

## Luther Martin: Address No. IV, *Maryland Journal*, 4 April 1788

To the CITIZENS of MARYLAND.

If those, my fellow-citizens, to whom the administration of our government was about to be committed, had sufficient wisdom never to err, and sufficient goodness always to consult the true interest of the governed,—and if we could have a proper security that their successors should to the end of time be possessed of the same qualifications, it would be impossible that power could be lavished upon them with too liberal a hand.

Power absolute and unlimited, united with unerring wisdom and unbounded goodness, is the government of the Deity over the universe!—But remember, my fellow-citizens, that the persons to whom you are about to delegate authority, are and will be weak, erring mortals, subject to the same passions, prejudices and infirmities with yourselves; and let it be deeply engraven on your hearts, that from the first history of government to the present time, if we begin with Nimrod, and trace down the rulers of nations to those who are *now* invested with supreme power, we shall find few, very few, who have made the beneficent Governor of the Universe the model of their conduct, while many are they who, on the contrary, have imitated the demons of darkness.

We have no right to expect that our rulers will be more wise, more virtuous, or more perfect than those of other nations have been, or that they will not be equally under the influence of ambition, avarice, and all that train of baleful passions, which have so generally proved the curse of our unhappy race.

We must consider mankind such as they really are,—such as experience has shewn them to be heretofore, and bids us expect to find them hereafter, and not suffer ourselves to be misled by interested deceivers or enthusiastick visionaries; and therefore in forming a system of government, to delegate no greater power than is *clearly* and *certainly necessary*, ought to be the first principle with every people, who are influenced by reason and a regard for their safety, and in doing this, they ought most solicitously to endeavour so to qualify even that power, by such checks and restraints, as to produce a perfect responsibility in those who are to exercise it, and prevent them from its abuse with a chance of impunity;—since such is the nature of man, that he has a propensity to abuse authority and to tyrannize over the rights of his fellow-men;—and to whomsoever power is given, not content with the actual deposite, they will ever strive to obtain an increase.

Those who would wish to excite and keep awake your jealousy and distrust, are your truest friends;—while they, who speak peace to you when there is no peace—who would lull you into security, and wish you to repose blind confidence in your future governors, are your most dangerous enemies.—Jealousy and distrust are the guardian angels who watch over liberty:—security and confidence are the forerunners of slavery.

But the advocates for the system tell you that we who oppose it, endeavour to terrify you with mere possibilities, which may never be realized, that all our objections consist in saying government *may* do this,—and government *may* do that.—

I will, for argument sake, admit the justice of this remark, and yet maintain that the objections are insurmountable.—I consider it an incontrovertible truth, that whatever by the constitution government even *may* do, if it relates to the *abuse* of power, by acts tyrannical and oppressive, it some time or other *will* do.—Such is the ambition of man, and his lust for domination, that no power less than that which fixed its bounds to the ocean, can say, to them, “thus far shall ye go and no farther.”—Ascertain the limits of the *may*, with ever so much precision, and let them be as extensive as you please, government will speedily reach their utmost verge; nor will it stop there, but soon will overleap those boundaries, and roam at large into the regions of the *may not*.—Those who tell you the government by this constitution *may* keep up a *standing army*,—abolish the trial by jury,—oppress the citizens of the states by its powers over the militia,—destroy the freedom of the press,—infringe the liberty of conscience, and do a number of other acts injurious to and destructive of your rights, yet that it *never will do so*; and that you safely may accept such a constitution, and be perfectly at ease and secure that your rulers will always be so good, so wise, and so virtuous—such emanations of the Deity, that they will never use their power but for your interest and your happiness—contradict the uniform experience of ages, and betray a total ignorance of human nature, or a total want of ingenuity.

Look back, my fellow-citizens, to your conduct but a few years past, and let that instruct you what ought to be your conduct at this time.

Great-Britain then claimed the right to pass laws to bind you in all cases whatever.<sup>3</sup>—You were then told in all the soft insinuating language of the present day, and with all the appearance of disinterested friendship now used, that those who insisted this claim of power might be abused, only wandered in the regions of fancy—that you need not be uneasy, but might safely acquiesce in the claim—that you might have the utmost possible confidence in your rulers, that they never would use that power to your injury;—but distrustful of government, and jealous of your liberty, you rejected such counsel with disdain;—the bare possibility that Britain might abuse it, if once conceded, kindled a flame from one end of this continent to the other, and roused you to arms—Weak and defenceless as you were, unused to military exertions, and unsupplied with warlike stores, you braved the strength of a nation the most powerful and best provided—you chose to risk your lives and property rather than to risque the possibility that the power claimed by the British government should be exercised to your injury—a possibility, which the minions of power at that time, with as much confidence as those of the present day, declared to be absolutely visionary.

Heaven wrought a miracle in your favour, and your efforts were crowned with success.

You are not now called upon to make an equal sacrifice—you are not now requested to beat your ploughshares into swords, or your pruning hooks into spears<sup>4</sup>—to leave your peaceful habitations, and exchange domestic tranquility for the horrors of war;—peaceably, quietly and orderly to give this system of slavery your negative, is all that is asked by the advocates of freedom—to pronounce the single monosyllable *no*, is all they entreat;—shall they entreat you in vain?—when by this it is to be determined, whether our independence, for obtaining which we have been accustomed to bow the

knee with reverential gratitude to Heaven, shall be our greatest curse;—and when on this it depends whether we shall be subjected to a government, of which the little finger will be thicker than the loins of that of Great-Britain.

But there are also persons who pretend that your situation is at present so bad, that it cannot be worse, and urge that as an argument why we should embrace any remedy proposed, however desperate it may appear.

Thus do the poor erring children of mortality, suffering under the presence of real or imaginary evils, have recourse to a pistol or halter for relief, and rashly launch into the *untried* regions of eternity—nor wake from their delusion, until they wake in endless wo[.—Should the citizens of America, in a fit of desperation, be induced to commit this fatal act of political *suicide*, to which by such arguments they are stimulated, the day will come when labouring under more than Egyptian bondage, compelled to furnish their quota of brick, though destitute of straw and of mortar; galled with your chains, and worn down by oppression, you will, by sad experience, be convinced (when that conviction shall be too late) that there is a *difference* in evils, and that the buzzing of gnats is more supportable than the sting of a serpent.

From the wisdom of antiquity we might obtain excellent instruction, if we were not too proud to profit by it—Æsop has furnished us with the history of a nation of Frogs—between which and our own there is a most striking resemblance.—Whether the catastrophe shall be the same, rests with ourselves.

Jupiter, out of pure good nature, wishing to do them as little injury as possible, on being asked for a King, had thrown down into their pond a Log to rule over them;—under whose government, had they been wise enough to know their own interest and to pursue it, they might, to this day, have remained happy and prosperous.—Terrified with the noise, and affrighted by the violent undulations of the water, they for some time kept an awful distance, and regarded their monarch with reverence; but the first impression being in some measure worn off, and perceiving him to be of a tame and peaceable disposition, they approached him with familiarity, and soon entertained for him the utmost contempt:—In a little time were seen the leaders of the Frogs croaking, to their respective circles, on the weakness and feebleness of the government at home, and of its want of dignity and respect abroad, till the sentiment being caught by their auditors, the whole pond resounded with “Oh Jupiter, good Jupiter, hear our prayers—take away from us this vile Log, and give us a ruler who shall know how to support the dignity and splendor of government!—give us any government you please, only let it be energetic and efficient.”—The Thunderer, in his *wrath*, sent them a *Crane*. With what delight did they gaze on their Monarch, as he came majestically floating on the wings of the wind!—They admired his *uncommon* shape—it was *such* as they had *never before seen*—his deformities were, in their eyes, the greatest of beauties—and they were heard, like Aristides, to declare, that, were they on the verge of eternity, they would not wish a single alteration in his form—His monstrous beak, his long neck, and his enormous poke—even these, the future means of their destruction, were subjects of their warm approbation.—He took possession of his new dominions, and instantly began to swallow down his subjects; and it is said, that those who had been the warmest zealots for Crane-administration, fared no better than the rest.—The poor

wretches were now much more dissatisfied than before, and, with all possible humility, applied to Jupiter again for his aid, but in vain—he dismissed them with this reproof, “*that the evil of which they complained, they had foolishly brought upon themselves, and that they had no other remedy now, but to submit with patience.*”—Thus forsaken by the God, and left to the mercy of the Crane, they sought to escape his cruelty by flight; but pursuing them to every place of retreat, and thrusting his long neck through the water to the bottom, he drew them out with his beak from their most secret hiding-places, and served them up as a regale for his ravenous appetite.

The *present* federal government is, my fellow-citizens, the *Log* of the fable—the *Crane* is the system now offered to your acceptance.—I wish you not to *remain* under the government of the *one*, nor to *become subjected* to the tyranny of the *other*.—If either of these events take place, it must arise from your being greatly deficient to yourselves, from your being, like the nation of Frogs, “*a discontented, variable race, weary of liberty, and fond of change.*”—At the same time I have no hesitation in declaring, that if the one or the other must be our fate, I think the *harmless, inoffensive, though contemptible Log*, infinitely to be preferred to the *powerful, the efficient, but all-devouring Crane*.

*Baltimore, March 29, 1788.*

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