

Letter from Samuel Adams to Richard Henry Lee, December 3, 1787

My dear Sir

Boston Dec 3^d 1787

I am to acknowledge your Several Favors of the 5th and 27 of October, the one by the Post and the other by our worthy Friend M^r Gerry. The Session of our General Court which lasted Six Weeks, and my Station there requiring my punctual & constant Attendance, prevented my considering the new Constitution as it is already called, So closely as was necessary for me before I Should venture an Opinion.

I confess, as I enter the Building I Stumble at the Threshold. I meet with a National Government, instead of a Federal Union of Sovereign States. I am not able to conceive why the Wisdom of the Convention led them to give the Preference to the former before the latter. If the several States in the Union are to become one entire Nation, under one Legislature, the Powers of which shall extend to every Subject of Legislation, and its Laws be supreme & controul the whole, the Idea of Sovereignty in these States must be lost. Indeed I think, upon such a Supposition, those Sovereignties ought to be eradicated from the Mind; for they would be Imperia in Imperio justly deemd a Solecism in Politicks, & they would be highly dangerous, and destructive of the Peace Union and Safety of the Nation. And can this National Legislature be competent to make Laws for the free internal Government of one People, living in Climates so remote and whose "Habits & particular Interests" are and probably always will be so different. Is it to be expected that General Laws can be adapted to the Feelings of the more Eastern & the more Southern Parts of so extensive a Nation? It appears to me difficult if practicable. Hence then may we not look for Discontent, Mistrust, Disaffection to Government and frequent Insurrections, which will require standing Armies to suppress them in one Place & another where they may happen to arise. Or if Laws could be made, adapted to the local Habits, Feelings, Views & Interests of those distant Parts, would they not cause Jealousies of Partiality in Government which would excite Envy and other malignant Passions productive of Wars and fighting. But should we continue distinct Sovereign States, confederated for the Purposes of mutual Safety and Happiness, each contributing to the federal Head such a Part of its Sovereignty as would render the Government fully adequate to those Purposes and no more, the People would govern

themselves more easily, the Laws of each State being well adapted to its own Genius & Circumstances, and the Liberties of the United States would be more secure than they can be, as I humbly conceive, under the proposed new Constitution. you are sensible, Sir, that the Seeds of Aristocracy began to spring even before the Conclusion of our Struggle for the natural Rights of Men, Seeds which like a Canker Worm lie at the Root of free Governments. So great is the Wickedness of some Men, & the stupid Servility of others, that one would be almost inclined to conclude that Communities cannot be free. The few haughty Families, think They must govern. The Body of the People tamely consent & submit to be their Slaves. This unravels the Mystery of Millions being enslaved by the few! But I must desist — My weak hand prevents my proceeding further at present. I will Send you my poor Opinion of the political Structure at another Time. In the Interim oblige me with your Letters; & present mine and M^{rs} A's best Regards to your Lady & Family, Col^o Francis, M^r A.L. if with you, & other friends, & be assures that I am

Very Affectionately

yours

S. Adams

As I thought it a Piece of Justice
I have Ventured to Say that I had Often
heard from the best Patriots from Virginia
that M^r G Mason was an early active
& able Advocate for the Liberties of
America

Hon^oble R. H. Lee Esq^r

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