

The John Locke Society

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Chairman *Secretary* *Chief Whip* *Chancellor*

"[The Constitution] is a government by force, and expresses the genius of despotism."
Patrick Henry, Virginia Ratification Convention, June, 1787 (from *Witnesses at the Creation*, page 236)

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The United States national government has extended its reach and imposed its power in all aspects of our society in abridgement of the principles of Ordered Liberty, thereby establishing a state of affairs bordering on tyranny. The Legislature, populated by a professional political class concerned only for polls, reduces the Republic to mob rule. The Executive Branch regulates us *literally* unto death, giving even fish primacy over the lives of firefighters. The Judiciary, once the philosophical conservators of individual freedom, are now Imperial rulers by fiat that today control nearly every aspect of our daily lives. This intolerable situation results from the mistaken notion that the United States in 1787 needed to strengthen the weak national government that then existed under the Articles of Confederation. Anti-Federalist Patriots such as Patrick Henry and George Mason warned that establishing a national central government through the proposed Constitution—even with its “federal” system—and replacing the Confederation of sovereign States, would invariably shift too much power to that central government, no matter how clearly drafted and well-intentioned that Constitution might be. A weak national government would be the best defense against tyranny they argued. History has proved these Patriots correct. If the Articles of Confederation were still in place, none of the political horrors and cultural rot of modern day liberalism, abetted by an overreaching national government, would have beset us. Instead, we would have a country where citizens, governed mainly by individual sovereign States, would be much more free to pursue their own individual and common destinies without the social and economic intervention of a too powerful central government. The relatively small geographic expanse of each State and the relatively minor barriers to migration would have created an environment where individual Liberty was not just highly prized, but vigilantly and vigorously protected. Unlike today, where any tyranny instituted by the federal government reaches to all corners of this great land, tyrannies instituted by State governments would be limited to just those States and would result in citizens fleeing to more enlightened States. Further, States would be free to pursue policies better suited to their unique individual circumstances. Individual and community Liberty would flourish, instead of being ground to a dull insensate national uniformity. And, most of all, individual Liberty would be best protected, not by a constitutional document that is increasingly ignored, but rather by a government close to the people—the sovereign State.

The Chairman, however, is also mindful of what might have happened had the United States not adopted the Constitution, but instead retained the Articles of Confederation. America would be divided into numerous internecine warring coalitions, as States would gang up against one another, each alliance constantly shifting, and losing or gaining ground. States would have thrown up barriers to the movement of individuals and businesses. Commerce and migration would have ground to a halt, as border controls became more and more onerous. In other words, America would have become like Europe. Like Europe, with vastly differing economic entities hindering free trade. Like Europe, unable to coordinate a national foreign policy. Like Europe, unable to muster defense of its own people. Like Europe, with all of its misery of tyrants—Napoleon, Lenin, Stalin, et. al.—coming forth to breed war and desolation on a tortured and divided land. The United States escaped all this bloodshed—experiencing only one conflict of American versus American (the War Between the States). Further, America by being unified, was able to develop the power to save the world, first from German nationalism, then from German National Socialism and Imperial Japanese authoritarianism, and then from Communist totalitarianism. An America disunited under the Articles of Confederation would have been unable to decisively intervene, not once and certainly not thrice—a grave price indeed, not just for America but for the world. And let no American forget, this Pax Americana—which resulted from national unity under the Constitution—has created the land of opportunity and greatness that America is today. Additionally, if the United States was still organized under the Articles of Confederation, these horrors and cultural rot of modern day liberalism would still be with us, except in a multiplied form. And finally, the admitted problems of overreaching federal power we face today result not from our Constitution granting too much power to the national government, but rather from the actions of the executives and legislators (and thereby the judges) that we have freely elected to lead us. The Constitution is a social contract between the American people—the problem lies not with the contract itself, but rather with the People refusing to enforce it.

Uncertain how to resolve this historical Gordian knot, the Chairman trusts the sharp wit of the Members and Guests of the Antient and Honorable John Locke Society, like Alexander's sword, to cut to the heart of the matter, by debating at the Eighteenth Ronald Wilson Reagan Debate Caucus

Resolved: The U.S. Should Have Retained The Articles Of Confederation.

The Society will assemble on Thursday, September 6, 2001, at the Royal Oaks Country Club (7915 Greenville Avenue, Dallas). The Debate Caucus will begin at 7:30 PM, with a social hour at 6:30 PM at Gershwin's (8442 Walnut Hill Lane at Greenville Avenue). All gentlemen who desire to speak should adorn proper neckwear and ladies should be similarly sartorially resplendent. Literary presentations are encouraged. Please direct all questions to the Chairman at 214-740-3260 or rstephe@firstunion1.com.