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## Centinel II

### Philadelphia *Freeman's Journal*, 24 October 1787 (excerpt)

“Centinel” II is, in part, a reply to James Wilson’s speech of 6 October 1787.

*To the PEOPLE of PENNSYLVANIA.*

. . . Mr. *Wilson* asserts, that never was charge made with less reason, than that which predicts the institution of a *baneful aristocracy* in the federal Senate.—In my first number, I stated that this body would be a very unequal representation of the several states, that the members being appointed for the long term of six years, and there being no exclusion by rotation, they might be continued for life, which would follow of course from their extensive means of influence, and that possessing a considerable share in the *executive* as well as *legislative*, it would become a *permanent aristocracy*, and swallow up the other orders in the government.

That these fears are not imaginary, a knowledge of the history of other nations, where the powers of government have been injudiciously placed, will fully demonstrate. Mr. *Wilson* says, “the senate branches into two characters; the one legislative and the other executive. In its legislative character it can effect no purpose, without the co-operation of the house of representatives, and in its executive character it can accomplish no object without the concurrence of the president. Thus fettered, I do not know any act which the senate can of itself perform, and such dependence necessarily precludes every idea of influence and superiority.” This I confess is very specious, but experience demonstrates, that checks in government, unless accompanied with *adequate* power and *independently* placed, prove *merely nominal*, and will be *inoperative*. Is it probable, that the president of the United States, limited as he is in power, and dependent on the will of the senate, in appointments to office, will either have the *firmness* or *inclination* to exercise his prerogative of a conditional controul upon the proceedings of that body, however injurious they may be to the public welfare: it will be his interest to coincide with the views of the senate, and thus become the head of the aristocratic junto. The king of England is a constituent part in the legislature, but although an hereditary monarch, in possession of the whole executive power, including the unrestrained appointment to offices, and an immense revenue, enjoys but in *name* the prerogative of a negative upon the parliament. Even the king of England, circumstanced as he is, has not dared to exercise it for near a century past. The check of the house of representatives upon the senate will likewise be rendered nugatory for want of due weight in the democratic branch, and from their constitution *they* may become so *independent* of the *people* as to be indifferent of its interests: nay as Congress would have the controul over the mode and place of their election, by ordering the representatives of a *whole* state to be elected

at *one* place, and that too the most *inconvenient*, the ruling power may govern the *choice*, and thus the house of representatives may be composed of the *creatures* of the senate. Still the *semblance* of checks, may remain but without *operation*.

This mixture of the legislative and executive moreover highly tends to corruption. The chief improvement in government, in modern times, has been the compleat separation of the great distinctions of power; placing the *legislative* in different hands from those which hold the *executive*; and again severing the *judicial* part from the ordinary *administrative*. “When the legislative and executive powers (says Montesquieu) are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates, there can be no liberty.”

Mr. *Wilson* confesses himself, not satisfied with the organization of the federal senate, and apologizes for it, by alledging a sort of compromise. It is well known, that some members of convention, apprized of the mischiefs of such a compound of authority, proposed to assign the supreme executive powers to the president and a small council, made personally responsible for every appointment to office, or other act, by having their opinions recorded; and that without the concurrence of the majority of the quorum of this council, the president should not be capable of taking any step. Such a check upon the chief magistrate would admirably secure the power of pardoning, now proposed to be exercised by the president alone, from abuse. For as it is placed he may shelter the traitors whom he himself or his coadjutors in the senate, have excited to plot against the liberties of the nation. . . .

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