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(Roger Sherman) Essays

A Countryman V *New Haven Gazette*, 20 December 1787

To the People of Connecticut.

You do not hate to read Newspaper Essays on the new constitution, more than I hate to write them. Then *we will be short*—which I have often found the *best* expression in a dull sermon, except the *last*.

Whether the mode of election pointed out in the proposed constitution is well calculated to support the principles which were designed to be established in the different branches of the legislature, may perhaps be justly doubted;—and may perhaps in some future day be discussed.

The design undoubtedly was, that the house of representatives should be a *popular* assembly,—that the senate should, in its nature, be somewhat more permanent, and that the two houses should be completely independent of each other. These *principles* are right.—For the present we will suppose they will be supported—there then remains to be considered no considerable difference between the continental government which is proposed, and your present government, except that the time for which you choose your present rulers is only for six and twelve months, and the time for which you are to choose your continental rulers is for two, four, and six years.

The convention were mistaken if they supposed they should lessen the evils of tumultuous elections by making elections less frequent.—But are your liberties endangered by this measure? Philosophy may mislead you. Ask experience.—Are not the liberties of the people of England as safe as yours?—They are not as free as you, because much of their government is in the hands of *hereditary majesty* and *nobility*. But is not that part of the government which is under the controul of the commons exceedingly well guarded? But still the house of commons is only a third branch—the *only* branch who are appointed by the people,—and they are chosen but once in *seven years*. Is there then any danger to be apprehended from the length of time that your rulers are to serve? when none are to serve more than six years—one whole house but two years, and your President but four.

The great power and influence of an hereditary monarch of Britain has spread many alarms, from an apprehension that the commons would sacrifice the liberties of the people to the money or influence of the crown: But the influence of a powerful *hereditary monarch*, with the national Treasury—Army—and fleet at his command—and the whole executive government—and one third of the legislative in his hands,—constantly operating on a house of commons, whose duration is never less than *seven years*, unless this same monarch should *end* it, (which he can do in an hour) has never yet been sufficient to obtain one vote of the house of commons which has taken from the people the *liberty of the press*,—*trial by jury*,—*the rights of conscience*, or of *private property*.

—Can you then apprehend danger of oppression and tyranny from the too great duration of the power of *your* rulers.

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