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Centinel III

Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 8 November 1787

(excerpts)

To the PEOPLE of PENNSYLVANIA

. . . A comparison of the authority under which the convention acted, and their form of government will shew that they have despised their delegated power, and assumed sovereignty; that they have entirely annihilated the old confederation, and the particular governments of the several states, and instead thereof have established one general government that is to pervade the union; constituted on the most *unequal* principles, destitute of accountability to its constituents, and as despotic in its nature, as the Venetian aristocracy; a government that will give full scope to the magnificent designs of the *well-born*; a government where tyranny may glut its vengeance on the *low-born*, unchecked by *an odious bill of rights*: as has been fully illustrated in my two preceding numbers;¹ and yet as a blind upon the understandings of the people, they have continued the forms of the particular governments, and termed the whole a confederation of the United States, pursuant to the sentiments of that profound, but corrupt politician Machiavel, who advises any one who would change the constitution of a state, to keep as much as possible to the old forms; for then the people seeing the same officers, the same formalities, courts of justice and other outward appearances, are insensible of the alteration, and believe themselves in possession of their old government. Thus Cæsar, when he seized the Roman liberties, caused himself to be chosen dictator (which was an ancient office) continued the senate, the consuls, the tribunes, the censors, and all other offices and forms of the commonwealth; and yet changed Rome from the most free, to the most tyrannical government in the world. . . .

The general acquiescence of one description of citizens in the proposed government, surprises me much; if so many of the Quakers have become indifferent to the sacred rights of conscience, so amply secured by the constitution of this commonwealth; if they are satisfied, to rest this inestimable privilege on the discretion of the future government; yet in a political light they are not acting wisely; in the state of Pennsylvania, they form so considerable a portion of the community, as must ensure them great weight in the government; but in the scale of general empire, they will be lost in the ballance.¹ . . .

1. “Portius” denounced “Centinel’s” attempt “to work upon the passions of the Quakers,” arguing that it was the Pennsylvania Antifederalists that Quakers had to fear. In support of his argument, “Portius” referred to the state Constitutionalists’ opposition to the repeal of the Test Law that disenfranchised many Quakers.

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