

To my Constituents

Of the Counties of Randolph and Alamance.

ON the 28th of February next you are called upon, by an Act of the General Assembly, by your vote, to declare whether or not you want a State Convention, restricted to the consideration of our National Affairs; and also, at the same time, to vote for delegates for said Convention, in case a majority of the whole State shall call it. The Act provides that the action of the convention shall have no validity until ratified by a vote of the people. I voted against this Act, because neither the Constitution of the United States, nor of this State, contemplates any such convention,—and because I can see no way by which it can do any good, and I fear it may do much mischief.

Such a convention is a modern invention of South Carolina, to bring about a sort of legalized revolution. It has been adopted in most of the Southern States. All its original advocates were disunionists. Wherever such a convention has assembled, it has asserted the power to sever the State from the Union, and declare it an independent government. Under my oath to support the Constitution of the United States, I could not vote to call a convention to overthrow that instrument.

I thought it improper for the General Assembly to ask you whether you want an unconstitutional convention. What can it do? It can do nothing only as a revolutionary body. Everybody looks for a remedy for our national troubles, to an amendment of the Constitution of the United States. The Fifth Article of the Constitution of the United States prescribes two modes of amendment. I give you the words:

“The Congress, whenever two-thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution; or on the application of the Legislatures of two-thirds of the several States shall call a convention for proposing amendments, which, in either case, shall be valid, for all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution, when ratified by the Legislatures of three-fourths of the several States, or by conventions in three-fourths thereof, as the one or the other mode of ratification may be proposed by the Congress.”

Our wise fathers did not intend that the great fundamental law—the Constitution—should be lightly altered. If bare majorities of the popular vote could have altered it, a *written* Constitution would have been idle.

You will see there are two constitutional modes of amendment. Congress has been endeavoring to agree on amendments. There is little prospect that two-thirds of both Houses can agree on any thing. The members were all elected as partizans. Many of them have indulged in crimination and recrimination in mutual abuse of each other till they are not in the temper to act as patriots and statesmen. They have become excited—excited men rarely act prudently and wisely. The other mode of amendment has not been tried. Shall we not try all constitutional modes of amendment before we resort to strange and unconstitutional modes? That other mode seems peculiarly adapted to our present condition. Let a National Convention be called. Surely two-thirds of the State will join in such a call. If called, it is hoped wise and discreet men, not men lately engaged in party strife, will be called to fill it. Can anybody doubt that such an Assembly could compose the National commotions. I do not doubt it. The provision for such a convention, in common with all their works, shows the forecast and wisdom of our fathers. In such an Assembly, composed of calm and prudent men, all sections could be heard—could interchange views, each could make some concessions to the feelings and prejudices of others—the same sort of concessions we all have to

make to each other in religion, morals, and everything else which makes civilized society.

They would agree on a basis of settlement. In all the States excepting South Carolina, perhaps in a few other Southern States, the people still cherish a love for the name of Washington, and for the Union. The doings of such a convention would be likely to be heartily ratified by three-fourths of the States. At all events let no one break up this great Union till we have fully tried all constitutional modes of amendment.

If the proposed State Convention does what its most ardent advocates desire it to do, it will be what all Conventions south of us have done—declare the State out of the Union, and an independent State. Every artifice will be employed to make you believe that a convention is to be called to *save* the Union. Believe it not. It is true, many members who are Union men voted for submitting it to a vote of the people whether they would have a convention or not, throwing upon you, with little time to consider, a responsibility which I think they should have met themselves. A majority refused to pass an amendment allowing you to endorse on your tickets whether you are for union or disunion. It will be said that the convention can do no harm since whatever it may do will have no validity until ratified by you. The disunion leaders boldly maintain that the Legislature cannot restrict the convention—that it may pass whatever ordinance it pleases, regardless of the restraints attempted to be imposed upon it by the Act of Assembly; and that it may, or may not, at its pleasure, submit its action to the people for ratification. If war begins, it will probably be brought on during the sitting of the convention.

It is now the policy of disunionists to postpone hostilities till President Buchanan goes out and President Lincoln comes in. They will probably court a fight as soon as Lincoln takes the reins. If war shall have actually commenced before the Convention closes its session, and an ordinance of secession be passed, it is to be feared that its action will not be referred to the people for ratification. Not one of the five States which seceded, though acting under no emergency, has submitted its action to the people for ratification. We have not yet exhausted Constitutional remedies. We cannot have exhausted them before this convention shall assemble. Believe not those who may tell you this convention is called to *save* the Union. It is called to *destroy* it. If you desire to preserve the Union vote “No Convention,” and at the same time, be careful for whom you vote as delegates.

When we shall have seen what the Commissioners shall effect, who are to meet in Washington on the 4th of February, to look for a remedy for the National disturbances,—when we shall have called for a National Convention and it shall be refused, or shall have failed to accomplish a pacification, it will be time enough to resort to revolution. I think that those only should vote for a convention who regard disunion as the only remedy for the disease of the times.

I have felt it due to you to present this hasty explanation of my views, on a momentous question on which you are called upon to vote with such extraordinary haste.

To go into a discussion of the ground on which the disunionists claim that we ought to dissolve the Union, would require more time than I can properly withdraw from my Legislative duties. I content myself with saying that I have carefully read nearly all the debates in Congress, and I see no sufficient reason for abandoning the counsels of the Father of his Country, and the Government under which we have become the freest and most powerful nation of the earth, and launching, probably through civil war upon the dark sea of experiment.

JONATHAN WORTH.

January 31st, 1861.



