

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 *RO-LITICAL SAVIOUR OF OUR COUNTRY*.

190. Centinel II

Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal, 24 October

“Centinel” II, in part a reply to James Wilson’s speech of 6 October (CC:134), had a direct influence on some Pennsylvanians. For instance, Francis Murray wrote that “Centinel” II and other Antifederalist writings “greatly changed” his sentiments on the Constitution (to John Nicholson, 1 November, RCS:Pa., 207), while John Smilie of Fayette County relied heavily on “Centinel” II in his speech of 8 December in the Pennsylvania Convention (RCS:Pa., 525–26, 531n).

Reprints by 13 December (6): Mass. (1), R.I. (1), N.Y. (2), Md. (1), Va. (1). For its publication as a broadside and in pamphlets and for authorship, see CC:133.

To the PEOPLE of PENNSYLVANIA.

FRIENDS, COUNTRYMEN, and FELLOW-CITIZENS, As long as the liberty of the press continues unviolated, and the people have the right of expressing and publishing their sentiments upon every public measure, it is next to impossible to enslave a free nation. The state of society must be very corrupt and base indeed, when the people in possession of such a monitor as the press, can be induced to exchange the heavenborn blessings of liberty for the galling chains of despotism.—Men of an aspiring and tyrannical disposition, sensible of this truth, have ever been inimical to the press, and have considered the shackling of it, as the first step towards the accomplishment of their hateful domination, and the entire suppression of all liberty of public discussion, as necessary to its support.—For even a standing army, that grand engine of oppression, if it were as numerous as the abilities of any nation could maintain, would not be equal to the purposes of despotism over an enlightened people.

The abolition of that grand palladium of freedom, the liberty of the press, in the proposed plan of government, and the conduct of its authors, and patrons, is a striking exemplification of these observations. The reason assigned for the omission of a *bill of rights*, securing the *liberty of the press*, and other *invaluable personal rights*, is an insult on the understanding of the people.

The injunction of secrecy imposed on the members of the late Convention during their deliberations, was obviously dictated by the genius of Aristocracy; it was deemed impolitic to unfold the principles of the intended government to the people, as this would have frustrated the object in view.

The projectors of the new plan, supposed that an *ex parte* discussion of the subject, was more likely to obtain unanimity in the Convention;

which would give it such a sanction in the public opinion, as to banish all distrust, and lead the people into an implicit adoption of it without examination.

The greatest minds are forcibly impressed by the immediate circumstances with which they are connected; the particular sphere men move in, the prevailing sentiments of those they converse with, have an insensible and irresistible influence on the wisest and best of mankind; so that when we consider the abilities, talents, ingenuity and consummate address of a number of the members of the late Convention, whose principles are despotic, can we be surprised that men of the best intentions have been misled in the difficult science of government? Is it derogating from the character of the *illustrious and highly revered* WASHINGTON, to suppose him fallible on a subject that must be in a great measure novel to him?—As a patriotic hero, he stands unequalled in the annals of time.

The new plan was accordingly ushered to the public with such a splendor of names, as inspired the most unlimited confidence; the people were disposed to receive upon trust, without any examination on their part, what would have proved either a *blessing* or a *curse* to them and their posterity.—What astonishing infatuation! to stake their happiness on the wisdom and integrity of any set of men! In matters of infinitely smaller concern, the dictates of prudence are not disregarded! The celebrated *Montesquieu*, in his *Spirit of Laws*, says, that “slavery is ever preceded by sleep.” And again, in his account of the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, page 97, “That it may be advanced as a general rule, that in a free State, whenever a perfect calm is visible, the spirit of liberty no longer subsists.”¹ And Mr. *Dickinson*, in his *Farmer’s Letters*, No. XI. lays it down as a maxim, that “A perpetual jealousy respecting liberty is absolutely requisite in all free States.”²

“Happy are the men, and happy the people, who grow wise by the misfortunes of others. Earnestly, my dear countrymen, do I beseech the author of all good gifts, that you may grow wise in this manner, and I beg leave to recommend to you in general, as the best method of obtaining this wisdom, diligently to study the histories of other countries. You will there find all the arts, that can possibly be practised by cunning rulers, or false patriots among yourselves, so fully delineated, that changing names, the account would serve for your own times.”

A few citizens of Philadelphia (too few, for the honour of human nature) who had the wisdom to think *consideration* ought to precede *approbation*, and the fortitude to avow that they would take time to judge for themselves on so momentous an occasion, were stigmatized as enemies to their country; as monsters, whose existence ought not to be suffered, and the destruction of them and their houses recommended, as meritorious.³—The authors of the new plan, conscious that it would not stand the test of enlightened patriotism, tyrannically endeavoured to

preclude all investigation.—If their views were laudable; if they were honest,—the contrary would have been their conduct, they would have invited the freest discussion. Whatever specious reasons may be assigned for secrecy during the framing of the plan, no good one can exist, for leading the people blindfolded into the implicit adoption of it. Such an attempt does not augur the public good—It carries on the face of it an intention to juggle the people out of their liberties.

The virtuous and spirited exertions of a few patriots, have at length roused the people from their fatal infatuation to a due sense of the importance of the measure before them. The glare and fascination of names is rapidly abating, and the subject begins to be canvassed on its own merits; and so serious and general has been the impression of the objections urged against the new plan, on the minds of the people, that its advocates, finding mere declamation and scurrility will no longer avail, are reluctantly driven to defend it on the ground of argument. Mr. *Wilson*, one of the deputies of this State in the late Convention, has found it necessary to come forward. From so able a lawyer, and so profound a politician, what might not be expected, if this act of Convention be the heavenly dispensation which some represent it. Its divinity would certainly be illustrated by one of the principal instruments of the Revelation; for this gentleman has that transcendent merit!—But if, on the other hand, this able advocate has failed to vindicate it from the objections of its adversaries, must we not consider it is as the production of *fraud* and *interested* men.

Mr. *Wilson* has recourse to the most flimsy sophistry in his attempt to refute the charge that the new plan of general government will supersede and render powerless the state governments. His quibble upon the term *Corporation*, as sometimes equivalent to communities which possess sovereignty, is unworthy of him. The same comparison in the case of the British parliament assuming to tax the colonies, is made in the Xth of the *Farmer’s Letters*, and was not misunderstood in 1768 by any. He says that the existence of the proposed federal plan depends on the existence of the State governments, as the senators are to be appointed by the several legislatures, who are also to nominate the electors who chuse the President of the United States; and that hence all fears of the several States being melted down into one empire, are groundless and imaginary.—But who is so dull as not to comprehend, that the *semblance* and *forms* of an ancient establishment, may remain, after the *reality* is gone.—*Augustus*, by the aid of a great army, assumed despotic power, and notwithstanding this, we find even under Tiberius, Caligula and Nero, princes who disgraced human nature by their excesses, the shadows of the ancient constitution held up to amuse the people. The senate sat as formerly; consuls, tribunes of the people, censors and other officers were annually chosen as before, and the forms of republican government continued. Yet all this was in *appearance*