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Instructions to the Convention Delegates

Rhode Island's Reasons for Refusing to Appoint Delegates 15 September 1787

General Assembly to the President of Congress

State of Rhode-Island & Providence Plantations. In General Assembly September Session AD 1787.

Sir, Permit the Legislative of this State to address you on a Subject Which has engaged the attention of the confederated Union; the singularity of our not sending forward to the Convention at Philadelphia, Delegates to represent us there, agreeably to a Resolution of Congress passed the 21st February AD 1787, for the purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation. Our conduct has been reprobated by the illiberal, and many severe and unjust sarcasmes propagated against us, but Sir, when we State to you the reason, and evince the Cause the liberal mind will be convinced that we were actuated by that great principle which hath ever been the Characteristic of this State, the Love of true Constitutional liberty, and the fear we have of making innovations on the Rights and Liberties of the Citizens at large.

Our conduct during the late trying contest, has shewn forth conspicuous, that it was not from sinister motives but to pervade over the whole. And we presume Sir, that we shall be enabled to fix the same sentiments now.

Your Hon. Body informed us that the Powers invested in Congress for the Regulation of Trade were not sufficient for the purpose of the great national Regulations requisite, we granted you by an Act of our State the whole and sole power of making such Laws as would be effectual for that purpose, other States not passing similar laws it had no effect.

An impost was like wise granted but other States in the Union not acceding thereto that measure has proved abortive,—The Requisition [i.e., Resolution] of the 21st Feby last hath not been acceded too, because, we conceived that as a Legislative Body, we could not appoint Delegates, to do that which only the People at large are intitled to do; by a Law of our State the Delegates in Congress are chosen by the Suffrages of all the Freemen therein and are appointed to represent them in Congress; and for the Legislative body to have appointed Delegates to represent them in Convention, when they cannot appoint Delegates in Congress, (unless upon the Death or other incident matter) must be absurd; as that Delegation in Convention is for the express purpose of altering a Constitution, which the people at large are only capable of appointing the Members.

By the 13th. Article in the Confederation “every State shall abide by the determinations of the United States in Congress assembled, on all questions which by this Confederation are submitted to them. And the Articles of Confederation shall be inviolably observed by every State

and the Union shall be perpetual; nor shall any alteration at any time be made in any of them unless such alteration be agreed to in a Congress of the United States and be afterwards confirmed by the Legislatures of every State.”—As the Freemen at large here have the Power of electing Delegates to represent them in Congress, we could not consistantly appoint Delegates in a Convention, which might be the means of dissolving the Congress of the Union and having a Congress without a Confederation.—You will impute it Sir, to our being diffident of power and an apprehension of dissolving a compact, which was framed by the Wisdom of Men who gloried in being instrumental in preserving the Religious and Civil rights of a Multitude of people, and an almost unbounded territory, that said Requisition hath not been complied with, and fearing when the Compact should once be broken we must all be lost in a Common ruin.

We shall ever esteem it a pleasure to join with our Sister States in being instrumental in what ever may be advantageous to the Union, and to add strength and permanance thereto, upon Constitutional principles.

We are Sir, with every sentiment of respect and Esteem,

Your very obedt. Servts
Signed at the request of the General Assembly
John Collins Go

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