

A Landholder II, *Connecticut Courant*, 12 November 1787

To the Holders and Tillers of Land.

Gentlemen, You were told in the late war that peace and independence would reward your toil, and that riches would accompany the establishment of your liberties, by opening a wider market and consequently raising the price of such commodities as America produces for exportation.

Such a conclusion appeared just and natural. We had been restrained by the British to trade only with themselves, who often re-exported to other nations, at a high advance, the raw materials they had procured from us. This advance we designed to realize, but our expectation has been disappointed.

The produce of the country is in general down to the old price, and bids fair to fall much lower. It is time for those who till the earth in the sweat of their brow to enquire the cause, and we shall find it neither in the merchant or farmer, but in a bad system of policy and government, or rather in having no system at all. When we call ourselves an independent nation, it is false: we are neither a nation, nor are we independent. Like thirteen contentious neighbors, we devour and take every advantage of each other, and are without that system of policy which gives safety and strength, and constitutes a national structure. Once we were dependent only on Great Britain; now we are dependent on every petty state in the world and on every customhouse officer of foreign ports. If the injured apply for redress to the assemblies of the several states, it is in vain, for they are not, and cannot be known abroad. If they apply to Congress, it is also vain, for however wise and good that body may be, they have not power to vindicate either themselves or their subjects.

Do not, my countrymen, fall into a passion on hearing these truths, nor think your treatment unexampled. From the beginning it hath been the case that people without policy will find enough to take advantage of their weakness, and you are not the first who have been devoured by their wiser neighbors. But perhaps it is not too late for a remedy; we ought at least to make a trial, and if we still die shall have this consolation in our last hours, that we tried to live.

I can foresee that several classes of men will try to alarm your fears, and however selfish their motives, we may expect that *liberty, the encroachments of power, and the inestimable privileges of dear posterity* will with them be fruitful topics of argument. As Holy Scripture is used in the exorcisms of Romish priests to expel imaginary demons; so the most sacred words will be conjured together to oppose evils which have no existence in the new Constitution, and which no man dare attempt to carry into execution among a people of so free a spirit as the Americans. The first to oppose a federal government will be the old friends of Great Britain, who in their hearts cursed the prosperity of your arms and have ever since delighted in the perplexity of your councils. Many of these men are still among us, and for several years their hopes of a reunion with Britain have been high; they rightly judge that nothing will so soon effect their wishes as the deranged state we are now in, if it should continue. They see that the

merchant is weary of a government which cannot protect his property, and that the farmer, finding no benefit from the revolution, begins to dread much evil; and they hope the people will soon supplicate the protection of their old masters. We may therefore expect that all the policy of these men will center in defeating those measures which will protect the people and give system and force to American councils.

I was lately in a circle where the new Constitution was discussed. All but one man approved; he was full of trembling for the liberties of poor America. It was strange! It was wondrous strange to see his concern after several of his arguments had been refuted by an ingenious farmer in the company. But says he, it is against the treaty of peace. We received independence from Great Britain on condition of our keeping the old constitution. Here the man come out! We had beat the British with a bad frame of government, and with a good one he feared we should eat them up.

Debtors in desperate circumstances, who have not resolution to be either honest or industrious, will be the next men to take the alarm. They have long been upheld by the property of their creditors and the mercy of the public, and daily destroy a thousand honest men who are unsuspecting. *Paper money* and *tender acts* is the only atmosphere in which they can breathe and live. This is now so generally known that by being a friend to such measures a man effectually advertises himself a bankrupt. The opposition of these we expect, but for the sake of all honest and industrious debtors, we most earnestly wish the proposed Constitution may pass, for whatever gives a new spring to business will extricate them from their difficulties.

There is another kind of people will be found in the opposition. Men of much self-importance and supposed skill in politics, who are not of sufficient consequence to obtain public employment, but can spread jealousies in the little districts of country where they are placed; these are always jealous of men in place and of public measures, and aim at making themselves consequential by distrusting every one in the higher offices of society.

It is a strange madness of some persons immediately to distrust those who are raised by the free suffrages of the people to sustain powers which are absolutely necessary for public safety. Why were they elevated but for a general reputation of wisdom and integrity; and why should they be distrusted, until by ignorance or some base action they have forfeited a right to our confidence?

To fear a general government on energetic principles lest it should create tyrants, when without such a government all have an opportunity to become tyrants and avoid punishment, is fearing the possibility of one act of oppression more than the real exercise of a thousand. But in the present case, men who have lucrative and influential state offices, if they act from principles of self-interest, will be tempted to oppose an alteration which would doubtless be beneficial to the people. To sink from a controlment of finance, or any other great department of the state, thro want of ability or opportunity to act a part in the federal system must be a terrifying consideration. Believe not those who insinuate that this is a scheme of great men to grasp more power. The temptation is on the other side. Those in great offices never wish to

hazard their places by such a change. This is the scheme of the people, and those high and worthy characters who, in obedience to the public voice, offer the proposed amendment of our federal constitution thus esteemed it, or they would not have determined state conventions as the tribunal of ultimate decision. This is the last opportunity you may have to adopt a government which gives all protection to personal liberty and, at the same time, promises fair to afford you all the advantages of a sovereign empire. While you deliberate with coolness, be not duped by the artful surmises of such as from their own interest or prejudice are blind to the public good.

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