

Louis Guillaume Otto to Comte de Montmorin New York, 10 June 1787 (excerpt)

The Deputies [to the Constitutional Convention], My Lord, who have communicated to me these various plans, are determined to sustain them with vigor in the Philadelphia Assembly. I shall not repeat here the doubts which I have expressed elsewhere regarding their success; but it is my duty to submit to You the opinion of another class of men, whose party will be equally strong and perhaps more obstinate in the Assembly in question.

These men observe that in the present state of affairs, it is impossible to unite under a single head all the members of the confederation. Their political interests, their commercial views, their customs, and their laws are so heterogenous that there is no resolution of Congress that can be equally useful and popular in the South and in the North of the Continent; even their jealousy appears to be an insurmountable obstacle. During the war the States had a common interest in repulsing powerful and cruel enemies; this interest exists no longer, why repair a building that no longer even has a foundation? Commerce henceforth becomes the principal basis for the political system of these States: The inhabitants of the North are fishermen and navigators, those of the center farmers, those of the South Planters. Their legislation should encourage, ameliorate, and perfect the various branches of their industry. To say that Congress will be able to make regulations that are specific and useful for each of these branches is to say that Congress will suffer from no passions at all, that intrigue will never play a part in its measures, that the interests of the North will never be sacrificed to those of the South: a thing theoretically impossible and known to be false from experience. "In this crisis," continue the partisans of this system, "there remains only one way to give each State all the power of which it is susceptible. That is to divide the Continent into several confederations, each of which would have a general Government independent of the others. This division is not difficult; nature appears to have indicated it. The confederation of the North could be composed of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont, and the State of New York up to the Hudson River. The confederation of the Center would contain all the land situated between that river and the Potomac, and that of the South would be composed of Virginia, the two Carolinas, and Georgia. The products, the interests, the laws, even the manners of the inhabitants would thus be classed according to their various nuances, and the three Governments would be fortified by reason of their proximity and of the identity of their political views. To those who say that one of these divisions might easily fall under the yoke of a foreign nation, has it not often been seen in Europe that several powers unite against another power which threatens to invade them? Treaties of alliance among the various States would serve as a common bond and would produce the same effect as a general confederation."

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