

Philippe André Joseph de Létombe to Comte de la Luzerne, Boston, 26 June 1788 (excerpts)

I have the honor to continue to give You an account of public affairs in my Department.

The general court of New-hampshire, My Lord, having resumed its sessions on the fifth of this month, first undertook the Election of its principal officers: the Speaker, Chief Clerk, Members of the Senate, and the two Chambers having counted [the votes] for the Presidency, four thousand four hundred and twenty-one in favor of John Langdon and three thousand, six hundred and sixty-four in favor of John Sullivan. The Former, elected with a plurality of seven hundred fifty-three [i.e., 757] Votes, immediately took the [reins?] of Government. The opening Speech of His Excellency and the Response of the Senate to this Speech are noteworthy: "... The perplexed Situation of our public affairs in general, is so apparent that it is enough to make mention of it in order to call forth from our Citizens all the Exertions which our desolated country requires. The deranged state of our finances and the near annihilation of our commerce are matters truly alarming. But I look forward, with pleasure, to the undoubtedly not too distant time when, by the Grace of divine Providence, the adoption of the proposed federal Constitution will relieve us of these Evils and of many others: this will give us a Government equal to the great national purpose, by which only we can reasonably expect to enjoy Peace, Liberty, and Safety"—To which the Senate replied: "... We have long viewed with anxious concerns the very unfortunate Situation of our public affairs and, particularly, of our Finances and our declining Commerce. But we will not be wanting in our repeated endeavours to remove those Embarrassments, arrange our Finances and restore our Commerce. Our Desires for the adoption of the federal Constitution are all the more ardent since we know that it is by It alone that our Union and our Independence can be preserved, our Finances can be established on a solid foundation, our political Embarrassments removed, our Commerce increased, extended and protected, and our Credit reestablished, and our national Character restored, and happy, amiable Peace be perpetuated; objects for which the People of these States have so nobly fought and conquered!"—The General Court of that State, My Lord, has since adjourned, Sine Die. Its new acts contain nothing interesting; they are only regulations of internal Police. But this court was succeeded by the Convention to which General Sullivan had been elected President and which has finally adopted the federal Constitution, on the twenty-first of this month, by a Majority of seventy-five Votes against forty-six: so that New-hampshire, becoming the ninth State, its Ratification is enough for the Establishment of the new Constitution under the Terms of the article [VII] of the federal Convention [i.e., Constitution]. But it is believed that Congress, before joining together the nine States in the new Confederation, is waiting until Virginia, North Carolina and New-York, whose conventions are now assembled, have adopted or rejected the proposed Constitution.

The new General Court of this State [Massachusetts], My Lord, assembled on the twenty-eighth of May; and having first proceeded to the Election of its principal Officers, It proclaimed John Hancock as Governor by virtue of the Majority of Votes. The Lieutenant Governor, not having been elected by the People [because?] no Candidate had the required Majority of Votes, the two Houses met together, in conformity with the Constitution, to make the choice and General Lincoln was elected.

The third instant, His Excellency the Governor waited on the General Court where he said.

...

The Response to this Speech, carried to the Governor by a Committee of nine, composed of four Members of the Senate and five of the House of Representatives, is expressed in these Terms:....

The General Court, My Lord, in resuming its Work found itself with fewer numbers than in preceding Assemblies and composed of better chosen Members. The People, more enlightened with respect to their true Interests, have dismissed those of their Delegates suspected of being Authors of the late Troubles or known as antifederalists. There was not any opposition this time, and the Unanimity made the Work concise, very orderly and much less expensive. The difference in Cost between the June Session of last year and the present one has been around twenty-six thousand francs, and the annual Election of Admiralty officers and Customs Collectors, Notaries and others, which used to take ten Days, was done in two.—The entire assembly was [governed?] by the Sentiments of humanity and charity recommended by the Governor. Luke Day, one of the Leaders of the Rebels, who was taken to Boston, has been sent back, and the General Court, after [having?] paid the seventeen hundred and fifty francs promised as a reward, has also repealed the act that promised this sum to those who would take Shays and Parsons: [recently?] these two Principal Rebel Leaders dared to present it with their Request for its abolition, a Request to which [it?] did not believe it dignified to reply, but it sent word that all was forgotten. This act of Clemency [may?] put an end to animosities [and] party spirit, and federalism is gaining many Partisans from it. I [must admit?], however, that a Task remains for the [General] Court Necessitated by the act passed, in 1786, entitled “Act with the effect of suspending Laws for the Prosecution of private Debts under certain Limitations.” In addition, those acts, passed in 1787 and [extended?] at the beginning of this year, have not been repealed and could cause irreparable Damage to internal and external, foreign and domestic Commerce. But the General Court apparently looked upon this Repeal as being, even at this time, the Province of the federal Constitution, from which it expects a sure, stable, and prosperous Government.

His Excellency the Governor, after having given his Approval to these new Acts, a List of which I have the honor to enclose here, prorogued the Session of the General Court to the first Wednesday of next September.

Hope, My Lord, begins to stir up this State. In the interior, public Roads, Bridges, Docks, Magazines, and Houses are being constructed or repaired, and Industry is resuming its Activity.

...

That State [Rhode Island], My Lord, is still under the Yoke of Ochlocracy, or rather, to express myself as Mr. Burk does, under that of a Ptochocracy. His Excellency John Collins and the Honorable Daniel Owen have been reelected, on the eighth of last month; the first, Governor; the second, Deputy-Governor.—It appears that that Government has been the same for three years. Peter Edes, a printer in Newport, has just published the Details of the last Session of its General Assembly, which adjourned on the nineteenth of this month until the second of next November, according to which he states, ...

“That no action has been taken on a Motion relative to the New Constitution.”

Meanwhile, a letter from Newport says that, news of the Ratification of the proposed federal Constitution by the State of New-hampshire having reached them, people there

indulged in the most fervent joy; that this News had been announced there by the [ringing?] of bells; that Boats immediately hoisted their flags and that, on a Request made of the Governor to raise the large Flag of the State over Fort Washington and to [fire?] the Cannon, His Excellency appeared to take pleasure in granting these Requests; that consequently, nine cannon shots were fired at one o'clock and an equal number at Sunset for the purpose of congratulating individually the nine States that ensure the Establishment of the new Constitution: that news likewise produced the most ardent Feelings in the State of Massachusetts where it seems not to be doubted that the Ratification of the ninth State will lead all the States to a common Ratification that will draw tight this knot of a new Union.

This new State of things, My Lord, is undoubtedly going to lead to order; Regularity; a more uniform, exact, and coherent domestic Policy. Until the present time, I have found here only obstacles to my Research on Commerce, Navigation, and their Particulars. Perhaps these obstacles will only increase again as a result of Jealousy, Anxiety, and democratic Passions; But my Task then will be to overcome these obstacles, and at least I will have a sure Rallying Point in the Port Policy, in the organization of Customs, in the Laws of Commerce. Since the Peace, nothing has been regulated; each General Court had to surrender itself to the fluctuation occasioned both by the Needs of the moment and by democratic Tempests. It has only been since the plan of the new federal System that this State is beginning to [act?]. At this moment, one can finally hope that Newhampshire's approval of the new Constitution, by completing the number of States required for its adoption, will unite them all and will facilitate a Union of Interests and the so desirable Reciprocity of Commerce between the two friendly and allied Nations. Assuredly, I will neglect nothing that can be done to promote the one and facilitate the other, and I will endeavor to gather my Information on these things only from the Sources.

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