

New York Antifederalist Society: Proceedings of Meetings on Calling a Second Convention, New York, 30 October–13 November 1788

The following Gentlemen, viz

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| Marinus Willett | |
| Melancthon Smith | Nathaniel Laurence |
| David Gelston | James M Hughes |
| John Lamb | Samuel Jones & |
| Ezekiel Robins | Charles Tillinghast |
| Solomon Townsend | |

having met at Fraunces' Tavern on Tuesday Evening Octr. 30. 1788 after some deliberation determined to form themselves into a Society, for the purpose of procuring a general Convention, agreeable to the circular Letter of the late Convention of this State, and thereupon, elected Colonel Willett to be their Chairman, and Charles Tillinghast Secretary.

On Motion of Mr Smith, and seconded by Genl. Lamb it was determined that a Committee of *three* be appointed to open a Correspondence with certain Persons in the several States (as well as Counties within this State) for the purpose of explaining the Reasons which induced the Adoption of the Constitution for the United States, by the late Convention of this State and requesting their assistance to procure the requisite Amendments by having a General Convention called immediately, or as soon as possible after, the organization of the new Government.

The Committee appointed were Melancthon Smith Esqr. General Lamb & Jas. M. Hughes Esqr. who are to draught the requisite Letters and report the same as early as possible

It was then determined that a Meeting of the Society should be again held on Tuesday Evening Novr. 4. at six o'Clock and at the same place.

Chas. Tillinghast Secy.

At a Meeting of the Society, agreeable to adjournment, the following Gentlemen attended, at Fraunce's Tavern Novr. 4. viz

- John Lamb
- Melancthon Smith
- James M. Hughes
- David Gelston
- Chas. Tillinghast

The Chairman of the Society being absent, General Lamb was called to the Chair for this Meeting.

The Committee who were appointed to draught Letters to the several States, and Counties within this State, produced draughts thereof, which having been read by Paragraphs, and amended, are as follows viz,

(To the Counties within the State)

New York November 4th. 1788

Gentlemen,

The Circumstances and Situation of Things both before, and some time after, our Convention had met, warranted an universal Opinion among all Federal Republicans, that it was proper to adopt the new Constitution, only on Condition that those important Alterations, which were considered Necessary to the Protection of political and civil Liberty, should be made; and this was founded not only on the defects of the Constitution, but on the Anticipation that there would have been a Majority in several of the State Conventions of the same Sentiment with our own, from whom we should have derived Support; but in pursuing our Opposition in this Form, the Sentiments and Opinions of many in our Convention were changed, not, as we have reason to believe, as to the Principles of Opposition, but as to the expediency of adopting it under an Alteration of Circumstances, so that this State should continue in the Union; at the same time giving such Constructions to some of its Articles, and relying on the Sentiments of a Majority in the United States with Respect to an Opinion of its Defects, that the Government would be restrained in the exercise of its most offensive and dangerous Powers until a new Convention should have an Opportunity of reconsidering and revising it before it should have its full operation—This Alteration of Sentiment with respect to a conditional Adoption, and the Mode of adopting it in its present Manner, it is to be presumed was caused by the Reception of it by nine States successively, by which the Government was capable to be put in Operation, and likewise the immediate and subsequent Adoption of it by Virginia, perhaps one of the most influential and important States in the Union—The Confidence of those who were of these Sentiments, was excited because many of the most important States had acknowledged it by small Majorities, and almost all in such a Way as was expressive of its Defects, and hence they considered Amendments as certain, subsequent as precedent—Thus, unsupported by any of the States in the Prospect of a conditional Adoption, and for these Reasons, it became a political Calculation with them, whether it was not most for the Interest of this State, under all Circumstances, to continue in the Union, and trust, for the Reasons aforesaid, for Amendments: Unhappily this occasioned a Diversity of Opinion among our Friends in the Convention, who were for a conditional Adoption only—however, the Question, as you well know, was at last carried in the way it now Stands. Altho' a Division took place, both within, and without the Convention, on this Point, and for these Reasons, yet we hope that a Confidence remains on the Minds of all, that each was governed by the Principles of Rectitude, and that the Efforts and Exertions of each other collectively, as well as individually, will be considered as a Duty in

future, and made use of to obtain the great Objects we have all had, and still have in View, to wit, the requisite Amendments, by having a general Convention called immediately, or as soon as possible after the Organization of the New Government.

With this design we conceive it will be very necessary to advert to the ensuing Election of Members to represent this State in the Assembly of the General Government, and to endeavour to elect such Characters who are in sentiment with us on the Subject of Amendments; nor is the Mode of Election a Matter of small Importance, when it is considered that one Mode may throw the Balance in the Hands of the Advocates of an arbitrary Government, while another may be favourable to equal Liberty.

The Activity and Duplicity of the principal of those who have contended for an unequivocal Adoption, and an uncontroled Exercise of the New Constitution, notwithstanding their Promises to assist in procuring a Convention for the Purposes already mentioned, have given us just Causes of Suspicion, that those Promises were made with a View to deceive.

To facilitate a Communication of Sentiment and free Discussion on this Subject with you and our Friends in the other Counties, and thereby further the great Objects of our Pursuit, and oppose with success the subtle Practices of the Adversaries of constitutional Liberty, have induced us to form ourselves into a Society for the purpose of procuring a general Convention. Agreeable to the circular Letter of the late Convention of this State, and we beg leave to recommend to your Consideration the propriety of your joining together, without Delay, for the like Design.

We have only to add, that whatever diversity of sentiment may have taken place among the friends of equal Liberty in our late Convention, we are fully persuaded, that they will unite their utmost Exertions in the only mode that is now left, and should the present Opportunity which is now offered at the organization of the Government not be properly improved, it is highly probable such a favourable one will not be again presented, and the liberties of the People will then depend on the arbitrary Decrees of their Rulers.

In behalf of the Society &c

To Republican Committe[e] of Ulster ——— County &c }

(To the several States)

New York Novr. 4. 1788

Previous to the Adoption of the new Constitution, a Committee was formed in this place, of those who disapproved of it without essential Amendments, to open a Correspondence with those of the sister States, who concurred with them in Sentiment—to invite them to open a communication with us, and concert an union of measures. From the Characters of a large Majority of those who composed our Convention, we had reason to expect they would not

have adopted the Constitution without stipulating for such previous Amendments, and of this we advised our Friends; their proceedings, containing the amendments proposed, which we do ourselves the honour to inclose you, will justify this sentiment. A small majority, however, was found, who were induced, from ideas of political expediency, to assent to a qualified adoption, in such manner as would admit this State into a participation of the Government.—It is not necessary to detail the reasons at large, nor whether they were well grounded, that influenced this measure—They may be briefly comprized in the following.—

A sufficient number of States had acceded to the Government to authorize its going into Operation; this being the case, it seems it was apprehended, that the States who had adopted, could not easily be prevailed upon to concur in any other mode, to effect the requisite Alterations, but the one pointed out in the Constitution itself—That if the State remained out of the Union, they might lose the Opportunity of employing their influence in bringing them about; and from the dissatisfaction manifested by many of the States to the System, as it stands, and from the spirit of accomodation, which it was hoped would prevail among those who approved of it, they were induced to believe that a general agreement would take place to call another Convention to consider and recommend amendments to the objectionable Parts. Though these, and similar reasons, we believe, influenced a majority to accede to the system, with certain declarations and explanations, yet, even this could not be obtained, without an express declaration of their disapprobation of it, and agreeing to a circular Letter inviting the other States to unite with ours in requiring a Convention—In this, both Parties concurred unanimously.

We can with confidence assure you, that the Opposition to the Constitution, without amendments, has not decreased, but on the contrary, many of those who were zealous for its adoption, declare they will unite their Efforts in endeavouring to have it reconsidered; but we have reason, at the same time, to believe, many of its most ardent advocates will use their influence and address to prevent this.—It is therefore the more necessary that the Friends of equal republican Government should firmly unite in pursuing such measures, as will have a tendency to effect amendments.

For this purpose, a number of Gentlemen, in this City, influenced by a sincere regard for constitutional Liberty and the publick Good, have associated, under the name of a Society for the purpose of procuring a general convention, agreeable to the circular Letter of the late Convention of this State, and have opened a Correspondence with the several States, and with the different parts of this State.

Notwithstanding so large a part of the Citizens of the United States appear to be in Sentiment, that it is necessary the Constitution should be altered, in order to render the people happy, and their liberties secure under it, yet it is now too evident, these alterations will not be obtained without great exertions and pains to awaken the attention of the People to their Interests and safety. Associations of the well informed, and patriotick Gentlemen in the different parts of the Country, we apprehend will have the most salutary influence to effect so desireable an event: We therefore earnestly invite you to set this on foot, and to open a Correspondence with us.

We have only to add, that whatever diversity of sentiment may have taken place among the friends of equal Liberty, in our late Convention, we are fully persuaded that they will unite their utmost exertions to procure the amendments, in the only mode that is now left, and should the present opportunity, which is now offered at the organization of the Government, not be properly improved, it is highly probable such a favourable one will not be again presented, and the liberties of the People will then depend on the arbitrary Decrees of their Rulers.

In behalf &c

To }

It was then determined that fair transcripts should be made, then signed by the Chairman, and transmitted to the proper Persons as early as possible.

The Meeting was then adjourned to Thursday Evening next Novr. 13. and then to meet at the usual Time & Place.

Fraunces Tavern Thursday Evening Novr. 13. 1788

A sufficient number for Business not having met, the Gentlemen who assembled, immediately adjourned, to meet whenever called upon by the Chairman—

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