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Centinel XIX

Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 7 October 1788

To the People of Pennsylvania.

Friends, Countrymen and Fellow Citizens!

When I last addressed you on the subject of the new constitution, I had not a doubt of its rejection: the baneful nature and tendency of this system of ambition had been so fully exposed, that its most zealous advocates were constrained to acknowledge many imperfections and dangers, and *seemingly* to acquiesce in the necessity of amendments. — However by the time this general conviction had taken place in the minds of the people, so many states had adopted the constitution, and the public anxiety was so great to have an efficient government, that the votaries of power and ambition, were enabled, by adapting their language and conduct to the temper of the times, to prevail upon a competent number of the states to establish the constitution, without previous alteration, upon the implied condition of subsequent amendments, which they assured would certainly be made, as every body were agreed in their propriety.

My knowledge of the principles and conduct of these men, for many years past, left me no room to doubt of their [in]sincerity on this occasion — I was persuaded that all their professions of moderation, and assurances of future amendments, were founded in deception, that they were but the blind of the moment, the covered way to dominion and empire — Like a barrel thrown to the whale,¹ the people were to be amused with fancied amendments, until the harpoon of power, should secure its prey and render resistance ineffectual. Already the masque of ambition begins to be removed, and its latent features to appear in their genuine hue, disdainng any further veil from policy; the *well-born*, inebriated with success, and dispising the people for their easy credulity, think it unnecessary to dissemble any longer — almost every news-paper ridicules the idea of amendments, and triumphs over the deluded people. Ye patriots of America, arouse from the dangerous infatuation in which ye are lulled, and, while it is yet time, strain every nerve to rescue your country from the servile yoke of bondage and to preserve that liberty which has been so recently vindicated, at the expence of so much blood and treasure. Upon the improvement of the present moment, depends the fate of your country; you have now a constitutional opportunity afforded you, to obtain a safe and a good government, by making choice of such persons to represent you in the new Congress; as have congenial sentiments with yourselves. Suffer not, ye freemen of America, the *well-born*, or their *servile minions*, to usurp the sacred trust, to impose themselves upon you as your guardians; for whatever professions they may make, or assurances they may give you, depend upon it they will deceive you, like the wolf in sheeps

clothing they will make you their prey. Treat with contempt the slanderous arts of the well-born to prejudice you against your true friends, and convince them on this great occasion, by your good sense, union and vigour, that you are not to be duped out of your liberties by all the refinements of *machiavelian* policy. The future government of these United States will take its tone from the complexion of the first Congress;—upon this will greatly depend, whether despotic sway, or the salutary influence of a well regulated government, shall hereafter rule this once happy land. As the Legislature of this state have appointed the last Wednesday in November next for the election of the 8 representatives from this state in the new Congress—you ought to be prepared for that *all-important* day; and as success is only to be ensured by unanimity among the friends of equal liberty, local and personal predilections and dislikes should give place to the general sentiment; whatever ticket may be agreed to by the majority of the opposition to the new constitution in its present shape, ought to be supported by all those who are sincere in wishing for amendments.—I trust that all prejudices and antipathies arising from the late war, or from difference of religion, will be sacrificed to the great object of the public welfare, and that all good and well meaning men of whatever description will harmonize on this occasion. For among the various practices & stratagems of the well born, the principal one, and upon which they will the most rely for success, will be the endeavor to divide you, and thus by scattering your suffrages between various candidates to frustrate your object.

From the mode of appointment, the Senate of the general government will be chiefly composed of the *well born*, or their minions, and when we consider the great and various powers which they will possess, and their permanency, it ought to operate as an additional stimulus with you to obtain faithful representatives in the other branch of legislature, to shield your privileges and property from the machinations of ambition, and the rapacity of power. The Senate, besides their proper share in the Legislature, have great executive and judicial powers—their concurrence is made necessary to all the principal appointments in government—What a fruitful source of corruption does not this present! in the capacity of Legislators they will have the irresistible temptation to institute lucrative and needless offices, as they will in fact, have the appointment of the *officers*.

When I consider the nature of power and ambition; when I view the numerous swarm of hungry office-hunters, and their splendid expectations, anticipation exhibits such a scene of rapacity and oppression, such burthensome establishments to pamper the pride and luxury of a useless herd of officers, such dissipation and profusion of the public treasure, such consequent impoverishment and misery of the people, that I tremble for my country.

Such evils are only to be averted by a vigorous exertion of the freemen of America, to procure a virtuous, disinterested, & patriotic House of Representatives. That you may all view the importance of this election in its true light, and improve the only means which the constitution affords you for your preservation, is the fervent wish of

CENTINEL

Philadelphia, October 3d, 1788.

1. “A barrel thrown to a whale” is meant metaphorically to be a diversion.

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