

Antifederalist No. 2

We Have Been Told of Phantoms

This essay is an excerpted from a speech of William Grayson, June 11, 1788, in Jonathan Elliot (ed.), *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution.....* (Philadelphia, 1876) 5 vols., III, 274-79.

The adoption of this government will not meliorate our own particular system. I beg leave to consider the circumstances of the Union antecedent to the meeting of the Convention at Philadelphia. We have been told of phantoms and ideal dangers to lead us into measures which will, in my opinion, be the ruin of our country. If the existence of those dangers cannot be proved, if there be no apprehension of wars, if there be no rumors of wars, it will place the subject in a different light, and plainly evince to the world that there cannot be any reason for adopting measures which we apprehend to be ruinous and destructive. When this state [Virginia] proposed that the general government should be improved, Massachusetts was just recovered from a rebellion which had brought the republic to the brink of destruction from a rebellion which was crushed by that federal government which is now so much contemned and abhorred. A vote of that August body for fifteen hundred men, aided by the exertions of the state, silenced all opposition, and shortly restored the public tranquility. Massachusetts was satisfied that these internal commotions were so happily settled, and was unwilling to risk any similar distresses by theoretic experiments. Were the Eastern States willing to enter into this measure? Were they willing to accede to the proposal of Virginia? In what manner was it received? Connecticut revolted at the idea. The Eastern States, sir, were unwilling to recommend a meeting of a convention. They were well aware of the dangers of revolutions and changes. Why was every effort used, and such uncommon pains taken, to bring it about? This would have been unnecessary, had it been approved of by the people. Was Pennsylvania disposed for the reception of this project of reformation? No, sir. She was even unwilling to amend her revenue laws, so as to make the five per centum operative. She was satisfied with things as they were. There was no complaint, that ever I heard of, from any other part of the Union, except Virginia. This being the case among ourselves, what dangers were there to be apprehended from foreign nations? It will be easily shown that dangers from that quarter were absolutely imaginary. Was not France friendly? Unequivocally so. She was devising new regulations of commerce for our advantage. Did she harass us with applications for her money? Is it likely that France will quarrel with us? Is it not reasonable to suppose that she will be more desirous than ever to cling, after losing the Dutch republic, to her best ally? How are the Dutch? We owe them money, it is true; and are they not willing that we should owe them more? Mr. [John] Adams applied to them for a new loan to the poor, despised Confederation. They readily granted it. The Dutch have a fellow-feeling for us. They were in the same situation with ourselves.

I believe that the money which the Dutch borrowed of Henry IV is not yet paid. How did they pass Queen Elizabeth's loan? At a very considerable discount. They took advantage of the weakness and necessities of James I, and made their own terms with that contemptible monarch. Loans from nations are not like loans from private men. Nations lend money, and grant

assistance, to one another, from views of national interest -- France was willing to pluck the fairest feather out of the British crown. This was her object in aiding us. She will not quarrel with us on pecuniary considerations. Congress considered it in this point of view; for when a proposition was made to make it a debt of private persons, it was rejected without hesitation. That respectable body wisely considered, that, while we remained their debtors in so considerable a degree, they would not be inattentive to our interest.

With respect to Spain, she is friendly in a high degree. I wish to know by whose interposition was the treaty with Morocco made. Was it not by that of the king of Spain? Several predatory nations disturbed us, on going into the Mediterranean. The influence of Charles III at the Barbary court, and four thousand pounds, procured as good a treaty with Morocco as could be expected. But I acknowledge it is not of any consequence, since the Algerines and people of Tunis have not entered into similar measures. We have nothing to fear from Spain; and, were she hostile, she could never be formidable to this country. Her strength is so scattered, that she never can be dangerous to us either in peace or war. As to Portugal, we have a treaty with her, which may be very advantageous, though it be not yet ratified.

The domestic debt is diminished by considerable sales of western lands to Cutler, Sergeant, and Company; to Simms; and to Royal, Flint, and Company. The board of treasury is authorized to sell in Europe, or any where else, the residue of those lands.

An act of Congress has passed, to adjust the public debts between the individual states and the United States.

Was our trade in a despicable situation? I shall say nothing of what did not come under my own observation. When I was in Congress, sixteen vessels had had sea letters in the East India trade, and two hundred vessels entered and cleared out, in the French West India Islands, in one year.

I must confess that public credit has suffered, and that our public creditors have been ill used. This was owing to a fault at the head-quarters -- to Congress themselves -- in not selling the western lands at an earlier period. If requisitions have not been complied with, it must be owing to Congress, who might have put the unpopular debts on the back lands. Commutation is abhorrent to New England ideas. Speculation is abhorrent to the Eastern States. Those inconveniences have resulted from the bad policy of Congress.

There are certain modes of governing the people which will succeed. There are others which will not. The idea of consolidation is abhorrent to the people of this country. How were the sentiments of the people before the meeting of the Convention at Philadelphia? They had only one object in view. Their ideas reached no farther than to give the general government the five per centum impost, and the regulation of trade. When it was agitated in Congress, in a committee of the whole, this was all that was asked, or was deemed necessary. Since that period, their views have extended much farther. Horrors have been greatly magnified since the rising of the Convention.

We are now told by the honorable gentleman (Governor Randolph) that we shall have wars and rumors of wars, that every calamity is to attend us, and that we shall be ruined and disunited

forever, unless we adopt this Constitution. Pennsylvania and Maryland are to fall upon us from the north, like the Goths and Vandals of old; the Algerines, whose flat-sided vessels never came farther than Madeira, are to fill the Chesapeake with mighty fleets, and to attack us on our front; the Indians are to invade us with numerous armies on our rear, in order to convert our cleared lands into hunting- grounds; and the Carolinians, from the south, (mounted on alligators, I presume,) are to come and destroy our cornfields, and eat up our little children! These, sir, are the mighty dangers which await us if we reject dangers which are merely imaginary, and ludicrous in the extreme! Are we to be destroyed by Maryland and Pennsylvania? What will democratic states make war for, and how long since have they imbibed a hostile spirit?

But the generality are to attack us. Will they attack us after violating their faith in the first Union? Will they not violate their faith if they do not take us into their confederacy? Have they not agreed, by the old Confederation, that the Union shall be perpetual, and that no alteration should take place without the consent of Congress, and the confirmation of the legislatures of every state? I cannot think that there is such depravity in mankind as that, after violating public faith so flagrantly, they should make war upon us, also, for not following their example.

The large states have divided the back lands among themselves, and have given as much as they thought proper to the generality. For the fear of disunion, we are told that we ought to take measures which we otherwise should not. Disunion is impossible. The Eastern States hold the fisheries, which are their cornfields, by a hair. They have a dispute with the British government about their limits at this moment. Is not a general and strong government necessary for their interest? If ever nations had inducements to peace, the Eastern States now have. New York and Pennsylvania anxiously look forward for the fur trade. How can they obtain it but by union? Can the western posts be got or retained without union? How are the little states inclined? They are not likely to disunite. Their weakness will prevent them from quarreling. Little men are seldom fond of quarreling among giants. Is there not a strong inducement to union, while the British are on one side and the Spaniards on the other? Thank Heaven, we have a Carthage of our own I . . .

But what would I do on the present occasion to remedy the existing defects of the present Confederation? There are two opinions prevailing in the world -- the one, that mankind can only be governed by force; the other, that they are capable of freedom and a good government. Under a supposition that mankind can govern themselves, I would recommend that the present Confederation should be amended. Give Congress the regulation of commerce. Infuse new strength and spirit into the state governments; for, when the component parts are strong, it will give energy to the government, although it be otherwise weak....

Apportion the public debts in such a manner as to throw the unpopular ones on the back lands. Call only for requisitions for the foreign interest and aid them by loans. Keep on so till the American character be marked with some certain features. We are yet too young to know what we are fit for. The continual migration of people from Europe, and the settlement of new countries on our western frontiers, are strong arguments against making new experiments now in government. When these things are removed, we can with greater prospect of success, devise changes. We ought to consider, as Montesquieu says, whether the construction of the government be suitable to the genius and disposition of the people, as well as a variety of other circumstances.