to this Form of Government, when they were sure that they never could obtain a better, and that attempting it by another Convention would end in worse than Babel confusion. What is more than all, they saw that this Confederacy being once established, *their equal voice in the Senate would be forever secured*.—For notwithstanding this most free and liberal Constitution provides in the 5th article for amendments and alterations *at any time*, on the application of two-thirds of the Legislatures of the several States; yet this is expressly provided, whatever other alterations shall be made, “THAT NO STATE WITHOUT ITS CONSENT SHALL BE DEPRIVED OF ITS EQUAL SUFFRAGE IN THE SENATE.”—It would therefore have been extremely injudicious for the smaller States to oppose a Constitution which gives them so respectable an ascendancy, and which when once established they can in no event be deprived of without their consent, though any other alterations may be made. This argument will apply with its full force to the State of Rhode-Island, which has been generally estimated at only a fiftieth part of the Union, and if we include the territory westward of the Ohio, is not a two-hundredth part; yet in the new Confederacy will in the Senate be equal with Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, or South-Carolina, and will have a thirteenth part of the controul of the general Government of the Confederacy.—A privilege which one would think she would not hesitate at accepting, *and which it will not be prudent for her too long to delay*. A word to the wise is sufficient. May gracious Heaven grant that party-spirit, feuds and animosities may speedily be banished from among us, and that *we may know the things which belong to our peace, before they are hid from our eyes*.

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