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Centinel XIII

Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 30 January 1788

(excerpts)

TO THE PEOPLE OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Fellow-Citizens, The conspirators are putting your good sense, patriotism and spirit to the severest test. So bold a game of deception, so decisive a stroke for despotic power, was never before attempted among enlightened freemen. Can there be apathy so indifferent as not to be roused into indignation, or prejudice so blind, as not to yield to the glaring evidence of a flagitious conspiracy against the public liberties! The audacious and high-handed measures practised to suppress information, and intimidate discussion, would in any other circumstances than the present, have kindled a flame fatal to such daring invaders of our dearest privileges.

The conspirators having been severely galled and checked in their career by the artillery of freedom, have made more vigorous and successful efforts to silence her batteries, while falsehood with all her delusions is making new and greater exertions in favor of ambition. . . . Doctor Puff [Benjamin Rush] the paragraphist, has scarcely slept since his appointment, having received orders to work double tides; beneath his creative pen thousands of correspondents rise into view, who all harmonize in their sentiments and information about the new-constitution; but the chief reliance is on James the Caledonian, who can to appearance destroy all distinction between liberty and despotism, and make the latter pass for the former, who can bewilder truth in all the mazes of sophistry, and render the plainest propositions problematical—He cameleon-like can vary his appearance at pleasure, and assume any character for the purposes of deception. In the guise of a *Conciliator*, in the *Independent Gazetteer*, he professes great candour and moderation, admits some of the principal objections to the new constitution to be well founded, and insidiously proposes a method to remove them, which is to consider the first Congress under the new constitution as a convention, competent to supply all defects in the system of government. This is really a discovery that does honor to his invention. What! a legislative declaration or law a basis upon which to rest our dearest liberties. Does he suppose the people have so little penetration as not to see through so flimsey a delusion, that such a security would amount to no more than the will and pleasure of their rulers, who might repeal this *fundamental* sanction whenever ambition stimulated?—in the feigned *character of a freeman*, he combats the weighty arguments of the minority of the late convention, by a meer play upon words, carefully avoiding the real merits of the question; and we moreover trace him in a variety of miscellaneous

productions in every shape and form, he occasionally assists Doctor Puff in the fabrication of extracts of letters, paragraphs, correspondents, &c. &c.

So gifted and with such a claim of merit from his extraordinary and unwearied exertions in the cause of despotism, who so suitable or deserving of the office of Chief Justice of the United States. How congenial would such a post be to the principles and disposition of James! Here he would be both Judge and jury, sovereign arbiter in law and equity. In this capacity he may satiate his vengeance on patriotism for the opposition given to his projects of dominion: Here he may gratify his superlative arrogance and contempt of mankind, by trampling upon his fellow creatures with impunity; here he may give the finishing stroke to liberty, and silence the offensive complaints of violated justice and innocence, by adding the sanction of his office to the rapacity of power and the wantonness of oppression; there will be no intervening jury to shield the innocent, or procure redress to the injured.

Fellow-citizens, although the conspirators and their abettors are not sufficiently numerous to endanger our liberties by an open and forcible attack on them, yet when the characters of which they are composed and the methods they are practising, are considered, it ought to occasion the most serious alarm, and stimulate to an immediate, vigorous and united exertion of the patriotic part of the community for the security of their rights and privileges. Societies ought to be instituted in every county and a reciprocity of sentiments and information maintained between such societies, whereby the patriots throughout Pennsylvania, being mutually enlightened and invigorated, would form an invincible bulwark to liberty, and by unity of council and exertion might the better procure and secure to themselves and to unborn ages the blessings of a good federal government. Nothing but such a system of conduct can frustrate the machinations of an ambitious junto, who, versed in Machiavelian arts, can varnish over with the semblance of freedom the most despotic instrument of government ever projected, who cannot only veil over their own ambitious purposes, but raise an outcry against the real patriots for interested views when they are advocating the cause of liberty and of their country by opposing a scheme of arbitrary power and office-making; who can give the appearance of economy to the introduction of a numerous and permanent standing army and the institution of lucrative, needless offices to provide for the swarms of gaping, almost famished expectants, who have been campaigning it for ten years without success against our inestimable state constitution, as a reward for their persevering toils, but particularly for their zeal on the present occasion, and also as a phalanx to tyranny; and who notwithstanding the testimony of uniform experience evinces the necessity of restrictions on those entrusted with power, and a due dependence of the deputy on the constituent being maintained to ensure the public welfare; who notwithstanding the fate that liberty has ever met from the remissness of the people and the persevering nature of ambition who ever on the watch, grasps at every avenue to supremacy. I say, notwithstanding such evidence before them of the folly of mankind so often duped by similar arts, the conspirators have had the address to inculcate the opinion that forms of government are no security for the public liberties, that the administration is every thing, that although there would be no responsibility under the new constitution, no restriction on the powers of the government, whose will and pleasure would be literally the law of the land, yet that we should be perfectly safe and happy, that as our rulers would be made of the same corrupt materials as ourselves, they certainly could not abuse the trust reposed in them, but would be the most self-denying order of beings ever created; with your purses at their absolute disposal, and your liberties at their discretion, they would be proof against the charms of money and the allurements of power; however, if such Utopian ideas should prove chimerical and the people should find the yoke too

heavy, they might at pleasure alleviate or even throw it off. In short, the conspirators have displayed so much ingenuity on this occasion, that if it had not been for the patriotism and firmness of some of the printers, which gave an opportunity to enlightened truth to come forward, and by her invincible powers to detect the sophistry, and expose the fallacy of such impositions, liberty must have been overcome by the wiles of ambition, and this land of freemen have become the miserable abode of slaves.

CITE AS: *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, ed. John P. Kaminski, et al., Commentaries on the Constitution, Volume XV, No. 3, (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1984), 505-08.