

Anti-Federalists Warned Us That American Elites Will Become Like Roman Patricians

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FINANCE July 3, 2018

The old adage when in Rome, do as the Romans do[1] can often make sense. But in some cases it does not; and can even be destructive. Our Founding Fathers understood this.

The Federalist Papers are great commentary on the thoughts and ideas from our Constitutional generation; and rightfully so. Unfortunately, another set of writings is every bit as insightful and profound as the Federalist Papers, but to America's detriment, have been thrust out of sight and thought. These writings are the Anti-Federalist Papers.



Not only are the Anti-Federalist Papers as astute as the Federalist Papers, but a majority of the concerns raised in these essays have actually come to past, and not for the better.

In Anti-Federalist No. 56, the Federalist Farmer[2] explains how in the Roman Republic the representative government was actually not representative at all. The Roman senate only represented the Roman elite, the Roman aristocracy, and not the body of the people, as they were elected to do. Also, the number of representatives in the Roman government represented a far greater number of Romans than good representation could support. In fact, the Federal Farmer notes that “In Rome the people were miserable.”[3]

The Republican government in Rome lost their concern for and interests in the liberty of the people. As the Federal Farmer notes, “Equal liberty never prevailed in Rome because there was but a shadow of a representation.”[4] Today, in the United States for nearly the past decade, the majority of Americans feel that the American Republic is but merely a shadow of representation. Our Congress most often represents their own interests and those of the Washington D.C. elite. They believe our interests are below them, and that only they know what is needed, proper, and superior to the rabble of the country - those of the fly-over country.

The result of the 2016 presidential election was a stark protest to the Washington elite and their snubbing of the will of the people. As Thomas Sowell often sarcastically refers to them, our “betters” know what is best for us and America, and We the People need to follow suit and abide to their will. Whether democrat or republican in Washington D.C. they ignore our will and make policy which they see fit and proper. This is the issue Federal Farmer raises in Anti-Federalist No. 56. Recognizing failure of human nature, the Farmer notes this warning for Americans in 1788 in reference to Italy:

Among all the [Roman] tribunes the people chose for several centuries, they had scarcely five real friends to their interests. Those tribunes lived, felt and saw, not like the people, but like the great patricians families, like senators and great officers of state, to get into which it was evident by their conduct, was their sole object. These tribunes often talked about the rights and prerogatives of the people, and that was all; for they never even attempted to established equal liberty. So far from establishing the rights of the people, they suffered the senate, to the exclusion of the people, to engross the power of taxation.[5]

Just like our betters in Washington D.C. are imposing upon Americans, the Roman people suffered from the elitist attitude of the tribunes. The Federal Farmer understood this potential dangerous concern of republics due to human nature. “Political evils to be guarded against are in the human character,” warns the Farmer, “and not in the name of patrician or plebeian.”[6] This caveat is for us as well.

Americans must realize and understand the failure of human nature, and hold our representatives in check. Power often corrupts those who are given it, regardless of their political party. Liberty is bestowed upon us by God, and is not to be relinquished to others, nor allowed to be taken from us; that is disobedience to God and His Laws. As the Federal Farmer recognizes from Scripture and discloses to us, “True liberty stands in need of a fostering band, - from the days of Adam she has found but one temple to dwell in securely.”[7]

[1] This adage, or proverb, is attributed to an interaction between Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine in the 4th century.

[2] The Federal Farmer is thought to be either Richard Henry Lee or Melancton Smith.

[3] Antifederalist Paper No. 56, The Federal Farmer, date not given, “Will the House of Representatives Be Genuinely Representative? (Part 2),” Taken from Patrick Henry, Robert Yates, and Samuel Byron, The Anti Federalist Papers, 2010 (originally published 1787-1790), “, (Lexington, KY: Pacific Publishing Studios), p. 116.

[4] Antifederalist Paper No. 56, The Federal Farmer, date not given, “Will the House of Representatives Be Genuinely Representative? (Part 2),” Taken from Patrick Henry, Robert Yates, and Samuel Byron, The Anti Federalist Papers, 2010 (originally published 1787-1790), “, (Lexington, KY: Pacific Publishing Studios), p. 116.

[5] Antifederalist Paper No. 56, The Federal Farmer, date not given, “Will the House of Representatives Be Genuinely Representative? (Part 2),” Taken from Patrick Henry, Robert Yates, and Samuel Byron, The Anti Federalist Papers, 2010 (originally published 1787-1790), “, (Lexington, KY: Pacific Publishing Studios), p. 116.

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[7] Antifederalist Paper No. 56, The Federal Farmer, date not given, “Will the House of Representatives Be Genuinely Representative? (Part 2),” Taken from Patrick Henry, Robert Yates, and Samuel Byron, The Anti Federalist Papers, 2010 (originally published 1787-1790), “, (Lexington, KY: Pacific Publishing Studios), p. 117.