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Centinel XX

Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer, 23 October 1788

(excerpt)

. . . It has been moreover the policy of the junto, from the beginning, to ruin, by every device of calumny and exertion of influence, the character and circumstances of every leading patriot; well knowing that the people are only important and powerful when united under confidential leaders; and as this policy was supported by a numerous and weighty party, and pursued with unremitted perseverance, the ablest and most influential patrons of the people fell victims to it, character after character were successively attacked and hunted down by the dogs of party, with the most unfeeling rancour, even the death of the victim did not assuage their gall—In this barbarous game of policy, the infamous *Galen* [Benjamin Rush] bore away the palm, and shone conspicuous beyond all the imps of the *well-born*; he boasted that the superior malignity of his pen had deprived the illustrious and patriotic [Joseph] *Reed* of his existence, and in his fate had made a signal example to deter others from emulating his virtues, and standing forth the advocates of the privileges of the people, which is so highly criminal in the eyes of the *well-born*.

By such means have the well-born attained to their present power and importance, to a situation which has enabled them to dictate and procure the establishment of a form of government for the United States, which, if not amended, will put the finishing stroke to popular liberty, and confirm the sway of the *well-born*. Whilst the fate of the new constitution was doubtful, great was the assumed moderation, specious were the promises of its advocates. The despotic principles and tendency of this system of government were so powerfully demonstrated as to strike conviction in almost every breast, but this was artfully obviated by urging the pressing necessity of having an energetic government and assurances of subsequent amendments. The people were moreover told, “you will have the means in your own power to prevent the oppression of government, viz. the choice of your representatives in the federal legislature, who will be the guardians of your rights and property, your shield against the machinations of the *well-born*.”] But how changed the language, how different the conduct of these men, since its establishment?—the[y] are taking effectual measures as far as in their power to realize the worst predictions of the opponents to the new constitution—Having secured the avenue to offices under the new Congress by the appointment of the senators, they are now exerting all their influence to carry the election of the representatives in the federal legislature, and thereby get the absolute command of the *purse strings* to confirm their domination; every artifice is practising to delude the people on this great occasion, which in all probability will be the last opportunity they will have to preserve their

liberties, as the new Congress will have it in their power to establish despotism without violating the principles of the constitution. The proposed meeting at *Lancaster*¹ is a high game of deception; under the appearance of giving the people an opportunity to nominate their representatives, the minions of ambition are to be palmed upon them. Ostensible deputies are to be sent from every county for this purpose, who, if we may judge from those already appointed, will take especial care to prevent the nomination of men who have congenial feelings with the people, as such would prove troublesome obstacles in the way of ambition; the intention is to monopolize both branches of the legislature, and make the government harmonize with the aggrandizement of the *well-born* and their minions. The deputies appointed to go from this city [James Wilson and George Latimer] characterise the juggle and designate the intention more strikingly than is in the power of language to express, or the ingenuity of artifice to conceal: the man who confessedly has had a principal share in the framing of a constitution that is universally allowed to be dangerously despotic [James Wilson]; and therefore to require great amendments; the man who in every stage of its adoption has been its greatest advocate; whose views of aggrandizement are founded upon the unqualified execution of this government, whose aristocratic principles, aspiring ambition, and contempt of the common people, have long distinguished him; I say this man is now selected as one of that body who are to dictate the choice of the people—to point out *faithful* representatives who are to check ambition and defend their rights and privileges. If the people suffer themselves to be thus fooled upon so momentous an occasion, they will deserve their fate. But I am persuaded they will discern the fraud and act becoming freemen, that they will give their suffrages to real patriots and genuine representatives.

Philadelphia, October 22d, 1788.

1. The Lancaster conference composed of delegates from most of the Pennsylvania counties and Philadelphia met on 3 November 1788 to select a slate of candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and for presidential electors.

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