

CAHIER

Third Estate of Versailles

1789

Of the grievances, complaints and remonstrance of the members of the third estate of the bailliage of Versailles.

1. The power of making laws resides in the King and the nation.
2. The nation being too numerous for a personal exercise of this right, has confided its trust to representatives freely chosen from all classes of citizens. These representatives constitute the national assembly.
3. Frenchmen should regard as laws of the Kingdom those alone which have been prepared by the national assembly and sanctioned by the King.
4. Succession in the male line and primogeniture are usages as ancient as the monarchy, and ought to be maintained and consecrated by solemn and irrevocable enactment.
5. The laws prepared by the Estates General and sanctioned by the King shall be binding upon all classes of citizens and upon all provinces of the Kingdom. They shall be registered literally and accurately in all courts of law. They shall be open for consultation at all seats of municipal and communal government; and shall be read at sermon time in all parishes.
6. That the nation may not be deprived of that portion of legislation which is its due, and that the affairs of the Kingdom may not suffer neglect and delay, the Estates General shall be convoked at least every two or three years.
7. No intermediate commission of the Estates General may ever be established, since deputies of the nation have no right to delegate the powers confirmed to them.
8. Powers shall be conferred upon delegates for one year only; but they may be continued or confirmed by a single re-election.
9. The persons of deputies shall be inviolable. They may not be prosecuted in civil cases during their term of office; nor held responsible to the executive authorities for any speech made in the assembly; but they shall be responsible to the Estates General alone.
10. Deputies of the Third Estate, or their president or speaker, shall preserve the same attitude and demeanor as the representatives of the two upper orders when they address the sovereign. As regards the three orders there shall be no difference observed in the ceremonial made use of at the convocation of the estates.
11. Personal liberty, proprietary rights and the security of citizens shall be established in a clear, precise and irrevocable manner. All *lettres de cachet* shall be abolished forever, subject to certain modifications which the Estates General may see fit to impose.
12. And to remove forever the possibility of injury to the personal and proprietary rights of Frenchmen, the jury system shall be introduced in all criminal cases, and in civil cases for the determination of fact, in all the courts of the realm.
13. All persons accused of crimes not involving the death penalty shall be released on bail within twenty-four hours. This release shall be pronounced by the judge upon the decision of the jury.
14. All persons who shall have been imprisoned upon suspicion and afterwards proved innocent shall be entitled to satisfaction and damages from the state, if they are able to show that their honor or property has suffered injury.

15. A wider liberty of the press shall be accorded, with this provision alone: that all manuscripts sent to the printer shall be signed by the author, who shall be obliged to disclose his identity and bear the responsibility of his work; and to prevent judges and other persons in power from taking advantage of their authority, no writing shall be held a libel until it is so determined by twelve jurors chosen according to the forms of a law which shall be enacted upon this subject.
16. Letters shall never be opened in transit; and effectual measures shall be taken to the end that this trust shall remain inviolable.
17. All distinctions in penalties shall be abolished; and crimes committed by citizens of the different orders shall be punished irrespectively, according to the same forms of law and in the same manner. The Estates General shall seek to bring it about that the effects of transgression shall be confined to the individual and shall not be reflected upon the relatives of the transgressor, themselves innocent of all participation.
18. Penalties shall in all cases be moderate and proportionate to the crime. All kinds of torture, the rack and the stake, shall be abolished. Sentence of death shall be pronounced only for atrocious crimes and in rare instances, determined by the law.
19. Civil and criminal laws shall be reformed.
20. The military throughout the Kingdom shall be subject to the general law and to the civil authorities, in the same manner as other citizens.
21. No tax shall be legal unless accepted by the representatives of the people and sanctioned by the King.
22. Since all Frenchmen receive the same advantage from the government, and are equally interested in its maintenance, they ought to be placed upon the same footing in the matter of taxation.
23. All taxes now in operation are contrary to these principles and for the most part vexatious, oppressive and humiliating to the people. They ought to be abolished as soon as possible, and replaced by others common to the three orders and to all classes of citizens, without exception.
24. In case the present taxes are provisionally retained, it should be for a short time, not longer than the session of the Estates General, and it shall be ordered that the proportional contribution of the two upper orders be due from them on the day of the promulgation of the law of the constitution.
25. After the establishment of the new taxes, which shall be paid by the three orders, the present exceptional method of collecting from the clergy shall be done away with, and their future assemblies shall deal exclusively with matters of discipline and dogma.
26. All new taxes, real and personal, shall be established only for a limited time, never to exceed two or three years. At the expiration of this term, they shall be no longer collected, and collectors or other officials soliciting the same shall be proceeded against as guilty, of extortion.
27. The anticipation of future revenues, loans in whatsoever disguise, and all other financial expedients of the kind, of which so great abuse has been made, shall be forbidden.
28. In case of war, or other exceptional necessity, no loan shall be made without the consent of the Estates General, and it shall be enacted that no loan shall be effected, without provision being made by taxation for the payment of interest, and of the principal at a specified time.
29. The amount which each citizen shall be obliged to pay, in case of war, by reason of an increase in the existing taxes, at a certain rate per livre, shall be determined beforehand by the Estates General in conjunction with the King. The certainty of increase ought to have a marked effect in preventing useless and unjust wars, since it clearly indicates to Frenchmen the new burden they will have to bear, and to foreign nations the resources which the nation has in reserve and at hand to repulse unjust attacks.

30. The exact debt of the government shall be established by the Estates General, and after verification it shall be declared the national debt.
31. Perpetual and life annuities shall be capitalized at their present value and discharged.
32. The expenses of the departments shall be determined by their actual needs, and so established by a committee of the Estates General, in such a manner that the expenditures may never exceed the sums appropriated.
33. There shall be no increase in taxation, until the receipts and expenditures have been compared with the utmost care, and a real deficit discovered; in fact, not until all possible reductions have been made in the expenses of each department.
34. The expenses of the war department call for, the special attention of the Estates General. These expenses amount annually to the appalling sums of 110 and 120 millions. In order to effect their reduction, the Estates General shall demand the accounts of this department under the recent ministries, particularly under the ministry of the Duc de Choiseul.
35. The present militia system, which is burdensome, oppressive, and humiliating to the people, shall be abolished; and the Estates General shall devise means for its reformation.
36. A statement of pensions shall be presented to the Estates General; they shall be granted only in moderate amount and then only for services rendered. The total annual expenditure for this purpose should not exceed a fixed sum. A list of pensions should be printed and made public each year.
37. Since the nation undertakes to provide for the personal expenses of the sovereign, as well as for the crown and state, the law providing for the inalienability of the domain shall be repealed. As a result, all parcels of the domain immediately in the King's possession, as well as those already pledged, and for the forests of His Majesty as well, shall be sold, and transferred in small lots, in so far as possible, and always at public auction to the highest bidder; and the proceeds applied to the reduction of the public debt. In the meanwhile all woods and forests shall continue to be controlled and administered, whoever may be the actual proprietors, according to the provisions of the law of 1669.
38. The execution of this law shall be confided to the provincial estates, which shall prosecute violations of the law before judges in ordinary.
39. Appanages shall be abolished and replaced, in the case of princes who possess them, with cash salaries, which shall be included in the expenses of the crown.
40. The Estates General shall take under advisement these transfers which have not yet been verified and completed. Ministers and all government officials shall be responsible to the Estates General for their conduct of affairs. They may be impeached according to fixed forms of law and punished according to the statute.
41. All general and particular statements and accounts relative to the administration shall be printed and made public each year.
42. The coinage may not be altered without the consent of the Estates; and no bank established without their approval.
43. A new subdivision shall be made of the provinces of the realm; provincial estates shall be established, members of which, not excepting their presidents be elected.
44. The constitution of the provincial estates shall be uniform throughout the Kingdom, and fixed by the Estates General. Their powers shall be limited to the interior administration of the provinces under the supervision of His Majesty, who shall communicate to them the national laws which have received the

consent of the Estates General And the royal sanction: to which laws all the provincial estates be obliged to submit without reservation.

45. All members of the municipal assemblies of towns and villages shall be elected. They may be chosen from all classes of citizens. All municipal offices now existing shall be abolished; and their redemption shall be provided for by the Estates General.
46. All offices and positions, civil, ecclesiastical and military, shall be open to all orders; and no humiliating and unjust exceptions (in the case of the third estate), destructive to emulation and injurious to the interests of the state, shall be perpetuated.
47. The right of aubaine shall be abolished with regard to all nationalities. All foreigners, after three years residence in the Kingdom, shall enjoy the rights of citizenship.
48. Deputies of French colonies in America and in the Indies, which form an important part of our possessions, shall be admitted to the Estates General, if not at the next meeting, at least at the one following.
49. All relics of serfdom, agrarian or personal, still remaining in certain provinces, shall be abolished.
50. New laws shall be made in favor of the Negroes in our colonies; and the Estates General shall take measures towards the abolition of slavery. Meanwhile let a law be passed, that Negroes in the colonies who desire to purchase their freedom, as well as those whom their masters are willing to set free, shall no longer be compelled to pay a tax to the domain.
51. The three functions—legislative, executive, and judicial—shall be separated and carefully distinguished. The communes of the bailliage of Versailles have already expressed themselves in respect to the necessity of adopting the form of deliberation per capita in the coming Estates General. The reform of the constitution will be one of their principal duties. This magnificent monument of liberty and public felicity should be the work of the three orders in common session; if they are separated, certain pretensions, anxieties and jealousies are bound to arise; the two upper orders are likely to oppose obstacles perhaps invincible, to the reform of abuses and the enactment of laws destined to suppress such abuses. It seems indispensable that in this first assembly votes should be taken per capita and not by order. After the renunciation by the upper two orders of their pecuniary privileges; after all distinctions before the law have been abolished; when the exclusion of the third estate from certain offices and positions has been done away with, then the reasons which to-day necessitate deliberation per capita will no longer exist. The communes of Versailles therefore refrain from expressing a positive opinion upon the future composition of the national assemblies and upon the method of their deliberation. They defer, with all confidence, the decision of this important question to the wisdom of the Estates General. Our prayer is that the methods determined upon shall be such as will assure forever, to the King and to the nation, those portions of the legislative power which respectively belong to them; that they shall maintain between them a perfect equilibrium in the employment of this power; that they shall conserve, forever, to the nation its rights and liberties; to the King his prerogatives and the executive power in all its fullness. Finally that these methods should be so combined as to produce that circumspectness and lack of haste so necessary to the enactment of laws, and that they will effectually prevent all hasty counsels, dissensions amongst deputies and immature conclusions. May all deputies to this august assembly, impressed with the sanctity and extent of their obligations, forget that they are the mandataries of some special order, and remember only that they are representatives of the people. May they never be forgetful of the fact, that they are about to fix the destinies of the foremost nation of the world!
52. It shall be ordained by the constitution that the executive power be vested in the King alone.
53. The King shall dispose of all official places and positions, ecclesiastical, civil and military, to which he has at present the right of appointment.

54. All the provincial estates, or commissions representing them shall receive his immediate orders, which it shall be their duty to obey provisionally.
55. His consent shall be necessary to all bills approved by the Estates General in order that they may acquire the force of law throughout the realm. He may reject all bills presented to him, without being obliged to state the reasons of his disapproval.
56. He shall have the sole right of convening, proroguing, and dissolving the Estates General.
57. The sale of the judicial office shall be suppressed as soon as circumstances will permit, and provision made for the indemnification of holders.
58. There shall be established in the provinces as many superior courts as there we provincial estates. They shall be courts of final jurisdiction.
59. All exceptional and privileged seignorial courts shall be abolished, as well as other courts rendered useless by the abolition of certain taxes which caused their erection, and by the adoption of a new system of accounts under the exclusive control of the Estates General.
60. All rights of *committimus* or of evocation, which tend to favor certain classes of citizens to the detriment of the general public, shall be abolished.
61. There shall be only two stages of jurisdiction.
62. Since the adoption of the jury system will have a tendency to facilitate and simplify the administration of justice, all classes of judges shall be reduced to the least number possible.
63. Each judge of the lower courts and of the superior provincial courts shall be appointed by the King out of a list of three candidates, presented by the provincial estates.
64. Judges of all courts shall be obliged to adhere to the letter of the law, and may never be permitted to change, modify or interpret it at their pleasure.
65. The fees received by all officers of justice shall be fixed at a moderate rate and clearly understood; and judges who extort fees in excess of the fixed rates shall be condemned to pay a fine of four times the amount they have received. Such are the bans of a constitution founded upon the eternal principles of justice and reason, which alone ought to regulate henceforward the government of the realm. Once they are adopted, all false pretensions, all burdensome privileges, all abuses of all kinds will be seen to disappear. Already a considerable number of bailliages have expressed their desires concerning the reforms and abolitions to, be effected in all branches of the administration; the necessity for these drastic changes has been so evident that it is sufficient merely, to indicate them.
66. The deputies of the *prevolte* and *Vicomte* of Paris shall be instructed to unite themselves with the deputies of other provinces, in order to join with them in securing, as soon as able, the following abolitions: the *taille*; the *gabelle*; the *aides*; the *corvee*; the *ferme* of tobacco; the registry-duties; the freehold tax; the taxes on leather; Of the government stamp upon iron; the stamps upon gold and Silver; the inter-provincial customs duties; the taxes upon fairs and markets; Finally, of all taxes that are burdensome and oppressive, whether on account of their nature or of the expense of collection, or because they have been paid almost wholly by agriculturists and by the poorer classes. They shall be replaced with other taxes, less complicated and easier of collection, which shall fall alike upon all classes and orders of the state without exception.
67. We demand also the abolition of the royal *capitaineries*, game laws, jurisdictions of *prevotes*, *banalities*, tolls, and useless authorities and governments in cities and provinces.

68. We solicit the establishment of public granaries in the provinces, under the control of the provincial estates, in order that by accumulating reserves during years of plenty, famine and excessive dearness of grain, such as we have experienced in the past may be prevented.
69. We solicit also the establishment of free schools in all country parishes.
70. We demand, for the benefit of commerce, the abolition of all exclusive privileges: The removal of customs barriers to the frontiers; the most complete freedom in trade; the revision and reform of all laws relative to commerce; encouragement for all kinds of manufacture, viz.: premiums, bounties, and advances; rewards to artisans and laborers for useful inventions. The communes desire that prizes and rewards shall always be preferred to exclusive privileges, which extinguish emulation and lessen competition.
71. We demand the suppression of various hindrances, such as stamps, special taxes, inspections; and the annoyances and visitations, to which many manufacturing establishments, particularly tanneries, are subjected.
72. The Estates General are entreated to devise means for abolishing guild organizations, indemnifying the holders of masterships; and to fix by the law the conditions under which the arts, trades and professions may be followed without the payment of an admission tax and at the same time to provide that public security and confidence be undisturbed.
73. Deputies shall solicit the abolition of receivers of consignments, pawn-brokers, all lotteries, the bank of Poissy, all taxes, of whatsoever nature, on grain and flour, all franchises and exemptions enjoyed by post-agents, except a pecuniary indemnity which shall be accorded them; and the exclusive privilege of the transportation companies which shall be allowed to continue their public service, in competition, however, with all private companies, which shall see fit to establish public carriages; and these, moreover, shall be encouraged.
74. They shall demand complete freedom of transport for grain among the various provinces of the Kingdom, without interference from any court whatsoever.
75. They shall demand also the total abolition of all writs of suspension and of safe conduct.
76. Superior courts shall be absolutely prohibited from arresting, in any manner whatsoever, by means of decrees or decisions obtained upon petitions not made public, the execution of notarial writs or the decisions of judges of original jurisdiction, when the law shall ordain their provisional execution; under penalty that the judge shall be responsible for the amount of the debt, payment of which he has caused to be arrested.
77. The abolition of all places of refuge for debtors.
78. That no merchant or trader may be admitted to any national assembly or any municipal body who has demanded abatement from his creditors; still less if he is a fraudulent bankrupt; and he may not be re-established in his rights until he has paid the whole amount of his indebtedness.
79. That individuals who have issued promissory notes shall be liable to detention.
80. That the Estates General shall consider means of diminishing mendicancy.
81. That civil and military offices may not be held simultaneously by the same person, and that each citizen may hold only one office.
82. That all the honorary rights of nobles shall be maintained; but that they shall be allowed to hunt only upon their own lands, and not upon the lands of their vassals or tenants.
83. That nobility may be acquired neither through office nor purchase.

84. That inheritances shall be divided equally among heritors of the same degree, without regard to sex or right of primogeniture, nor to the status of the co-participants, and without distinction between nobles and non-nobles.
85. That all entails shall be limited to one generation.
86. That day laborers may not be taxed to exceed the amount of one day's labor.
87. That there shall be established in all towns and country houses commissions of arbitration, composed of a certain number of citizens elected and renewed annually, to which persons may apply and secure provisional judgment, without expense, except in case of appeal to the regular courts.
88. That all state prisons shall be abolished, and that means shall be taken to put all other prisons in better sanitary condition.
89. That it may please the Estates General to provide means for securing a uniformity of weights and measures throughout the Kingdom.
90. That the laws upon *leds* and *ventes* shall be examined and rendered uniform throughout the Kingdom.
91. That parishes shall be furnished with power to redeem the tax upon the transfer of land.
92. That dimes shall be suppressed and converted into a money rent based upon the price of corn and of the mark of silver, rising proportionately with the combined increase in value of corn and of the mark of silver.
93. Since clergymen in general ought not to occupy themselves with worldly affairs, there ought to be provided for bishops, archbishops and all holders of benefices a decent income and one suitable to their dignity; accordingly the property of the church in each province ought to be sold under the supervision of the provincial estates, which shall assume the duty of paying to holders of benefices the sums accorded to them by the Estates General.
94. That in case the above change should not be made, then it shall be ordained that no clergyman may hold two benefices at the same time, and that all persons now possessing two or more benefices shall be obliged to choose and to declare, within a prescribed time, which one of them they desire to retain.
95. That all commendatory abbacies, benefices without functions and useless convents shall be suppressed, their possessions sold for the benefit of the sure, and the funds thus realized made to constitute an endowment, the income of which shall be used for the benefit of country parish priests, for the establishment of free hospitals and other charitable institutions.
96. That continuous residence of archbishops and bishops in their dioceses and of beneficiaries in their benefices shall be required; and that resignations be not permitted.
97. That no clergyman under the age of twenty-five may be promoted to a sub-diaconate.
98. That girls may not enter religious orders until after they are twenty-five years of age, nor men until after thirty.
99. That it be forbidden to go to the Roman Curia for provisions, nominations, bulls and dispensations of all kinds; and each bishop in his diocese shall have full powers in these matters.
100. That the right of the pope to grant livings in France be suppressed.
101. That the Concordat be revoked, and all intervention on the part of the Roman Curia be made to cease.
102. That loans, contracted by the clergy to cover their contribution to the taxes which they were bound to support, shall be paid by them, since these loans are the obligation of the order; but loans which have

been contracted on the government's account shall be included in the royal rich; and added to the national debt.

Various Matters

1. Deputies of *prevote-vicomte* shall be instructed to demand increased pay for soldiers.
2. That inhabitants of towns and rural places be paid and indemnified for troops of war quartered upon them, for the transportation of troops and of military baggage.
3. That the ordinances concerning the King's guard be revised, particularly those clauses which abolish the wise provision of Louis XIV for the safety of his person, and the regulations made by him relative to his body-guard.
4. That barbarous punishments, taken from the codes of foreign nations and introduced into the new military regulations, be abolished and replaced with regulations more in conformity with the genius of the nation....
8. That it be permitted to contract loans by means of bills or short-term certificates of debt, bearing interest at the legal rate, without it being necessary to alienate the capital so pledged.
9. In case the property of the church be not sold, that leases shall be continued by the successors of the present holders; at least that they shall not suffer a reduction of more than one-third.
10. That canals be constructed in all provinces of the Kingdom where they will be useful.
11. That the working of mines be encouraged.
12. That a new schedule be made of the expenses of funerals, marriages, and other church functions.
13. That cemeteries be located outside of cities, towns and villages; that the same be done with places of deposit for refuse.
14. That the funds for the support of the lazarettos, formerly located in rural parishes, having been united with the endowments of hospitals, country people shall be permitted to send their sick to the city hospitals.
15. That the laws of the Kingdom shall be equally the laws of the French colonies.
16. That all kinds of employment suitable for women shall be reserved for them by special enactment.

Merrick Whitcombe, ed. *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History* (Philadelphia, 1898) IV:24–36.