

Antifederalist No. 13

The Expense of The New Government

Part 1: From The Freeman's Oracle and New Hampshire Advertiser, January 11, 1788, by "A FARMER."

Part 2: An unsigned essay from The Connecticut Journal, October 17, 1787.

. . . . Great complaint has been made, that Congress [under the Articles] has been too liberal in their grants of salaries to individuals, and I think not without just cause. For if I am rightly informed, there have been men whose salaries have been fifteen hundred dollars per year, and some of them did not do business at any rate, that the sum they negotiated would amount to their yearly salary. And some men [are] now in office, at twenty five hundred dollars per year, who I think would have been glad to have set down at one hundred pounds a year before the war, and would have done as much or more business. The truth is, when you carry a man's salary beyond what decency requires, he immediately becomes a man of consequence, and does little or no business at all. Let us cast our eyes around us, in the other departments -- the judges of the superior court have but about one hundred pounds salary a year. The judges of the courts of common pleas, on an average, not more than sixty dollars per year. The ministers of the gospel -- a very valuable set of men, who have done honor to themselves, and rendered great service to their country, in completing the revolution -- have salaries but from sixty to an hundred pounds a year in general. The contrast is striking. I heartily wish that all ranks of men among us, ministers of the gospel as well as others, would turn their attention toward the Constitution they may be more concerned in the event than they at present think of.

Rouse up, my friends, a matter of infinite importance is before you on the carpet, soon to be decided in your convention: The New Constitution. Seize the happy moment. Secure to yourselves and your posterity the jewel Liberty, which has cost you so much blood and treasure, by a well regulated Bill of Rights, from the encroachments of men in power. For if Congress will do these things in the dry tree when their power is small, what won't they do when they have all the resources of the United States at their command? They are the servants of the public. You have an undoubted right to set their wages, or at least to say, thus far you and those under you may go and no further. This would in the end ease Congress of a great deal of trouble, as it would put a stop to the impertinence of individuals in asking large salaries. I would say that the ages of a Representative in Congress do not exceed five dollars per day; a Senator not to exceed six; and the President seven per day, with an allowance for his table. And that the wages of no person employed in the United States exceed the daily pay of a Representative in Congress, but be paid according to their service, not exceeding that sum. Perhaps it may be said that money may depreciate, or appreciate. Let a price current be taken when this Constitution is completed, of the produce of each state, and let that be the general standard.

My friends and countrymen, let us pause for a moment and consider. We are not driven to such great straits as to be obliged to swallow down every potion offered us by wholesale, or else die immediately by our disease. We can form a Constitution at our leisure; and guard and secure it on all sides. We are paying off our state debt, and the interest on the domestic, as fast as Congress call upon us for it. As to the foreign debt, they have the promise of more interest from us than they can get anywhere else, and we shall be able to pay them both interest and principal shortly. But it is said they will declare war against us if we don't pay them immediately. Common sense will teach them better. We live at too great a distance, and are too hardy and robust a people, for them to make money out of us in that way.

But it is said, the trading towns are fond of this Constitution. Let us consider how they stand, including their interest.

1st. The merchant wishes to have it adopted, that trade might be regulated. 2dly. Another set of men wishes to have it adopted, that the idea of paper money might be annihilated. 3dly. Another class of men wish to have it take place, that the public might be enabled to pay off the foreign debt, and appear respectable abroad among the nations. So do I, with all my heart. But in neither of these cases do I wish to see it adopted without being guarded on all sides with a Magna Charta, or a Bill of Rights, as a bulwark to our liberties. Again, another class of men wish to have it adopted, so that the public chest might be furnished with money to pay the interest on their securities, which they purchased of the poor soldiers at two shillings on the pound. I wish the soldiers were now the holders of those securities they fought so hard for. However, as the public finances were such that they could not be paid off as they became due, and they have carried them to market, and sold them as the boy did his top -- we must pay them to the holders. But we need not be in a hurry about it; certificates will do for that. Consider, my friends, you are the persons who must live and die by this Constitution. A merchant or mechanic may dispose of his goods, or pack them up in trunks and remove to another clime in the course of a few months. But you cannot shoulder your lands, or dispose of them when you please. It therefore behoves you to rouse up, and turn your most serious and critical attention to this Constitution. . . .

A FARMER

. . . A large representation has ever been esteemed by the best Whigs in Great Britain the best barrier against bribery and corruption. And yet we find a British king, having the disposition of all places, civil and military, and an immense revenue SQUEEZED out of the very mouths of his wretched subjects, is able to corrupt the parliament, to vote him any supplies he demands, to support armies, to defend the prerogatives of his crown, and carry fire and sword by his fleets and armies; to desolate whole provinces in the eastern world, to aggrandize himself, and satisfy the avarice of his tyrannical subjects.

No wonder our American ambassador, struck with the brilliancy of the British court [John Adams], where everything around St. James's wears the appearance of wealth, ease and plenty, should imagine a three branched legislature only can produce these effects, and make the subjects happy, should write a book in favor of such a government, and send it over for the illumination of this western world. If this is the sole fruit of his embassy, America will not canonize him for a saint on account of his services, when they have experienced the consequences of such a kind of government as he has planned out. In order to have formed a right judgment, he should have looked into the ditches which serve for graves for many of the human race -- under hedges which serve as dreary habitations for the living; into the cottages of the poor and miserable, and critically examine with how much parsimony the mechanics, the day laborers, cottagers and villagers live in order to support their high pampered lords -- before he had wrote a book to persuade his country to pursue the same road to greatness, splendor and glory, and have reflected in his own mind, whether he could wish to see that country which gave him birth reduced to the same situation....

Now I submit it to the good sense of the people of these states, whether it is prudent we should make so liberal and extensive a grant of power and property to any body of men in these United States, before they have ever informed the public, the amount of the public debt, or what the annual expenses of the federal government is, or will be. It is now almost five years since the peace. Congress has employed thirteen commissioners, at 1500 dollars per annum, as I am informed, to settle the public accounts, and we know now no more what the national debt is, than at the first moment of their appointment. Nor do we know any more what is the amount of the annual expenses of the federal government, than we do of the empire of China. To grant therefore such an ample power of taxation, and the right of soil, to the amount of millions, upon the recommendation of this honorable Convention, without either knowing the amount of the national debt, or the annual expenses of government, would not argue, in my opinion, the highest degree of prudence.