

# Terror Is the Order of the Day

*September 5, 1793*

Responding to pressure from the sections, the Convention voted on 5 September 1793, to declare that "Terror is the Order of the Day," meaning that the government, through internal "revolutionary armies" that were formed two days later, should and would use force against its own citizens to ensure compliance with its laws, including the law of the Maximum.

The president [Robespierre] announces that a large number of Parisian citizens were requesting permission to enter the chamber and have their delegation present a petition.

The delegation is introduced, headed by the mayor and several municipal officers.

Chaumette: Citizen legislators, the citizens of Paris are tired of a situation that has been uncertain and wavering for too long and want to settle their fate once and for all. Europe's tyrants, along with the state's internal enemies, persist outrageously in their hideous plot to starve the French People into submission and to force them to shamefully trade their liberty and sovereignty for a piece of bread, something they will certainly never do.

New lords, just as cruel, just as greedy, and just as brazen as those they replaced, have risen up in the ruins of feudalism. They have leased or bought the properties of their former masters and continue to follow the well-worn paths of crime, to profit from public misery, to stem the tide of abundance, and to tyrannize those who destroyed tyranny.

Another class, as greedy and as criminal as the first, has seized control of [the supply of] basic necessities. You have dealt them a blow, but they were only dazed. They continue to plunder beneath the very nose of the law.

You have passed wise laws, laws that promise happiness. But they have not been implemented because the power to do so is lacking. If you do not create that power quickly, these laws risk becoming obsolete almost at birth.

At this very moment, the enemies of the state are raising their swords against it . . . swords already stained with the state's own blood. You both possess and implement the needed skills

which then, in republican hands, change metal into weapons capable of felling tyrants. But where are the hands that can drive these weapons into the traitors' breasts?

Hidden domestic enemies, freely speaking the word "liberty," stem the flow of life. In spite of your benevolent laws, they close granaries and coolly engage in the heinous calculation of how much they stand to make from a famine, a riot, or a massacre. Your spirit buckles at the very thought, so you turn over the granaries' keys and the execrable ledgers of these monsters back to the administrators. But where is the strong hand that will forcefully turn that key so fatal to such traitors? Where is that proud and impassible being, unyielding to conspiracy and corruption, who will tear out the pages of the book that has been written with the People's blood, immediately commuting it into a death sentence against those who are starving the nation?

Every day we learn of new betrayals and new crimes. Every day we become upset at the discovery and the reappearance of new conspiracies. Every day new disturbances stir up the Republic, ready to drag it into their stormy whirlwinds, hurling it into the bottomless abyss of the centuries to come. But where is that powerful being whose terrible cry will reawaken sleeping justice, or rather justice that has been paralyzed, dazed by the clamor of factions, and force it at last to strike off criminal heads? Where is that powerful being who will crush all these reptiles who corrupt everything they touch and whose venomous stings stir up our citizens, transforming political gatherings into gladiatorial arenas where each passion, each interest, finds apologists and armies?

Legislators, it is time to put an end to the impious struggle that has been going on since 1789 between the sons and daughters of the nation and those who have abandoned it. Your fate, and ours, is tied to the unvarying establishment of the republic. We must either destroy its enemies, or they will destroy us. They have thrown down the gauntlet in the midst of the People, who have picked it up. They have stirred up agitation. They have attempted to separate, to divide the mass of the citizens, in order to crush the People and to avoid being crushed themselves. Today, the mass of the People, who are without resources, must destroy them using their own weight and willpower. . . .

. . . Legislators, the immense gathering of citizens who assembled yesterday and today in the Commune building, and in the square outside it, passed only one resolution, which is brought to you by a delegation. It is: *Food, and to get it, strength for the law*. As a result, we are charged with demanding the creation of the revolutionary army which you have already decreed but which the guilty, through plotting and fear, have aborted. [Unanimous applause breaks out

several times.] Let this army form its core in Paris immediately, and from every department through which it passes, let all men join who want a republic united and indivisible. Let an incorruptible and formidable tribunal follow this army, as well as that deadly tool which, with a single stroke, ends both the conspiracies and the days of their authors. Let this tribunal be tasked with making avarice and cupidity cough up the wealth of the land, that inexhaustible wet nurse of all children. Let it bear the following words on its standards, which shall be its constant order: *Peace to men of good will; war on those who would starve people; protection for the weak; war on tyrants; justice; and no oppression.*

Finally, let this army be established such that there remains in each city sufficient forces to restrain malicious people. . . .

Billaud-Varenne: It is by taking advantage of the energy of the People that we will finally exterminate the enemies of the revolution. We will lack neither food supplies nor plots of land on which to grow this food. Even more importantly, and what we must hope for, is that all the malicious people disappear from the face of the earth. As we stated before the Convention, it is finally time, it is more than time, that we settle the fate of the revolution. Indeed, we must congratulate ourselves, for it is in fact the very misfortunes of the People that increase their energy and make us equal to the task of exterminating our enemies. . . . The time has come to act . . . the time for deliberations is over. We must place all our enemies under arrest this very day. [Applause]

If revolutions drag on, it is because only half measures are taken. Let us leave it to weaker minds to worry about the results of the revolution. We work everything out . . . we see the grand vision of what must be achieved for the happiness of the People . . . let us boldly go along the path we have set for ourselves. Let us save the People, they will assist us. They want liberty regardless of the price. Let us crush the enemies of the revolution, and starting today, let the government take action, let the laws be executed, let the lot of the People be strengthened, and let liberty be saved.

Danton: . . . You have just proclaimed to all of France that it is still in a real and active state of revolution. Well, this revolution must be consummated. You must never fear movements that could tempt counterrevolutionaries in Paris, who would no doubt like to extinguish the flame of liberty where it burns the brightest. But the immense number of true patriots, of *sans-culottes* who have crushed their enemies a hundred times, still exists [and] is ready to take action. We only need to know how to lead them, and once again they will confound and foil all conspiracies. It is not enough to have a revolutionary army; you must be revolutionary yourselves. Remember that industrious men who live by the sweat of their brow cannot attend the sections and that it is

only when the true patriots are absent that scheming can take over the section meetings. Therefore decree that two large section-meetings be held each week, and that the man of the People who attends these political assemblies will receive just remuneration for the time spent away from his work.

It is also good that you proclaim to all our enemies that we are determined to be continually and completely prepared for them. You have ordered thirty million [*francs*] placed at the disposal of the Minister of War in order to manufacture weapons. Decree that this emergency production cease only when the nation has given a gun to each citizen. Let us announce the firm resolution of having as many guns and almost as many cannon as there are *sans-culottes*. [Applause] Let it be the republic that puts a gun into the hands of the citizen, the true patriot, and let the republic say to him, "The country entrusts this weapon to you with for its defense. You will stand up for your country each month of the year, as well as any other time you are required to do so by the national authority." Let a gun be our most sacred object. . .let each of us lose our life rather than our gun. [Applause] I therefore ask that you decree at least 100 million [*francs*] to produce all kinds of weapons because, had we all had arms, we would all have marched. It is the lack of weapons that enslaves us. A country in danger will never be short of citizens.

Source: *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, 32 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 185863), 17:58083, 586, 591.

Taken from: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/416/>