Daniel Shays to the Antifederal Junto in Philadelphia Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 25 September 1787

This fictitious letter was an attempt to associate Philadelphia's Antifederalist leaders with Daniel Shays of Massachusetts and the violence-prone Connecticut settlers in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley. The Wyoming Valley had been the scene of turmoil for decades. Before the Revolution, a large group of Connecticut settlers purchased land in the valley from a Connecticut land company, settled there, and acknowledged the jurisdiction of Connecticut. From the first, the Connecticut settlers engaged in open warfare with those settlers who accepted Pennsylvania's jurisdiction. In 1782 a federal court awarded jurisdiction of the valley to Pennsylvania, and four years later, Pennsylvania established Luzerne County in the area. Whereupon, the Connecticut settlers, led by John Franklin, organized to resist the laws of Pennsylvania and to boycott state and local elections. In August 1787 they met at Tioga Point and openly defied the authority of Pennsylvania.

Tioga Point, 15*th September*, 1787.

My dear Friends,

It is with great concern that I have heard that you are composed of only *five* members, and that a great body of citizens who once followed you in every thing, have lately joined the federal party. Rest assured, they never were sound at bottom, that is, they never were attached to *themselves* above all things, or they never would have left you at this trying juncture.

My advice to you upon this occasion is, give the new government all the opposition that lies in your power. For this purpose, if you are applied to to sign a petition to your Assembly to recommend the adoption of it,—you must say "*you* have not read it;" or if you have, that "you want time to consider of it."

Besides this, you must *snarle* at the Convention in every company, and write letters to the frontier countries, where the people is most easily deceived, and alarm them with a number of hard words, such as *aristocracy*, *monarchy*, *oligarchy*, and the like, none of which they will understand.

You must tell them further, that by the constitution of Pennsylvania, which *you* are sworne to support (and no wonder, for its treasury supports *you*) the federal government cannot be adopted in Pennsylvania. Even the *people* themselves cannot consent to any alterations of the constitution; for the constitution is above them all, and above every thing else, except you five

gentlemen, who live by it, and who may break it, and twist it, and turn it when ever it suits your interest and party.

You must try further to put off the recommendation of a Convention, till the next session of your Assembly. This will give you time to look about you, and perhaps to throw a lock upon one of the wheels of the great continental waggon; for you may depend upon it your wheelbarrow, and the new flying machine, cannot long travel the same road together.[1]

With great regard, and sincere wishes for your success in every thing that tends to anarchy, distress, poverty and tyranny, I am your friend and humble servant, DANIEL SHAYS.

1. The "great continental waggon" probably refers to the central government, and the "new flying machine" to the new Constitution. The "wheelbarrow" was undoubtedly the Pennsylvania state constitution of 1776.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XIII: Commentaries on the Constitution, Public and Private [1] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1981), 228–29.