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Helvidius Priscus IV

Massachusetts Gazette, 5 February 1788 (excerpts)

To the Inhabitants of Massachusetts.

It has been one of the leading arts of the aristocratick faction, to depreciate the abilities of that part of the convention of the Massachusetts who are opposed to the arbitrary system, which the other supports with the avidity of interest, and the acrimony of contempt for those of less fortune, education, or other factitious advantages than themselves. An impartial observer, who has little personal acquaintance with, nor any undue prejudice against, the one side, or predilection in favour of the other, has read with great attention the speeches of both, on a subject the most important that has yet been discussed in America. He has been willing to discover truth, and ready to pay the tribute of applause wherever it is due, either to the peasant, just called from the field, or to the accomplished citizen, who has spent his life in a court; and has faithfully compared the arguments of both, and must acknowledge that, where he had been led to expect genius, improved by education, oratorical abilities, and profound reasoning, brightened by study and experience, he has been mortified, for the sake of human nature, to find evasion and sophistry; the prostration of the genuine principles of liberty, and the weak subterfuges of party, endeavouring to cast a veil over the design, the meaning and the consequences of a system that does not require the deepest sagacity to penetrate. . . .

And when the thin vizard that has been cast before your injured opticks shall fail from your lids, you may find the men, who have lured you to the snare, are the least disposed to meliorate your sufferings. But it is said, you must accept and ratify the proposed constitution— Then, with your hands tied behind you, and sackcloth on your backs, you may perhaps be permitted to approach the federal city with supplicatory addresses, to mollify the hard conditions of your subjugation; and among other evils you deplore, you may pray that no direct taxes may be assessed, but when the exigences of your masters require it. But you will remember the Caudine Forks cannot be repassed, without bending the neck beneath the yoke of the Samnites; you may then, as the humiliated Romans, in the deepest consternation, look with silent agony on each other, but without discovering a ray of hope in the countenance of the brave, reduced by their own rashness to inextricable wretchedness. . . .

CITE AS: *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, ed. John P. Kaminski, et al., Ratification by the States, Volume V: Massachusetts, No. 2, (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1998), 858-60.