

## Antifederalist No. 74

### The President as Military King

"Philadelphiensis," who was influenced by Thomas Paine (in *Common Sense*), wrote the following selection. It is taken from 3 essays which appearing February 6 & 20, and April 9 of 1788 in either *The Freeman's Journal* or, *The North-American Intelligencer*.

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Before martial law is declared to be the supreme law of the land, and your character of free citizens be changed to that of the subjects of a military king -- which are necessary consequences of the adoption of the proposed constitution -- let me admonish you in the name of sacred liberty, to make a solemn pause. Permit a freeman to address you, and to solicit your attention to a cause wherein yourselves and your posterity are concerned. The sun never shone upon a more important one. It is the cause of freedom of a whole continent of yourselves and of your fellow men.

A conspiracy against the freedom of America, both deep and dangerous, has been formed by an infernal junto of demagogues. Our thirteen free commonwealths are to be consolidated into one despotic monarchy. Is not this position obvious? Its evidence is intuitive . . . . Who can deny but the president general will be a king to all intents and purposes, and one of the most dangerous kind too -- a king elected to command a standing army. Thus our laws are to be administered by this tyrant; for the whole, or at least the most important part of the executive department is put in his hands.

A quorum of 65 representatives, and of 26 senators, with a king at their head, are to possess powers that extend to the lives, the liberties, and property of every citizen of America. This novel system of government, were it possible to establish it, would be a compound of monarchy and aristocracy, the most accursed that ever the world witnessed. About 50 (these being a quorum) of the well born, and a military king, with a standing army devoted to his will, are to have an uncontrolled power. . . .

There is not a tincture of democracy in the proposed constitution, except the nominal elections of the president general and the illustrious Congress be supposed to have some color of that nature. But this is a mere deception, invented to gull the people into its adoption. Its framers were well aware that some appearance of election ought to be observed, especially in regard to the first Congress; for without such an appearance there was not the smallest probability of their having it organized and set in operation. But let the wheels of this government be once cleverly set in motion, and I'll answer for it, that the people shall not be much troubled with future elections, especially in choosing their king -- the standing army will do that business for them.

The thoughts of a military officer possessing such powers, as the proposed constitution vests in

the president general, are sufficient to excite in the mind of a freeman the most alarming apprehensions; and ought to rouse him to oppose it at all events. Every freeman of America ought to hold up this idea to himself: that he has no superior but God and the laws. But this tyrant will be so much his superior, that he can at any time he thinks proper, order him out in the militia to exercise, and to march when and where he pleases. His officers can wantonly inflict the most disgraceful punishment on a peaceable citizen, under pretense of disobedience, or the smallest neglect of militia duty. . . .

The President-general, who is to be our king after this government is established, is vested with powers exceeding those of the most despotic monarch we know of in modern times. What a handsome return have these men [the authors of the Constitution made to the people of America for their confidence! Through the misconduct of these bold conspirators we have lost the most glorious opportunity that any country ever had to establish a free system of government. America under one purely democratical, would be rendered the happiest and most powerful nation in the universe. But under the proposed one composed of an elective king and a standing army, officered by his sycophants, the starvelings of the Cincinnati, and an aristocratical Congress of the well-born -- an iota of happiness, freedom, or national strength cannot exist. What a pitiful figure will these ungrateful men make in history; who, for the hopes of obtaining some lucrative employment, or of receiving a little more homage from the rest of their fellow creatures, framed a system of oppression that must involve in its consequences the misery of their own offspring....

Some feeble attempts have been made by the advocates of this system of tyranny, to answer the objections made to the smallness of the number of representatives and senators, and the improper powers delegated to them. But, as far as I recollect, no one has been found bold enough to stand forth in defense of that dangerous and uncontrolled officer, the President-General, or more properly, our new King.

A few pieces under the signature of An American Citizen' were published immediately after the Constitution broke the shell, and the hydra made its way from the dark conclave into the open light. In the first number the writer, in touching on the President, endeavored to conceal his immense powers, by representing the King of Great Britain as possessed of many hereditary prerogatives, rights and powers that he was not possessed of; that is, he shows what he is not, but neglects to show what he really is. But so flimsy a palliative could scarce escape the censure of the most ignorant advocate for such an officer; and since [then] we hear of no further attempts to prove the necessity of a King being set over the freemen of America.

The writer of these essays has clearly proven, that the President is a King to all intents and purposes, and at the same time one of the most dangerous kind too -- an elective King, the commander in chief of a standing army, etc. And to those add, that he has a negative power over the proceedings of both branches of the legislature. And to complete his uncontrolled sway, he is neither restrained nor assisted by a privy council, which is a novelty in government. I challenge the politicians of the whole continent to find in any period of history a monarch more absolute. . .

*PHILADELPHIENSIS*

