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## Solon

### Boston *Independent Chronicle*, 30 October 1788

Mess’rs. ADAMS and NOURSE, Some *writers* on the *subject* of the Federal Constitution, write with a *candour peculiar to themselves*; every man or number of men, who advance sentiments of the propriety, necessity or utility of any amendments in the Constitution, are held up as “*anti-federalists*” or “time serving politicians” “sticklers for alterations,” “alteration mongers,” “shameless seekers of posts and pensions,” and the like, who want to “*divide*” — “perplex,” and “harrass the people,” and are “anticipating the destruction of the essence and spirit of the adopted Constitution”:—But such a *mode of reasoning* with candid and impartial men, is seldom convincing. A *free* and *enlightened* people are capable of distinguishing between *right* and *wrong*. If the federal Constitution is a system of government, *balanced*, and *sufficiently checked*, by those principles which reason and common sense dictate, and approve, and *experience* hath *taught* and *confirmed*, any attempt needlessly to *alarm*, *perplex* or *harrass* the people will undoubtedly be treated by them with that inattention and contempt which they deserve;—But if on the other hand, it *appears*, that with all the *excellencies* of the new Constitution, it is *essential* to the *security* and *permanence* of the *rights* and *liberties* of the people, that in some *particulars*, a more *explicit* definition and *express* limitation of power be made,—the men who advance, and hold up to the people, the propriety and necessity of such measures, will *justly merit*, not the character of *antifederalists*, or time serving politicians, but that of *true federalists* and *true patriots*.

The respectable Convention of this State, have stated *nine* propositions—these speak for themselves; will any man say, there were no grounds for, or weight in them, or that it is a matter of indifference, whether there are any such *checks* or *declarations* adopted into the federal Constitution or not? Several other States have likewise proposed amendments, not of a *local* but *general* nature: Is no respect or attention due to these? Hath not every man, and every body of men, in a free country, a right to express their sentiments, with decency and candour, touching public measures; and those objects in which both they and their posterity are deeply interested, to be *heard*, and attended to, as far as the merits of their observations have weight, and not to be *stigmatized*? It is *measures*, and not men, that are to be *scanned*, (*truth is truth from whomsoever it comes*) and these will ever *stand* or *fall*, as they have their *basis* on *truth* and *reason*, or not—unless *supported* by *arbitrary power*.—*This people*, are not only remarkable for their good sense and discernment, but they live in a peculiar age—and without recurrence to ancient story, within the compass of a score of years, have *seen* and *heard* sufficiently, to caution them, carefully to *define* those powers, which *they delegate* to others.

Great-Britain, who stiled herself the mother country, of these now sovereign States, not long since her colonies, *claimed* the *exercise* of those powers over them in *all* cases whatsoever [the Declaratory Act (1766)], to which this enlightned people would not submit; and an everlasting seperation has taken place.

A *Prince* and a *virtuous people*, a *Republic* too, we have seen, not long since, disputing of *prerogative*, and of *rights*—a horrid civil war commenced—a *foreign force* commanded *silence*. If *powers delegated*, and *rights retained*, had been *definite*, probably *this dispute* had not happened.

In a *nation* with whom these States have not only a near connection, but for whom they also possess a *warm* affection, and between a *Prince* the most *amiable* and *paternal*, and a *people* the most *filial* and *obedient*, are matters at this moment in a most disagreeable situation [France and Louis XVI]—the one *claiming*, what the other suppose ought not to be *conceded*; what the event will be, time must discover,—*Heaven* grant that the *law* of the *Prince* for his people, to whom he has remarkably shewn himself in time past, the *father*; and the *love* of the *people* for their *Prince*, who has been their pride and their boast, may cement, and forever *unite* their affections, in those measures which tend to the *prosperity* and *happiness* of the nation.

But these things *shew*, as was my intention in the mention of them, that *powers delegated*, ought never to be *indefinite*, or *ambiguous*, but *clearly defined*, and well *understood*; as it will not only *prevent* unhappy disputes, but as it heretofore *might*, so it hereafter *may*, prevent *bloodshed*, and the *loss of liberty*. A celebrated writer has told us, that “in every society there is an effort constantly tending to confer on one part the height of power, and to reduce the other to the extreme of weakness and misery.” And *another* has observed, “*Is it not strange, though true, to say that virtue itself has need of limits.*” —Ought then, a *wise* and *free* people carefully to *guard that* which of all human enjoyments, is the *most invaluable*—or, in any essential point, grant it *unlimited* and at *discretion*? Let common sense and reason, in the breasts of those who *determine*, and who have *virtue to be free, decide*.

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