

A Political Dialogue, *Massachusetts Centinel*, 24 October 1787

At the time that "A Political Dialogue" appeared, *the Massachusetts Centinel* was embroiled in a heated controversy over the freedom of and access to the press.

Mr. grumble. Sad times! neighbour *Union*, sad times!

Mr. union. Why, what is the matter, neighbour *Grumble*?

Mr. grumble. Why, all our liberties are going to be swallowed up; *the whole country* is in a confederacy to ruin us—I remember the glorious times when every man had a right to speak what he thought.

Mr. union. Why, who hinders you now?

Mr. grumble. Who?—Why every body:—When this report of the Convention came to hand, I thought I would go and talk about it to my neighbours; so I went to the Barber's shop, and taking up the paper, so says I, "it seems this monster which is to devour the liberties of the people is come forth."—Immediately the whole shop was in alarm—Mr. *Razor*'s hand trembled so with indignation, that I thought he would have cut my throat—and the whole shop looked as if they did not care if he had. What's that you say, said a surly *Ship-Carpenter*, do you mean that I and my family should starve? Let us come at him, said a *Blacksmith, Painter, Rope-Maker, Sail-Maker, Corker, and Joiner*—*the Federal Constitution* is the only thing which can save us, and our children, from starving.—Out of the shop with the rascal, said half a dozen different tradesmen. It was in vain I applied to a *Merchant* for protection, he assured me that for want of a Federal Government he had sunk a fortune by importing cargoes under the State imposts, and was undersold by goods from Connecticut—and even my friend *Simon Meek*, the Quaker, who delights in healing quarrels, would not interfere, but coolly told me—"Friend *Grumble*, whilst we are in the flesh, we should be obedient to the powers which may be ordained over us." In fine, I was driven from the shop in the plight of the Israelitish ambassadours.—I ran with my complaint to our reverend *Pastor*, who told me that to be bound by this law of equity, was perfect freedom, and bid me beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.—The *Doctor* who tends my sick child, was in the same story—and the honest man from the country, who brings me my winter's cyder, vowed it would have been *right cute* if they had kicked me out of the shop, for *his town* thought the new Constitution was altogether up to the *notch*. In a word, every man I have conversed with, has been ready to knock my brains out, if I said a word against it—Do you call these liberty times?

Mr. union. Well, but neighbour, what are your objections to the new Constitution?

Mr. grumble. Why, as to the matter, I can't say I have any, but then what vexes me is, that they won't let me say a word against it—it shews, neighbour, there is some trick in it.

Mr. union. But neighbour this is indeed a country of liberty, and every man may speak his mind, especially on a subject which is presented to you, for your consideration—but if all orders and degrees of people oppose your speaking against this

proposed constitution, the conclusion is, that the whole people, both see the necessity, and give their warmest approbation of it. And indeed, neighbour, it is no wonder, when we consider the horrors of our present situation—the decay of our trade and manufactures—the scarcity of money—the failure of publick credit—the distraction of our publick affairs, and the distress of individuals, which have all arisen from a want of this very Federal Government—it is no wonder, I say, if men who are so deeply interested, should not be able to sit patiently, and hear revilings against the only remedy which can be applied with success, to our present grievances.

No man is intended to be deprived of a freedom of speech, but the few individuals who oppose the Federal Government, must not be surprised to find, that the *Merchant* and *Trader*, who have been ruined for the want of an efficient Federal Government to regulate trade—will resent it—that the *Landholder* who has been taxed so high that the produce of his farm would scarcely pay its rates—will resent it:—And out of the abundance of the heart, the long train of industrious *Tradesmen*, who are now spending their past earnings, or selling their tools for a subsistence—will resent it—nay, the whole body of an almost ruined people, will despise and execrate the wretch who dares blaspheme the political saviour of our country.

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