

Centinel III, Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 8 November 1787

To the people of Pennsylvania

John 3d, verse 20th—*“For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.”* But *“there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known. Therefore whatever ye have spoken in darkness, shall be heard in the light: and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed on the housetops.”* St. Luke, chap, xii, 2d and 3d verses.

Friends, Countrymen, and Fellow Citizens! The formation of a good government, is the greatest effort of human wisdom, actuated by disinterested patriotism; but such is the cursed nature of ambition, so prevalent among men, that it would sacrifice every thing to its selfish gratification; hence the fairest opportunities of advancing the happiness of humanity, are so far from being properly improved, that they are too often converted to the votaries of power and domination, into the means of obtaining their nefarious ends. It will be the misfortune of America of adding to the number of examples of this kind, if the proposed plan of government should be adopted; but I trust, short as the time allowed you for consideration is, you will be so fully convinced of the truth of this, as to escape the impending danger: it is only necessary to strip the monster of its assumed garb, and to exhibit it in its native colours, to excite the universal abhorrence and rejection of every virtuous and patriotic mind.

For the sake of my dear country, for the honor of human nature, I hope and am persuaded, that the good sense of the people will enable them to rise superior to the most formidable conspiracy against the liberties of a free and enlightened nation, that the world has ever witnessed. How glorious would be the triumph! How it would immortalize the present generation in the annals of freedom!

The establishment of a government, is a subject of such momentous and lasting concern, that it should not be gone into without the clearest conviction of its propriety; which can only be the result of the fullest discussion, the most thorough investigation and dispassionate consideration of its nature, principles and construction. You are now called upon to make this decision, which involves in it, not only your fate, but that of your posterity for ages to come. Your determination will either ensure the possession of those blessings, which render life desirable, or entail those evils which make existence a curse:—that such are the consequences of a wise or improper organization of government, the history of mankind abundantly testifies. If you viewed the magnitude of the object in its true light, you would join with me in sentiment, that the new government ought not to be implicitly admitted. Consider then duly before you leap, for after the rubicon is once passed, there will be no retract.

If you were even well assured that the utmost purity of intention predominated in the production of the proposed government, such is the imperfection of human reason and knowledge, that it would not be wise in you to adopt it with precipitation in toto, for all former experience must teach you the propriety of a revision on such occasions,

to correct the errors, and supply the deficiencies, that may appear necessary. In every government whose object is the public welfare, the laws are subjected to repeated revisions, in some by different orders in governments, in others by an appeal to the judgment of the people and deliberative forms of procedure. A knowledge of this, as well as of other states, will show that in every instance where a law has been passed without the usual precautions, it has been productive of great inconvenience and evils, and frequently has not answered the end in view, a supplement becoming necessary to supply its deficiencies.

What then are we to think of the motives and designs of those men who are urging the implicit and immediate adoption of the proposed government; are they fearful, that if you exercise your good sense and discernment, you will discover the masqued aristocracy, that they are attempting to smuggle upon you, under the suspicious garb of republicanism. . . .

In many of the states, particularly in this and the northern states, there are aristocratic junto's of the *well-born few*, who had been zealously endeavouring since the establishment of their constitutions, to humble that offensive *upstart, equal liberty*; but all their efforts were unavailing, the *ill-bred churl* obstinately kept his assumed station.

Such an opportunity for the acquisition of *undue* power, has never been viewed with indifference by the ambitious and designing in any age or nation, and it has accordingly been too successfully improved by such men among us. The deputies from this state (with the exception of two) and most of those from the other states in the union, were unfortunately of this complexion, and many of them of such superior endowments, that in an *ex parte* discussion of the subject by specious glosses, they have gained the concurrence of some well-disposed men, in whom their country has great confidence, which has given a great sanction to their scheme of power.

A comparison of the authority under which the convention acted, and their form of government will shew that they have despised their delegated power, and assumed sovereignty; that they have entirely annihilated the old confederation, and the particular governments of the several states, and instead thereof have established one general government that is to pervade the union; constituted on the most *unequal* principles, destitute of accountability to its constituents, and as despotic in its nature, as the Venetian aristocracy; a government that will give full scope to the magnificent designs of the *well-born*; a government where tyranny may glut its vengeance on the *low-born*, unchecked by *an odious bill of rights*: as has been fully illustrated in my two preceding numbers; and yet as a blind upon the understandings of the people, they have continued the forms of the particular governments, and termed the whole a confederation of the United States, pursuant to the sentiments of that profound, but corrupt politician Machiavel, who advises any one who would change the constitution of a state, to keep as much as possible to the old forms; for then the people seeing the same officers, the same formalities, courts of justice and other outward appearances, are insensible of the alteration, and believe themselves in possession of their old government.⁷ Thus Cæsar, when he seized the Roman liberties, caused himself to be chosen dictator (which was an ancient office) continued the senate, the consuls, the tribunes, the censors, and all other offices and forms of the commonwealth; and yet

changed Rome from the most free, to the most tyrannical government in the world...
Philadelphia, November 5th, 1787.

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