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and Songs

Massachusetts Centinel, 29 October 1788

(The following Petition is now circulating in Rhode-Island.)

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES.

The PETITION of the “MAJORITY” of RHODE-ISLAND,

HUMBLY SHEWETH,

That your Honour’s petitioners, *anti’s* by trade—
Tho’ since we were born, we have lent Anarch our aid;
And done what we could in country and town,
His reign to support—and all laws to pull down:
Yet now to our grief and confusion we see,
That ruin’s our lot—to remain as we be.

Though often—too often—our schemes were disgrac’d,
We still were in hopes to have conquer’d at last;
To have form’d an Algiers in American seas¹—
And have plunder’d, and murder’d, and rob’d as we please;
But alas—all those prospects are vanished and fled,
And the genius of *Anarch’s* expiring, or dead.

Though bang’d in the papers, and ill thump’d about,
Whene’er we come in, or whene’er we go out.
Though charg’d with supporting the *De’il* and his imps—
Of harbouring forg’ers, thieves, knaves, and pimps,
There’s one thing that ought to our credit be plac’d,
That with *tendries of paper*, our debts are erac’d.

As all of the States, except two, have come in,
And the North-Carolinians are repenting their sin;
We beg to be told, what we have to expect—
Whether *grace*, or *chastisement*, or scornful *neglect*.
If the *first*—to your plans we will *strive* to agree—
If the *second*—let mercy adorn the decree.

Neglect we have often experienc’d before,
So we’ve nothing to hope, or to fear, on that score:

But if we're *chastis'd*, as we think we deserve,
Pray still give us leave our *old master*² to serve—
And more to effect it—transport us away,
To our "*brethren in evil*,"³ at Botany Bay.⁴
And your Honours petitioners ever shall pray.

W. W.

GOTHERNIEL, &c. &c.⁵

1. This reference to Algiers equates Rhode Island with the infamous Barbary pirates of the Mediterranean Sea.

2. Great Britain.

3. Genesis 49:5.

4. A reference to the British penal colony in Australia.

5. A reference to William West, Othniel Gorton, and the others involved in threatening violence against the Federalist Fourth of July celebration in Providence and ratification of the Constitution by New Hampshire.

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