

REPORT TO HIS CONSTITUENTS

Comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791), representative of Aix en Provence

23–25 June 1789

Finally, the 23^d all the machinery of arbitrary power is displayed; a large guard surrounds the hall of the Estates General, barriers are established; and at a time when everything ought to inspire confidence, the only thought is to impart terror. The door of the hall is opened again to the representatives of the nation, but it is severely forbidden to the public. The King appears. A gloomy silence is observed; he does not receive that accustomed tribute of vows and of homage which announce to him the contentment of his people and which he will always obtain when perfidious counsel does not mislead his judgment. To what a degree must it not have been deceived to adopt forms so despotic, after having solemnly abjured despotism!

We do not fear to say it, suggestions foreign to His Majesty are recognized clearly in the discourses that he has pronounced in the royal session. These discourses are public and without doubt it is permitted to discuss the principles which they contain, principles that His Majesty would never have sustained if he were not surrounded by aristocrats and ministers sworn to despotism. We are all the more authorized to believe it, because one finds in these discourses expressions truly paternal, maxims of public good which contrast with the formulas of tyranny.

In the opening speech of the session, His Majesty prides himself that the two privileged orders will be the first to propose a union of opinion and sentiment that he regards as necessary in the present crisis.

In the declaration, the King orders that three chambers be formed and that deliberation be by order. Are not these two arrangements contradictory? Can one expect this union which is so desirable of opinion and sentiment while deliberating by orders? Moreover, did the ministers believe that in speaking to the National Assembly that it was permissible for the King to make use of the imperative expressions which have been for so long a time abused in the *lits de justice*? Can the King annul the deliberation of the National Assembly? Even in admitting the royal veto, is not this right limited to a simple opposition to the decrees of this assembly; opposition which, in any case denomination excludes the right of setting aside or annulling?

If anyone doubted that the aristocrats had drawn up this declaration under the name of the King or rather the statutes confirmative of their tyrannical privileges, let him read articles VIII and IX, he will there see that great care has been shown to take away the national will, the reform of the seignorial abuses, and that the special consent of the clergy will be necessary for all arrangements which would interest religion, ecclesiastical discipline, the régime of the orders, and secular and regular bodies.

But are not these objects of general interest and should there be a question of particular interest in a national assembly? Should those who have particular interests to defend present themselves there? Let them address petitions, if they believe their pretensions legitimate; but an opposition of private interest against the general interest is a monstrous thing, and consequently it can not be the intention of the King.

No more can it be in accord with his views that the public be excluded from the sessions. Why should we keep the knowledge of our deliberations from it? What do these words—decency, good order—mean, stated in article XV? Here the indecency would be in the mystery, the disorder, in the secret of our operations. This irregular prohibition could have been imagined only by those who fear that their guilty manœuvres may be unveiled and who could not show themselves without blushing.

After this declaration of imperative wishes, the King pronounced a discourse, in which this strange sentence was noticed, “I have also wished, gentlemen, to bring to your attention again the different favors that I grant my people;” as if the rights of the people were favors of kings! Then a declaration of the intentions of the King

was read in which some are found truly wise and popular. But since when has the executive power had the initiative of laws? Is it wished to liken us to an assembly of notables?

Besides, the responsibility of the ministers solemnly demanded by the nation is not to be found in this declaration; no participation whatever of the Estates General in the legislative power is even spoken of. Nothing positive upon the liberty of the press; no mention of the eternal breach of trust, of the secrecy of letters, of the disastrous lottery tax; but, on the other hand, the formal intention of preserving the *lettres de cachet* with useless modifications. Finally the King declares himself the arbiter of what is property or what is not, independently of the nature of things. "His Majesty expressly comprises under the name of property the tithes, revenues, annuities, feudal and seignorial rights and dues."

Here we ought to observe that at the reading of this article, some nobles had the indecency to applaud and to thus show that they have too much pride for their avarice, or too much avarice for their pride. It was only by means of "Silence, there!" that they were induced to restrain themselves.

This declaration of the intentions of His Majesty was followed by a third discourse, in which the King said to the representatives of the nation...

So the King, not content to prescribe laws to the Estates General, and even their by-laws, whether interior or exterior, speaks only by this formula: *I will, I forbid, I order*; so that never has a monarch arrogated to himself more formally all powers without limit and without partition. And it is a good King that courtiers have dared counsel to try such a regime upon the nation that he has felt the need of convoking!

But was it not, then, useless to assemble the representatives of the people, in order to arrive at such an end? If the monarch is free to make laws based upon the *cahiers* of the different bailliages, the ministers had only to have them sent by post; or indeed was this formality necessary? Could they not continue the role of legislators that they have played up to this time? Persuaded of the beneficent intentions of His Majesty, their last resource is to deceive him upon the means of execution, to persuade him that he has need only of himself to effect the well-being of his kingdom. If, however, at the time the estates were summoned, at a time when the King was incontestably provisory legislator, they did not believe that it was permissible for him to determine the manner of the deliberations, by what right, today when a legislative assembly exists, do they wish to usurp the power of making laws, which does not pertain to them and ought not to?....

The deputies of the nobility and a part of those of the clergy retired; the others remained in their seats. Very soon the Marquis de Brézé came to say to them: "Gentlemen, you know the will of the King." At this one of the members of the commons, addressing him said: "Yes, sir, we have heard the views that have been suggested to the King; and you cannot be his representative before the Estates General, you, who have no seat here, nor vote, nor right to speak, you are not the one to recall his discourse to us. However, to avoid all equivocation and all delay, I declare to you that if you have been charged to compel us to withdraw from here, you ought to demand orders to employ force; for we will leave our seats only by the power of the bayonet."

Then with one voice, all of the deputies shouted, "Such is the will of the assembly."

De Brézé having withdrawn, le Camus made the motion to persist in the preceding decrees. It was ably and strongly supported by Barnave, and passed unanimously.