

Antifederalist No. 15

Rhode Island Is Right!

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The abuse which has been thrown upon the state of Rhode Island seems to be greatly unmerited. Popular favor is variable, and those who are now despised and insulted may soon change situations with the present idols of the people. Rhode Island has out done even Pennsylvania in the glorious work of freeing the Negroes in this country, without which the patriotism of some states appears ridiculous. The General Assembly of the state of Rhode Island has prevented the further importation of Negroes, and have made a law by which all blacks born in that state after March, 1784, are absolutely and at once free.

They have fully complied with the recommendations of Congress in regard to the late treaty of peace with Great Britain, and have passed an act declaring it to be the law of the land. They have never refused their quota of taxes demanded by Congress, excepting the five per cent impost, which they considered as a dangerous tax, and for which at present there is perhaps no great necessity, as the western territory, of which a part has very lately been sold at a considerable price, may soon produce an immense revenue; and, in the interim, Congress may raise in the old manner the taxes which shall be found necessary for the support of the government.

The state of Rhode Island refused to send delegates to the Federal Convention, and the event has manifested that their refusal was a happy one as the new constitution, which the Convention has proposed to us, is an elective monarchy, which is proverbially the worst government. This new government would have been supported at a vast expense, by which our taxes -- the right of which is solely vested in Congress, (a circumstance which manifests that the various states of the union will be merely corporations) -- would be doubled or trebled. The liberty of the press is not stipulated for, and therefore may be invaded at pleasure. The supreme continental court is to have, almost in every case, "appellate jurisdiction, both as to law and fact," which signifies, if there is any meaning in words, the setting aside the trial by jury. Congress will have the power of guaranteeing to every state a right to import Negroes for twenty one years, by which some of the states, who have now declined that iniquitous traffic, may re-enter into it -- for the private laws of every state are to submit to the superior jurisdiction of Congress. A standing army is to be kept on foot, by which the vicious, the sycophantic, and the time -- serving will be exalted, and the brave, the patriotic, and the virtuous will be depressed.

The writer, therefore, thinks it the part of wisdom to abide, like the state of Rhode Island, by the old articles of confederation, which, if re-examined with attention, we shall find worthy of great regard; that we should give high praise to the manly and public spirited sixteen members, who lately seceded from our house of Assembly [in Pennsylvania]; and that we should all impress with great care, this truth on our minds -- That it is very easy to change a free government into an arbitrary one, but that it is very difficult to convert tyranny into freedom.