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## Hampden

### *Pittsburgh Gazette*, 16 February 1788 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>

The Constitution proposed for the government of the United States is of such importance to the present age, as fully to justify an honest and free discussion thereof. Yet the magnitude of the subject certainly requires that such as offer their sentiments respecting it to the public should themselves have a competent knowledge of its principles. It may be freely granted, that from a mistaken zeal in favor of that political liberty which was so recently purchased at so costly a rate, even good men may give it unreasonable opposition, but such men cannot reasonably be charged with sordid personal interest as their motive; because it is great and sudden changes which produces opportunities of preferment; but that class of men, who either prompted by their own ambition or desperate fortunes, are expecting employments under the proposed plan, or those weak and ardent men who always expect to be gainers by revolutions, and who are never contented, but always hastening from one difficulty to another; may be expected to ascribe every excellence to the proposed system and to urge a thousand reasons for our real or supposed distresses, to induce our adopting thereof. Such characters may also be expected to promise us such extravagantly flattering advantages to arise from it, as if it was accompanied with such miraculous divine energy as divided the Red Sea and spake with thunder on Mount Sinai.<sup>2</sup> . . .

. . . Many sensible patriots, from their earnest desire of giving sufficient federal powers, and their honest unsuspecting confidence in the Federal Convention, were well pleased with the proposed system at the first examination thereof, who have since entirely changed their opinion of it, having by a more strict scrutiny penetrated the mystery with which much of it is enwrapped . . . I shall address my attention chiefly to the character of candor, as it relates either to the Convention itself or to the system which they have proposed. Things are come to that crisis which justify a free examination and it is happy that to examine freely is not yet declared to be treason, or that the liberty of the press is not already restrained. Was it the result of candor? Let us first examine facts. . . The delegates were strictly limited by the law of their appointment solely to the revising the existing Confederation and reporting the result to Congress. In the meantime the people at large had great hopes and few jealousies, because the Convention had powers to brace, but not to destroy the Confederation; they had authority to recommend more extensive federal powers to the general government, but not dissolve the constitutions of the several states, and *give* ultimately the whole internal sovereign power to Congress, was as far from being included in their appointment, as it was from the expectation and wishes of the people. If they had strengthened the Confederation, and increased the federal powers; if they had clothed Congress with every general power belonging to the United States, would they not have done

their duty? Would they not have fulfilled their trust according to the law of their appointment? Would they then not have merited the character of candor? But if it doth not appear that they have discharged any part of the sacred trust reposed in them, but that they, on the contrary, as far as in them lay, destroyed the very object of their appointment; whatever may be said of them otherwise, I hope the character of candor will be given up. But to be more particular; that honorable body, after entering into a bond of secrecy which, however plausible and artful the reasons might be which brought that measure about, was certainly not necessary at least after their business was brought into form. . . .

When four months was spent in mysterious secrecy, a system of a very novel and unexpected nature was transmitted to Congress, who though vehemently urged (by a number of such as were members both of the Convention and of Congress) to signify their approbation of the system, entirely refused to do it, and [---] [---] transmit it to the states without any [recom- m]endation. . . .

. . . But it will be asked, no doubt, who is this that dares so boldly to arraign the conduct and censure the production of a Convention composed of so chosen a band of patriots? To this I answer, that I am a freeman, and it is the character of freemen to examine and judge for themselves; they know that implicit faith respecting politics is the handmaid to slavery, and that the greatness of those names who frame a government cannot sanctify its faults, nor prevent the evils that result from its imperfections. Delicacy forbids that scrutiny into particular characters, which the boasting advocates of the new system seem to invite; and indeed the adding so much weight on the gilding of great names betrays a want of more substantial aid. However, I cheerfully grant that the names of Franklin and Washington would do honor to any deliberative body; their patriotism is unquestionable; but had those great men been the framers of the system, we ought not for this to give up our right of judging, but the case is quite otherwise. We know that General Washington, being President, was obliged to sign officially, whatsoever the majority resolved upon, let it be ever so contrary to his own sentiments; and though the general proceedings of that body are still a secret, we yet certainly know that he expressed a considerable degree of disapprobation of the system, by breaking through the established rules, in order to have it amended, in the important instance before mentioned. With respect to Dr. Franklin, it is now also well-known that he was all along in the minority; that after long labor the patriots of the minority procured some alterations to the better; that Doctor Franklin never approved of it in the Federal Convention, but even to the last expressed his apprehension that it would end in despotism, though he and several others joined it out of submission to the majority, and as the best they could obtain to lay before the people. Messrs. [George] Mason, [Elbridge] Gerry, and [Edmund] Randolph, who refused absolutely to sign the system, were also patriots whose souls had been tried, and many such characters retired hopeless before the question was taken. . . .

1. "Hampden" was apparently William Findley. Thomas Scott stated: "Mr. Finley I am told behaves with considerable moderation, but he republished the Dissent of the Minority in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, and published his Hampden, which I enclose you."

2. On 12 December 1787 Benjamin Rush declared that the hand of God was employed in the creation of the new Constitution in the same manner as "God had divided the Red Sea to give a passage to the children of Israel or had fulminated the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai."

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