

Antoine de la Forest to Comte de Montmorin New York, 15 December 1787

Since the account which I had the honor of giving to Mgr. le Mai. de Castries of the different opinions which divide the people of the United States On the plan of the new general Government, nine legislatures have voted in Succession for the convening of a Special assembly of the people of their respective States. All have purely and Simply Submitted the proposed constitution to the free consideration of their assembly, by abstaining from giving their opinion. The legislature of Virginia is the Only one which permitted Itself to show indirectly its desire that this plan not be accepted, by voting for funds *to defray the expenses of the commissioners who could be sent back to a new general assembly of the states in order to make alterations in the constitution.* It is not doubted that all the other legislatures will also appoint Special assemblies at their first Session. That of Rhode island however, where the motion to do so was made last October, has rejected it provisionally; but it will probably return to it at its next Session. Moreover people seem hardly to be concerned with what that State too weak to resist the wishes of the others will do.

The Special assembly of Newjersey is now meeting and it is known that it is almost unanimously disposed to adopt the new government. That of Delaware has the merit of having ratified it first on the 6. of this month and that of Pensylvania on the 12. There were some violent debates in the Special assembly of that State; one third of the deputies of the people, almost all belonging to the western counties of Pensylvania, are opposing it with all their powers. It is not feared however that disturbances will result in these counties, because the Electors themselves are almost equally divided on the question. There is reason to believe, from reports which leave little doubt, that the Special assemblies of New Hampshire, Massachussets, Connecticut, South Carolina and georgia will be decidedly in favor of the new constitution. People thus already flatter themselves to see it ratified by 8. States. Only one more will then be needed in order for the new Government to go into effect. It is not yet known what the Special assemblies of Rhode island, Newyork, North Carolina, Maryland and Virginia will decide.

In these last two States there is a powerful party against the adoption of the constitution in its present form. It desires that the questions of commerce and navigation be decided in the house of representatives by the Vote of at least two-thirds of the delegates. It fears that the interest of the five Southern States will always be Sacrificed on these two matters to that of the seven [sic] others. It observes that since the peace the seafaring states have made constant efforts to draw closer to England so that their Ships would be admitted into the English Antilles. It also observes that these States came close to compromising the rest of the Southern ones in the negotiation relative to the Mississippi in order to obtain some concessions from Spain. It is persuaded that the States of new England, Newyork, and Pensylvania, assisted by those of Newjersey and Delaware, whose Vote they often carry along, want to obtain an act of navigation which would give them, to the exclusion of foreigners, the transport of Southern goods; this would result in an increase in the price of freight very prejudicial to the South. On the other hand it does not doubt that the seafaring States are seeking to conclude a treaty of Commerce with England from which they would obtain all the advantages and from which the

Southern States would have all the disadvantages; because people are convinced that great Britain will entirely change its Policy in regard to the United States, as soon as the latter have the power to prohibit its merchandise if it insists on an exclusive navigation. It knows that the seafaring states want to have a navy to protect their merchant marine; those of the South observe that [by supporting a navy] they would contribute to an expense from which they would receive no advantage since they are Solely farmers. These local views will have no effect at all on Georgia and South Carolina, which are too persuaded of their weakness and the disorder of their affairs not to move towards their principal object—to *secure the protection of the entire body of the union*. But these views operate in Maryland, Virginia and even North Carolina. It is hoped nevertheless that these views will have less force in the popular assemblies of these States than in the minds of the leading citizens who are at the head of the opposition there. The latter moreover have only to acknowledge that their objections are entirely founded on these Secret apprehensions; they have the same motives as all those who disparage the constitution and as these motives have seemed insufficient to the assemblies of eight other States, they will not be able to have much influence on those of these three States.

As for the State of Newyork, My Lord, it has no interest which is able to thwart the adoption of the new Government. But the preponderance of its civil officers until now have prevailed over the *federalist* party and the former have personal motives for preserving the complete and full direction of the affairs of the state for as long as possible. The application of money arising from [state] import duties to the funding of public securities on which they Speculate is of major importance for their fortunes. Much more condemnable views above all influence the conduct of the legislature of Rhode island entirely composed of debtor farmers who want *to free* themselves without however *paying*. They Know that the new Government would put all iniquities of this type to the torch.

Two questions, My Lord, present themselves on which very few people here agree—If nine Special assemblies ratify the proposed constitution, it would be put into effect, but How will they induce the four other States to reconsider the refusal of their assemblies? On the other hand—if this ratification is made only by eight States, the constitution fails to become law, it is necessary to begin everything again; how will the five other States induce the others to consent to alterations? would one find again that moment of agreement which so happily prevailed in the general assembly of the States? Many American politicians hope that some major impetus, such as a foreign war, will force all minds towards a reconciliation.

I hope, My Lord, that you will not frown upon these long details. The progress of the new Government of the United States interests us as much from a Commercial point of view as from a political one. And M. le Mal. de Castries has ordered me to Follow it with attention.

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