

THE ROYAL SESSION OF 23 JUNE 1789

Jacques Necker (1732–1804)

1795

It was, as I have said, at a time when the interference of the monarch in the states general appeared indispensable, and at a time when all ideas, still vacillating, kept the government in anxiety, that I formed the project of a royal session. I hastened to communicate my ideas to the ministers who voted in the most intelligent manner and they gave them a support which bordered upon enthusiasm. They found the idea courageous, the procedure prudent and they told me so, they repeated it to me in a hundred different ways. There were, afterwards, regular committee meetings with the King, where the whole affair was discussed, and a full and entire approbation on the part of the prince was joined to the then unanimous opinion of his ministers.

A council of state was fixed for the last reading and this council was held at Marly, whither the King had just gone. The reading took place; one or two ministers made observations upon details of the plan, but without importance and, an almost perfect agreement of opinions having reigned during the sitting of the council, it occupied itself with measures of execution, considered whether there would be need for more than twenty-four hours for the preparation of the hall where the royal majesty was to be displayed and the absolute necessity of great haste was unanimously agreed upon. It only remained to fix the day and the next day, but one was almost agreed upon.

A last word of the King was ending the council and the portfolios were already being closed when an officer of the King's household entered unexpectedly. He approached the seat of the King, spoke to him in a low tone, and His Majesty immediately arose, commanding his ministers to remain in their places and await his return. This message, at the moment when the council was nearly at an end, could not but surprise us all. Monsieur de Montmorin, seated by me, said to me immediately, "We have accomplished nothing. The Queen alone would be permitted to interrupt the council of state; the princes have apparently won her over and wish to put off the decision of the King through her mediation."

This presumption of de Montmorin was only too natural, for already confused rumors had announced that the journey to Marly had been decided upon that the King might be controlled more easily and the plans of the ministry combated in his mind. Yet I doubted these reports and, as had often happened to me, I trusted to the force of reason the care of combating and obviating all these efforts of the court, that others called intrigues, believing that I knew well both their first causes and their first motives.

The King re-entered the council chamber after a half-hour's absence, and postponing the deliberation with which we had just been occupied until a first meeting of the Council of State, he suspended his decision, his orders, and everything was at a stand-still. He was, however, told of the difficulties that would arise without fail from this delay; it was represented to him that the rumor of a division among the persons admitted to his confidence would weaken the ascendancy of his authority. It was permitted to warn him that in the midst of the public fermentation, hesitations and uncertainties would multiply suspicions and would also give to party leaders all the time necessary to prepare a redoubtable opposition.

The King persisted in his determination. The new Council of State was held two days after at Versailles and His Majesty judged it fitting to call there not only his ordinary ministers, but also the two princes, his brothers, and four magistrates who had never had a seat in the Council.

We saw at once that a plan had been formed to defeat our measures and to attack the project adopted by the ministry and approved by His Majesty. Secret conferences had been held, the King had been worked upon, and already his opinion appeared changed. It was principally the union of the Orders that they wished to prevent.

I believe that I have shown its expediency and necessity, so I will not recall the arguments that I employed to plead this cause. The ministers then in office, most distinguished by their intellect and wisdom, sustained me with firmness and at first only an uncertain advantage was gained over us. The King decided only, that to find a means of conciliating the different views discussed in his presence, they should re-assemble at the house of the Guard of the Seals, and one of the magistrates called to the Council by way of exception was charged to consult with me more particularly.

We saw one another. I yielded upon everything that was not an absolute necessity in my eyes; and yet each one of these compliances was painful to me, although I was persuaded that the fault of my project was its too great boldness under the circumstances.

We separated after a detailed discussion, which ended by an entire accord. He appeared to me fully persuaded that no other change could be asked without changing the nature of the project, and I believed for the second time that everything was ended. I was mistaken. So much was done and always on the same side, that in a period of twice twenty-four hours, and on the eve of the royal session, the King was prevailed upon not to require the reunion of the orders, not to require it under any condition, and to adopt a system absolutely opposed.

Fred Morrow Fling. *Source Studies on the French Revolution* (1907):7-10.