

Men, Brethren, and Sisters,

HEARKEN! it is now a critical time with us, and a time in which we ought to be upon our watch and upon our guard. Now is the time for us to look out; now is the time for us to take care; now is the time for us to see that nothing is done to deprive us of our religious or our civil liberties.

Our government at present is democratical, that is, the power is in the people. We are allowed to choose our rules, make our own laws, and perform religious worship according to the dictates of our own consciences; and by our constitution a freedom of speech and the liberty of the press are allowed to every one of us.¹⁴ But although we are under such an excellent constitution, behold a new one is presented to us for our reception which appears much like an aristocratical form, and will, if it is established, demolish a part of our democratical government and deprive us of a part of our liberties.

Before we suffer [allow] this new constitution to be established, we ought to consider seriously what it contains and whether it is calculated to promote our felicity [happiness] or whether, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, it is calculated to vest certain men with more power, deprive us of our liberties, and bring our land into lordships and lead us into vassalage and slavery like the poor people of Holland who, after they had obtained their independence, lost their power and were not suffered [allowed] to have any voice in their government — no, not so much as to choose their representatives.¹⁵

How often has it been ringing in our ears from every quarter of the United States that our present constitution is the best that ever was or ever could be established? If that be true, pray what need is there of an alteration — what need have we to alter a constitution that is in every way perfect? If we should suffer our democratical government to be demolished and an aristocratical one established, it is probable that in a few years some designing [plotting/deceitful] men will attempt to pull that down and set up one that is monarchical, and so bring the country under a military government.

Permit me then, my beloved brethren and sisters, to point out wherein this new constitution is deficient.¹⁶

- 1st. There is no bill of rights in it.
- 2^d. Although different religions are allowed to set in Congress, yet there is no liberty given to the people to perform religious worship according to the dictates of their consciences.
- 3^d. There is a door opened for the Jews, Turks [i.e., Muslims], and Heathen [atheists] to enter into public office and be seated at the head of the government of the United States.
- 4th. There is nothing said about the people being allowed the freedoms of speech and the liberty of the press.
- 5th. It divides Congress into three branches, as President, Senate, and a House of Representatives, which will be a great clog to business and a hindrance to the making of laws with expedition and dispatch [with order and speed].¹⁷
- 6th. It deprives men that are endowed with the wisdom that is from above from entering into Congress unless they have arrived at a certain age and have abode [residence] in the states a certain quantity of time.
- 7th. It augments [increases] the members of Congress and makes the government more expensive.
- 8th. It deprives the people of the liberty of choosing their delegates to Congress annually, and of recalling them when they please.
- 9th. It almost annihilates the state governments, and deprives their legislation of the power of making their own laws.¹⁸

¹⁴ The Articles of Confederation did not contain a bill of rights, but it was assumed that the central government could not violate rights and privileges protected by the state constitutions.

¹⁵ After a brief rebellion in 1785 inspired in part by the American Revolution, the Netherlands (Holland) returned to autocratic rule.

¹⁶ The sixteen objections are included here in their entirety.

¹⁷ While the President can promote bills and veto laws, the writer incorrectly places the President in the legislative branch of the government.

- 10th. It makes no provision against the keeping a standing [permanent] army in a time of peace.
- 11th. It deprives the people of the power of levying and collecting their own taxes.¹⁹
- 12th. It vests Congress with power to tax all the states, to send forth collectors, and enforce the payment of taxes by a standing army.²⁰
- 13th. It vests Congress with power to run the people into debt by borrowing money of foreign nations upon the credit of the United States, and it doth not oblige the members of that assembly to render any account of the expenditure of the same, if they shall see fit to secret it [keep the accounts secret].
- 14th. No provision is made in it against having the civil power subject to the military, nor against having people that do not belong to any army or navy tried and punished by the military laws.²¹
- 15th. It deprives the people in the several states of the liberty of making their own constitutions and vests it in the hand of Congress.²²
- 16th. It deprives the inhabitants of each state of the power of choosing their superior and inferior judges.²³

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Thus, my beloved friends, have I given you the foregoing hints that you may be upon your guard and ward off the impending danger. Keep the power in your own hands and let nothing be established that may deprive you of your liberties and make you unhappy.

A WATCHMAN.

"To the People of North Carolina," The Wilmington Centinel, NC, reprinted in the New York Journal and Daily Patriotic Register, 21 April 1788, EXCERPTS

IT is proper you should be reminded that most of you have taken an oath to support the present [state] government consistently with the [state] constitution. By that constitution all the power of the government is vested in the general assembly, the governor, and the chief judges. It is now proposed to you to adopt a new system which gives every essential part of that power, that is, all legislative, executive, judicial, military, and pecuniary [financial] authority to a Congress who will sit at or near Philadelphia, 4 or 500 miles from you. — This I understand to be subverting our government . . . and therefore a plan which ought to be opposed by every citizen. . . .

Some people may think that the adopting of the new system will not alter the government because we shall have our assembly, governor, and judges, but probably nobody will retain that opinion after reflecting that the government really is where the supreme power is — that the chief power will be in the Congress, and that what is left of our government will be a mere shadow is plain, because a citizen may be deprived of the privilege of keeping arms for his own defense, he may have his property taken without a trial by jury, he may be ordered to march with the rest of the militia to New Hampshire or anywhere else, he may be forced to go to the new seat of government 500 miles off to oppose an oppressive appeal in spite of our assembly, governor, and judges. These things are entirely contrary to our constitution, and the possibility of them by no means to be admitted [allowed to become real].

COMMON SENSE.

¹⁸ The Constitution did not remove states' authority to make their own laws, but many opponents felt this would be the effective result of a strong national government.

¹⁹ As with objection #8, the Constitution does not remove states' authority to enact statewide taxation, but opponents were concerned that the states' authority was only marginally protected in the proposed Constitution.

²⁰ The taxation authority of Congress in the proposed Constitution seemed to invite autocratic excess similar to Britain's heavy-handed collection of colonial taxes after 1763.

²¹ I.e., protections against a military takeover of the government, an Anti-Federalist concern that "The Watchman" stated early in his letter.

²² This is inaccurate; states continue to write and amend their own constitutions. It reflects the anxiety among many Anti-Federalists that the controls on the national governments built into the Constitution (e.g., checks and balances, impeachment, president's veto power, civil control of the military) would be insufficient to maintain states' authority within their borders and in their relationships with other states and nations.

²³ States continue to elect or appoint state judges, while federal judges are appointed by the president of the United States. Federal judges make decisions on state laws when cases based on those laws are appealed to the federal courts (by the state or an affected individual or group).