

under despotic governments, whose soil in itself is the most fertile imaginable, that scarcely produce subsistence for the inhabitants, and intirely owing to the badness of the governments—Where there is no security for property, none are ambitious of acquiring it; the accumulation thereof, is but an inducement to their tyrants to deprive them even of their lives, in order to possess their property—Under these circumstances men are desirous of procuring only so much as shall be barely sufficient for their sustenance—The consequence is plain, the agricultural interest suffers, the ground not half tilled, and the country wearing a miserable appearance—On the contrary, where the citizen enjoys liberty and security for his property, he is desirous of increasing it, and makes the best use of his lands; the country puts on “a gay, pleasant and prosperous appearance,” and that in gradation from a tyrannical government to a free one, in proportion to the goodness of the constitution. These effects of our excellent constitution are visible to every observer, and acknowledged by every friend to the government—All who acknowledge a divine Providence, must own that to be the prime source of both prosperity and adversity; and sometimes, for wise purposes, it is exercised in adverse dispensations; thus we see partial evil in the midst of general good, without destroying the universal influence of second causes—Such may have been the case during the last summer—In the course of Providence a drought prevailed in some places, yet notwithstanding, there was a general appearance of fertility in the country—though grass failed in some places, yet was there a plentiful harvest; nor did that partial evil militate against the benign influence of our government, in its happy effects upon the country at large, nor lead to a conclusion that the government is defective. I am at the same time sorry to find our Respondent casting reflections upon a state, which however a mistaken policy may for a while, have made backward in subscribing to the constitution, yet now is a sister in union with us.

AN OPPONENT.

New-Jersey, November 10, 1791.



CONGRESS.

PHILADELPHIA.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 1791.

IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE.

Debate on the Ratio of Representation.

MR. FINDLEY declared himself to be in favor of one representative for every 30,000 persons.

The opinion of the people, he said, should be the guide of the committee: that opinion, he conceived to be in favor of the ratio he had mentioned.

The representation ought as nearly as possible to express not only the will, but to participate in the wishes and interests of the people—A large representation embraces these interests more fully, and is more competent to giving and receiving information. The objects of legislation are such as come home to the doors, to the feelings of every man; the government ought therefore to secure the confidence of the people by a large representation. The expence he considered as trifling compared to the benefits—and the people expect and are willing to pay for being well governed, and having their liberties secured. An encreased representation, he considered as an additional security against corruption. As to delays occasioned by a numerous body—he observed, that the representatives were chosen to deliberate, and to mature every subject before decision—He instanced the advantages derived from the numerous representations in France and in Ireland—The former had framed a constitution in two years for twenty-six millions of citizens, and provided for securing the liberties of their country—and the latter had proved a successful barrier against the encroachments of the arbitrary power of England. He concluded, by asserting that the voice of the people was in favor of the amendment proposed to the constitution, which would give one representative to every 30,000 persons.

Mr. Giles—This subject, said he, has struck me in two points of view—Whether Congress are not precluded from exercising any discretion on the subject; and whether, if they are not, it is expedient for them to exercise this discretion at this time. The ratio of representation is a constitutional, and not a legislative act. He referred to the constitution, in which it is said that there shall be one representative to every state, and secondly, that until the enumeration, the

number should be as therein appointed to each state—after the enumeration the number is mentioned, below which it shall not be placed—but there is a negative power to increase the ratio—and from this negative power, a positive discretionary power is inferred. But, he observed, that Congress had precluded itself from a right to exercise this discretionary power, by sending out to the several state legislatures, an amendment on this very subject—this amendment he considered in a serious point of view; and had this idea been attended to at the commencement of the discussion, he conceived that it would have prevented the opinion from being brought forward, whether it was expedient that any change in the ratio of the representation should take place—The idea of one to 30,000, he considered as fully settled in the minds of the people; and a change on the part of the government, would indicate a changeable disposition, and a mutability of counsels, which is but another name for weakness.

The sense of the people have been resorted to by gentlemen on both sides of the question—this, if it can be ascertained, is undoubtedly the best guide; and he thought those in favor of one to 30,000 had with great propriety referred to the conventions, and to the acts of Congress itself. But the amendments are said to have been a matter of compromise, and were insincerely acceded to by the majority—but even on this ground he conceived, that the sense of the people was equally at well declared.—He however differed from gentlemen in respect to the motives which produced those amendments—in the state he came from, both federalists and anti-federalists were fully of opinion that further security as to the representation, was requisite.

The numerous representations of the states, whatever inconveniences may attend them, plainly shew the sense of the people on the subject.

He then took a view of the objects of legislation to the state assemblies, and of those of the general government—in the former, he said, above 1000 persons are employed, though their attention is confined to their internal police—Those of the general government on the other hand, are on the great objects of the whole finance of the Union, a sum of more than eighty millions of dollars, &c. &c.

It is said that we shall want abilities—but, said he, I should be sorry if a representation of ten times the present number of this House, should comprize the abilities of a single state.

He assigned different causes from numbers, for the corruption in the British House of Commons—among these were the frequent mortgages of the funds, and the immense appropriations at the disposal of the executive—the mode of their elections, &c. A large number, he observed, is not so easily corrupted as a small body.

An inequality of circumstances, he then observed, produces revolutions in government, from democracy to aristocracy and monarchy. Great wealth produces a desire of distinctions, rank and titles—The revolutions in property in this country, have created a prodigious inequality of circumstances—Government has contributed to this inequality—the Bank of the United States is a most important machine in promoting the objects of this monied interest—this bank will be the most powerful engine to corrupt this House—some of the members are directors of this institution—and it will only be by increasing the representation that an adequate barrier can be opposed to this monied interest. He next adverted to certain ideas which he said had been disseminated through the United States; and here he took occasion to observe, that the legislature ought to express some public disapprobation of these opinions—The strong executive of this government ought to be balanced by a full representation in this House. He hoped the motion to strike out 30,000 would not obtain.

Mr. Boudinet closed the debate of this day, by a few remarks, reinforcing his former observations in favor of an increased ratio.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15.

Mr. PAGE.—I can no longer refrain from expressing my sentiments respecting the question before the committee; not only because I wish if possible to remove the error which I think several members, for whom I have the highest respect, have fallen into, but because I feel myself more interested in the question than I ever was in any one I have had to decide on.

Sir, it gave me pain to find those worthy members calculating and coldly applying the rules of arithmetic to a subject beyond the power of numbers to express the degree of its importance to their fellow-citizens. I was distressed, sir, to find that in their honest zeal for securing order, dispatch of business, and dignity in respectability of members in the general legislature, they used arguments which have been applied in other countries to the establishment of insolent aristocracies—in some, tyrannical despotisms—and in others, Kings; those countries which were most on their guard with the semblance of a free government.

Sir, the errors I wish to correct are these: They think that because it is proposed, by a proposed amendment to the Constitution, to authorize them to interfere in the business of ascertaining and fixing the ratio of representation to the population of the States, that Congress ought, without any hesitation, to enter on that business—but I humbly conceive, that Congress, as this is a delicate question in which their own weight and importance must unite with the weight and substantial interest of their constituents, ought to listen to the suggestions of delicacy, and leave its discussion to a disinterested convention of the States. I say it appears to me no small error to quit the plain path of legislation, marked out for us by the Constitution, needlessly to wander into the field of political speculation, respecting its supposed defects.

Let me therefore advise to leave the restriction of the numbers of members of this house to the people, or to some future Congress, which can see more plainly than can now be deferred, the evils of a too numerous representation. By so doing, we shall avoid, if not an improper measure, at least a rash step—at least we shall stand clear of a charge of indelicacy, and deprive our enemies of the triumph they expected in the completion of their predictions, that Congress would never propose any amendments to the Constitution but such as would be subservient to their own views and aggrandizement. Let us not give the enemies of our new government cause to exult, and its friends to sigh and mourn. Let us not give our friends occasion to repeat what many have said, that so many of our citizens have been led away by theoretical writers on government, as to render it problematical whether the American States are not at this time as much indebted to the National Assembly for its remains of republican principles, as France was to Congress in 1776, for their first ideas of that liberty which they now enjoy. Let us not, in this moment of general exultation of the friends to the rights of man, take a step which may damp their joy, and lead them to fear that Americans who were foremost in the glorious career of liberty, have stopped short.

But, sir, granting that we were now sitting in full convention, convened for the sole purpose of altering that article of the Constitution which respects the number of representatives, would it not become us to consider rather what was the sense of the members who framed that Constitution, and what was and is the sense of their constituents and our own respecting it, than what may be the result of our enquiries concerning the speculative opinions of writers on the subject of government, or even the real consequences of the most plausible theories reduced to practice in other countries?

But not to take up the precious time of this house with relations of facts to show what was and is the opinion of our fellow-citizens on this interesting subject, I will only state a few arguments which have weight with me as being in themselves evident truths, viz.—Our Constitution being framed by the people, and introduced to us in their name, and Congress being the creatures of their will, spoken into existence by the word of their power for Congress, to lessen their weight, to diminish their importance, and to exclude them from as full a share in their own government, as can be consistent with the nature of it, and indeed from that share which they claim, must be impolitic and dangerous.

But granting that the people wished not a greater share in the general government than is proposed by the amendment, as it is impossible, in a country like the United States, that one man can be sufficiently informed of the opinions, wishes and real interests of thirty-five thousand of his fellow-citizens, and therefore laws might be enacted contrary to the opinions, wishes and interests of the people, in which they might nevertheless acquiesce, sacrificing their interests for the sake of peace and quiet, to the wills of their representatives, one thirty-five thousandth part of their own number—What friend to his country would wish to see such a dangerous influence on the one hand, and such a blind submission on the other? How long could an enlightened people remain in such a state of insensibility and torpor? and what might not be the consequence of their awaking from their lethargy? If not an expensive revolution, an expensive repeal of laws. And here I will remark, that the smallest number of legislators, and they too, well selected for their wisdom and respectability, if unacquainted with their constituents, might pass well framed laws, founded on the wisdom of other countries, and yet find them disagreeable to their constituents, and be under a necessity of repealing them—but this could not be the case if the people had in that legislature a sufficient number of representatives, on whose fidelity, attachment and disinterestedness, they could rely. This, sir, is a truth worthy of our attention—an ignorance of which or inattention thereto, I suspect has been the occasion of much political evil in the world. Happily for France, the people had such a number of representatives in the National Assembly, as could