


A Dialogue Between Mr. Z and Mr. & Massachusetts Centinel, 31 October¹

Mr. RUSSELL, *The following SINGULAR DIALOGUE, between two anti-federalists, Mr. Z. and Mr. &. was overheard from a chamber-window not a hundred miles from the State-House, one evening this week—you will please to hand it to the publick for the entertainment of the curious—and oblige yours,* DETECTOR.


Mr. Z.

Enough of that subject for the present.—How do you like the Federal Constitution?

Mr. & . You have an easy answer to that question—you know that it comes diametrically across all my plans, and if it should take effect, my prospects will be entirely blasted, judge therefore if it can receive *my* approbation.

Mr. Z. Well, I am glad to find your sentiments agree with mine—and the question now is, how we shall counteract the measures of those [177 

Mr. & . Yes, that is the question—and for my part I am pretty well determined what methods to pursue.—You know the people of this commonwealth are tinctured with a strong proportion of JEALOUSY—this principle then, must be our FORTE—In all circles, by all means, in publick and in private, by letters, correspondencies, in print, and out of print, let us be careful to extol this FIRST OF VIRTUES in a REPUBLICK. Let us disseminate *surmises, suspicions* and *inuendoes*, let no *characters* escape our animadversions, let us suspect the *motives, views* and *designs*, of the members of the late Continental Convention—let us blow up that scare-crow bubble ARISTOCRACY—let our fears of a STANDING ARMY be *dark and gloomy*—let us terrify the imaginations of the weak and credulous, with horrid ideas of *tax-gatherers and soldiers at their heels*—let us decry *imposts and excises*, as the appendages of tyranny—let us infuse into the minds of the disaffected that the plan is to pay the national debt, *pound for pound*—to cut us off from all *suspension and tender laws*, from any relief by BANKRUPT ACTS, and by this means enabling their rapacious creditors to take poor debtors by the throat—let us inflame the honest and unsuspecting *Farmer, Tradesman* and *Mechanick* with ideas that there is a *combination* among the *rich*, to stifle all free debate upon the great subject of the AMERICAN CONSTITUTION, and that the PRINTERS are leagued to suppress all publications against it; and though the STATE GOVERNMENT is an object of our detestation, and we have exerted ourselves to the utmost to subvert it, and introduce a GLORIOUS ANARCHY—let us conjure up every apprehension of its falling a sacrifice to the *Federal Government*—let us damn this government as an *elective monarchy, aristocracy, and cursed tyrannical system*.—By THESE MEANS we shall throw such stumbling-blocks in the way of your federal men—we shall so *bewilder* and *puzzle* the people, that they never will agree to any thing, and if *confusion* and *bloodshed* insues, so much the better—we shall stand the *best* chance, having anticipated *such scenes*, and taken OUR MEASURES accordingly.

Mr. Z. I find you have not been idle; your imagination is really fruitful, and I think with you that JEALOUSY is our grand resort—*this principle* has wrought wonders already—It was JEALOUSY that prevented granting adequate powers to Congress, some years ago—*this principle* in our good friends of *Rhode-Island* has been the prime cause of ruining the publick credit, and enabling the people to pay taxes at a depreciated rate—*this principle* properly worked up, has brought so many of [178 poor distressed debtors there, to pay off their debts without any difficulty²—*this principle* will keep out every man of property, wisdom and learning from every post in government—and if *now* duly cultivated, will effectually defeat this FEDERAL SYSTEM—FOR ALTHOUGH IT IS NEXT TO A MIRACLE THAT THE CONVENTION HAVE AGREED UPON A SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT FOR A PEOPLE SO DIVERSIFIED IN MANNERS AND HABITS—and although it is morally impossible for them ever to coalesce under any continental plan, should this fall through, yet that GLORIOUS PRINCIPLE, JEALOUSY, the never-failing resort of the factious and enterprizing, may turn even these considerations to its advantage.—This WONDERFUL UNANIMITY may be construed into an ARISTOCRATICAL COMBINATION, and the TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES that would result, from a *rejection* of the federal system, may be explained away, as the idle predictions of self interested, aristocratical partizans.

Mr. & . We certainly have hit upon the only successful game that can be played; and if we do but manage our cards dexterously, we may yet give the COUP DE GRACE to this plan, and if by any means this can be effected, the present calm may be prolonged, and we shall continue to retain our consequence, without fear of *sheriffs, attachments or creditors*.

Mr. Z. There are yet some difficulties that remain, such as these, to persuade the people to believe us, to keep them from suspecting US in the storm of JEALOUSY that we may raise, and to make them believe that all the miseries they suffer do not proceed from the want of a Federal Government.

Mr. & . Why I acknowledge this is the *toughest part* of our business—however, *perseverance* can do wonders—we must ponder upon the subject—I will see you again, when we may be able to enlarge our plan of operation.—Interim, adieu.

1

For another dialogue between “Mr. Z” and “Mr. &,” see *Massachusetts Centinel*, 7 November.

2

Rhode Island had been attacked for rejecting the federal Impost of 1781, but it was especially condemned for its radical financial policies. In May 1786, for example, the Rhode Island legislature passed an act calling for the emission of £100,000 in paper money which was legal tender for all past, present, and future debts. Under this law a Rhode Island debtor, whose tender of paper money to his creditor was refused, could lodge the currency with a judge. If the creditor again rejected the payment, the judge would advertise the lodgment in the state’s newspapers introduced by the words “Know Ye.” If the creditor remained adamant in his refusal to accept

the depreciated paper money, the debt was forever cancelled and the lodgment, minus the judge's and advertising fees, were forfeited to the state.

Cite as: *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Digital Edition*, ed. John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Charles H. Schoenleber and Margaret A. Hogan. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/RNCN-02-04-02-0003-0018> [accessed 19 Aug 2011]

Original source: *Ratification by the States, Volume IV: Massachusetts, No. 1*