

**A Dialogue Between Mr . Z and Mr . &, *Massachusetts Centinel*, 31
October 1787**

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 who are sticklers for what they call an efficient Federal Government, so as to frustrate their expectations?

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 our good friends into publick life in the above government, and enabled the *poor distressed debtors there*, to pay off their debts without any difficulty 1—*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 enterprising, 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. 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.

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Mr. Z. Well met—come let us retire a few steps, perhaps we may be observed, and as I want to resume the subject we were upon the other evening, we cannot be too private—you know we then determined that JEALOUSY was the main string to touch, in order to effect the overthrow of the new Constitution?

Mr. &. Yes, and it seems we were fortunate in our idea—Observe the *antifederal* publications through the States, they abound in *surmises* and *prophesies*; the passion of jealousy appears to be their main object—with few, or no arguments, these writers wander in the fields of conjecture, which is boundless, and winking out of sight the solid and permanent advantages which *they know* the people will derive from an adoption of this Constitution, they endeavour to haunt their imaginations with baseless probabilities, which may as well be drawn from any system of government *already established*, as from that proposed to the United States:—But, as the speculations of these people proceed from motives similar to our own, and as there are but comparatively a small proportion of mankind who penetrate beneath the surface of things, if the passions, humours and prejudices of the multitude can be interested to oppose any system, how far soever it may have truth for its basis, it will not succeed.

Mr. Z. There are however many obstacles we have to encounter in prosecuting our plan. It is too evident that this American Constitution has a very powerful and respectable body through the States to support it—The most active and zealous promoters of the revolution, whether in a civil or military line—the great body of the clergy—the independent body of yeomanry—farmers, who are unembarrassed in their circumstances, and have any thing to lose—the whole body of industrious mechanicks—the mercantile and trading interests—in short every man who supposes that the present unsettled state of affairs is owing to the want of government:—Besides these, we have to encounter your men of fortune, and professional men in every line, and those of every rank who are your people of sentiment, and are seriously affected, as they phrase it, with the fatal consequences of rejecting the proposed plan of Continental Government:—From such a combined force we have much to fear—and all our arts must be tried to render abortive their exertions.

Mr. &. True—but after all we need not despair—there is a goodly number who are embarked in the same bottom with us—we may reckon among these—all those who secretly rejoice at our present abject and distressed situation—the secret and inveterate

enemies of the late revolution—of these, there are many who hope to see us reunited to Britain, and who know that the most direct method to effect the overthrow of Independency, and bring us back to the British Government, would be to cause a rejection of the new Constitution, as anarchy, confusion and bloodshed would ensue; and then a tyranny would be prefer[r]ed to no Government—add to these your *time-servers* and *popularity-seekers*, who appear to lay *perdue* at present—but if the current should set *against* the system, will undoubtedly go with the stream—there are likewise a goodly number of *paper-money gentry*, *bankrupts*, *land-jobbers*, *state-leeches*, *system-mongers*, *state-tinkers*, *idlers*, and *busy-bodies*—These may be grouped together, and safely reckoned on our side—for it is evident that an efficient government will render the States impregnable to all the secret and open attempts of *Britain*, and her emissaries—that *honesty* and *abilities* will recommend to offices of trust and importance, to the confusion of all *cunning politicians*; that industry and œconomy will be the only road to fortune, and paper-money jockeys must then go to work—in short I might go over the whole body separate and collective of those who are inimical to the new system, and point out their well-grounded fears, which harrow up their souls, should an efficient government be established, and truth, justice and publick faith again raise their heads through this otherwise devoted continent.—But you must be sensible by this time that this favourite plan must go through a fiery trial before it can be established?

Mr. Z. A fiery trial, indeed! if my poor abilities can be of any service in its opposition—my situation is peculiarly adapted to sow the seeds of jealousy—intelligence from such a source will be received with avidity—and having once kindled a small spark of disaffection, inferiour agents may blow it to a flame—we have already a few hands at work—I am mortified the number is so small—we have but two or three antifederal writers, who move in a circle, and talk *about it*, and *about it*—they keep themselves snug, however, which is much in our favour, for if they were *known*, their views would be seen through, which would effectually ruin the cause they advocate.—However, if they do but persevere and keep themselves out of sight, we have much to expect from their labours?

Mr. &. They keep themselves secreted in general, it is true; but it was an unlucky business the publication of a certain letter with the name at full length²—it may lead to an investigation of motives, that will not do our cause any good. I am really sorry for the accident—however, *labor omnia vincit*.³

² Probably a reference to Elbridge Gerry's 18 October letter to the General Court, which was printed in the *Massachusetts Centinel* on 3 November. See I above, under 18 October.

³ "Labor conquers all things" (Latin).

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