

The Address of the Seceding Assemblymen, 29 September 1787

Gentlemen: When in consequence of your suffrages at the last election we were chosen to represent you in the General Assembly of this Commonwealth, we accepted of the important trust, with a determination to execute it in the best manner we were able, and we flatter ourselves we acted in such a manner as to convince you, that your interests with that of the good of the state has been the object of our measures.

During the fall and spring sessions of the legislature, on the recommendation of the Congress of the United States, your representatives proceeded to the appointment of delegates to attend a convention to be held in the city of Philadelphia, for the purposes of revising and amending the present Articles of Confederation, and to report their proceedings to Congress, and when adopted by them, and ratified by the several states to become binding on them as part of the Confederation of the United States. We lamented at the time that a majority of our legislature appointed men to represent this state who were all citizens of Philadelphia, none of them calculated to represent the landed interest of Pennsylvania, and almost all of them of one political party, men who have been uniformly opposed to that constitution for which you have on every occasion manifested your attachment. We were apprehensive at the time of the ill consequences of so partial a representation, but all opposition was in vain. When the Convention met, members from twelve states attended and, after deliberating upwards of four months on the subject, agreed on a plan of government which was sent forward by them to Congress, and which was reported to the House by the delegates of Pennsylvania as mere matter of information, and printed in the newspapers of the city of Philadelphia; but the House had not received it officially from Congress, nor had we the least idea that, as the annual election was so near, we should be called upon to deliberate, much less to act on so momentous a business; a business of the utmost importance to you and your posterity. We conceived it required the most minute examination and mature consideration, and that it ought to be taken up by the next house. Judge then of our surprise on finding the last day but one in the sessions, a member of the House [George Clymer] who had been a delegate in the Convention, without any previous notice or any intimation of his intentions to the House, offer a resolution recommending the calling a convention to consider of the proposed Constitution, and to direct the electing members for the same, at so early a period as the day of your annual election, thus attempting to surprise you into a choice of members—to approve or disapprove of a Constitution, which is to entail happiness or misery forever without giving time to the greatest part of the state even to see, much less to examine the plan of government.

Our duty to ourselves and our regard for your dearest interests induced us to oppose the measure by every possible argument that we could suggest at the time; but all our efforts were insufficient even to produce a postponement until the afternoon. We urged and urged in vain the constant practice of the House when any important business was to be brought on, of giving previous notice and making it the order of the day sometime beforehand; that no bill however trifling was passed without three readings, and without this formality which gave the members time and opportunity to think on the subject; that the rules were adhered to so strictly that even the building of a bridge, or the laying out a road, could not be determined on without this form; but this the most important of all matters was to be done by surprise and, as we conceived, with design to preclude you from having it in your power to deliberate on the subject. Our anxiety for

your interests was great, but notwithstanding the firmest and most determined opposition, no respite could be obtained, and the first resolution was adopted by a majority of the House, when they adjourned till the afternoon to complete the business. In these circumstances we had no alternative; we were under a necessity of either returning to the House and, by our presence, enabling them to call a convention before our constituents could have the means of information or time to deliberate on the subject, or by absenting ourselves from the House, prevent the measure taking place. Our regard for you induced us to prefer the latter, and we determined not to attend in the afternoon. We conceived that at the time we were chosen you had no view to this business, and we could see no inconvenience nor loss of time from deferring a matter of such importance and which would in its consequences affect or, perhaps, annihilate our own constitution, as well as that of every constitution in the Union to a house chosen after the people had some knowledge of the plan, especially as the next house will meet at so early a period, and a convention could be called by them time enough to meet in a few months, which would be as early as any state in the Union and would be allowing you time to make up your minds on a matter which appeared to us to require so much deliberation. Thus circumstanced and thus influenced, we determined the next morning again to absent ourselves from the House, when James M'Calmont, Esquire, a member from Franklin, and Jacob Miley, Esquire, a member from Dauphin, were seized by a number of citizens of Philadelphia, who had collected together for that purpose; their lodgings were violently broken open, their clothes torn, and after much abuse and insult, they were forcibly dragged through the streets of Philadelphia to the State House, and there detained by force, and in the presence of the majority, who had, the day before, voted for the first of the proposed resolutions, treated with the most insulting language; while the House so formed proceeded to finish their resolutions, which they mean to offer to you as the doings of the legislature of Pennsylvania. On this outrageous proceeding we make no comment. The inhabitants of Franklin and Dauphin have been grossly insulted by the treatment of their members. We know the feelings of the people of these counties are sufficiently keen; it becomes us not to add to them by dwelling longer on the subject; but as our conduct may, and we have no doubt, will be misrepresented, we thought it our duty to lay before our constituents, to whom alone we are accountable, a real state of facts; that they may judge for themselves. We need not tell you, that we could have no interested motive to influence our conduct. A sense of that duty which we owed to you and to ourselves could have alone induced us to submit to the variety of abuse and insults which many of us have experienced, for not consenting to a measure that might probably have surprised you into a surrender of your dearest rights. Our conduct has at least had the good effect to lengthen out the time of election, and induced them to postpone the election for members of the convention until the first Tuesday in November next; whereas the resolution first proposed directed it to be holden for all the counties east of Bedford on the day of the annual election, nine days from the time of proposing the measure.

We cannot conclude without requesting you to turn your serious attention to the government now offered to your consideration. "We are persuaded that a free and candid discussion of any subject tends greatly to the improvement of knowledge, and that a matter in which the public are so deeply interested cannot be too well understood. A good constitution and government is a blessing from heaven and the right of posterity and mankind; suffer then, we entreat you, no interested motive, sinister view or improper influence to direct your determinations or bias your judgments." Provide yourselves with the new Constitution offered to you by the Convention; look it over with attention that you be enabled to think for yourselves. We confess when the

legislature appointed delegates to attend the Convention, our ideas extended no further than a revision or amendment of the present Confederation, nor were our delegates, by the acts of Assembly appointing them, authorized to do more as will appear by referring to the said act, the second section of which describes their powers in the following words, viz.:

“2. Be it enacted, and it is hereby enacted by the representatives of the Freemen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in General Assembly met, and by the authority of the same, That Thomas Mifflin, Robert Morris, George Clymer, Jared Ingersoll, Thomas Fitzsimons, James Wilson and Gouverneur Morris, esquires, are hereby appointed deputies from this state to meet in the Convention of the deputies of the respective states of North America, to be held at the city of Philadelphia, on the second day of the month of May next. And the said Thomas Mifflin, Robert Morris, George Clymer, Jared Ingersoll, Thomas Fitzsimons, James Wilson and Gouverneur Morris, esquires, or any four of them are hereby constituted and appointed deputies from this state, with powers to meet such deputies as may be appointed and authorized by the other states to assemble in the said convention at the city aforesaid, and to join with them in devising, deliberating on, and discussing all such alterations and further provisions as may be necessary to render the foederal constitution fully adequate to the exigencies of the Union; and in reporting such act or acts for that purpose, to the United States in Congress assembled, as when agreed to by them, and duly confirmed by the several states, will effectually provide for the same.”

You will therefore perceive that they had no authority whatever from the legislature to annihilate the present Confederation and form a constitution entirely new, and in doing which they have acted as mere individuals, not as the official deputies of this commonwealth. If, however, after mature deliberation, you are of opinion that the plan of government which they have offered for your consideration is best calculated to promote your political happiness and preserve those invaluable privileges you at present enjoy, you will no doubt choose men to represent you in convention who will adopt it; if you think otherwise you will, with your usual firmness, determine accordingly.

You have a right, and we have no doubt you will consider whether or not you are in a situation to support the expense of such a government as is now offered to you, as well as the expense of your state government or whether a legislature consisting of three branches, neither of them chosen annually, and that the Senate, the most powerful, the members of which are for six years, are likely to lessen your burthens or increase your taxes or whether in case your state government should be annihilated, which will probably be the case, or dwindle into a mere corporation, the continental government will be competent to attend to your local concerns? You can also best determine whether the power of levying and imposing internal taxes at pleasure will be of real use to you or not or whether a continental collector assisted by a few faithful soldiers will be more eligible than your present collectors of taxes? You will also, in your deliberations on this important business, judge whether the liberty of the press may be considered as a blessing or a curse in a free government, and whether a declaration for the preservation of it is necessary or whether in a plan of government any declaration of rights should be prefixed or inserted? You will be able likewise to determine, whether in a free government there ought or ought not to be any provision against a standing army in time of peace or whether the trial by jury in civil causes is become dangerous and ought to be abolished and whether the judiciary of the United States is

not so constructed as to absorb and destroy the judiciaries of the several states? You will also be able to judge whether such inconveniences have been experienced by the present mode of trial between citizen and citizen of different states as to render a continental court necessary for that purpose or whether there can be any real use in the appellate jurisdiction with respect to fact as well as law? We shall not dwell longer on the subject; one thing however it is proper you should be informed of; the Convention were not unanimous with respect to men though they were as states. Several of those who have signed did not fully approve of the plan of government, and three of the members, viz., Governor Randolph and Colonel George Mason of Virginia, and Eldredge [*sic*] Gerry, Esquire of Massachusetts, whose characters are very respectable, had such strong objections as to refuse signing. The Confederation no doubt is defective and requires amendment and revision, and had the Convention extended their plan to the enabling the United States to regulate commerce, equalize the impost, collect it throughout the United States, and have the entire jurisdiction over maritime affairs, leaving the exercise of internal taxation to the separate states, we apprehend there would have been no objection to the plan of government.

The matter will be before you, and you will be able to judge for yourselves. “Show that you seek not yourselves, but the good of your country, and may He who alone has dominion over the passions and understandings of men enlighten and direct you aright, that posterity may bless God for the wisdom of their ancestors.”

James M’Calmont John Gilchrist

Robert Clark Abraham Smith

Jacob Miley Robert Whitehill

Alexander Wright David Mitchel

John M’Dowell John Piper

John Flenniken Samuel Dale

James Allison William Findley

Theophilus Philips James Barr

Saturday, September 29th, 1787

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