

Robespierre 1794

On the Enemies of the Nation

Speech given from the tribune of the Convention;
7 Prairial, Year II (May 26, 1794);

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Citizens:

It would be a beautiful subject for conversation for posterity; it's already a spectacle worthy of heaven and Earth to see the Assembly of the people's representatives placed upon the inexhaustible volcano of conspiracies bring to the feet of the Eternal Author of all things the homage of a great people with one hand, and, with the other, with the lives and the wrath of tyrants gathered against it, found the first republic in the world and recall exiled freedom, justice and nature among mortals.

They will perish, all of the tyrants armed against the French people! They will perish, all the factions that rely upon their power in order to destroy our freedom. You will not make peace, but you will give it to the world, taking it from the hands of crime.

This approaching prospect offered itself to the sight of the frightened tyrants, and they decided with their accomplices that the time had come to assassinate us; we, that is, the National Convention, for if they attack you now en masse and now individually you still recognize the same plan and the same enemies. Without a doubt they are not foolish enough to believe that the death of a few representatives can assure their triumph.

If they believed, in fact, that in order to destroy your energy, or to change your

principles, it was enough to assassinate those to whom you have especially confided the care of overseeing the salvation of the republic; if they believed that in throwing us into the tomb the spirits of Brissot, Hebert and Danton would emerge triumphant to deliver you a second time to discord, to the empire of factions and to the mercy of traitors, they were wrong.

When we will have fallen under their blows, you would either complete your sublime enterprise or share our fate. Or rather, there is not one Frenchmen who would not want to stand over our bloody corpses to swear to exterminate the last of the enemies of the people.

Nevertheless, their impious delirium attests both to their hope and their despair.

They once hoped to succeed in starving the French people; the French people still lives and will survive all its enemies. Subsistence was assured, and nature, faithful to Liberty, already presents it abundance. What resource then remains to them? Assassination.

They hoped to exterminate the national representation by bribed revolt, and they so counted on the success of this attack that they didn't blush to announce it in advance to the wrath of Europe and to confess it in the English parliament. This project failed. What remains to them? Assassination.

They thought they could overwhelm us by the efforts of their sacrilegious league, and especially by treason. The traitors tremble or perish, their artillery falls into our power, their satellites flee before us, but assassination remains to them.

They sought to dissolve the National Convention by degradation and corruption. The Convention punished their accomplices and rose triumphant on the ruins of factions and under the aegis of the French people. But assassination remains to them.

They attempted to deprave public morality and to extinguish the generous sentiments of which the love of freedom and of the fatherland are composed by banishing from

the republic good sense, virtue and divinity. We proclaimed the divinity and the immortality of the soul; we commanded virtue in the name of the republic. Assassination remains to them.

Finally, slander, treason, arson, poisoning, atheism, corruption, famine, assassinations. They were lavish with these crimes: assassination and yet more assassination still remain to them.

Let us then rejoice and give thanks to heaven since we have so well served our country as to have been judged worthy of the daggers of tyranny.

We thus have glorious dangers to run! The city offers as many such dangers as the battlefield. We have nothing to envy our brave brothers in arms; we pay, in more than one way, our debt to the fatherland.

Oh kings and valets of kings! It is not we who will complain of the kind of war you make, and we recognize that it is worthy of your august prudence.

In fact, it is easier to take our lives than to triumph over our principles and our armies. England, Italy, Germany, and France itself will furnish you soldiers to execute these noble exploits. When the powers of the earth league together to kill a feeble individual he must not insist on living; it is thus that living a long time doesn't enter into our calculations. It's not in order to live that we declare war on all tyrants and, what is even more dangerous, on all crimes.

What man on earth has ever defended the rights of humanity with impunity?

A few months ago I said to my colleagues on the Committee of Public Safety: "If the armies of the Republic are victorious, if we unmask the traitors, if we put down factions, they will assassinate us." And I was not in the least astonished to see my prophecy realized. I myself find that the situation in which the enemies of the republic have placed me is not without its advantages, for the more uncertain and precarious are the lives of the defenders of the fatherland, the more independent they

are of men's evil.

Surrounded by assassins I have already put myself in the new order of things where they want to send me. I only hold to fleeting life by the love of the fatherland and the thirst for justice and, separated more than ever from any personal considerations, I find myself better disposed to attack with energy the villains who conspire against us and humankind.

The more they hurry to terminate my career down here, the more I hasten to fulfill those actions useful to the happiness of my like.

At least I will leave a testament whose reading will make tyrants and their accomplices tremble. I will perhaps reveal redoubtable secrets that a pusillanimous prudence would have pushed me to hide.

I will tell what the salvation of my fatherland and the triumph of freedom depend upon. If the same perfidious ones who guide the rage of the assassins aren't yet visible to all eyes, I will leave to time the task of lifting the veil that covers them, and I will restrict myself to recalling those truths that alone can save this Republic.

Yes, no matter what lack of seriousness with its lack of foresight might think, whatever perfidious counter-revolutionaries might say! The destiny of the republic is not yet fixed, and the vigilance of the people's representatives is more than ever necessary.

It is not the pomp of denominations, not victory, nor riches nor fleeting enthusiasm that constitute the republic; it is the wisdom of laws and especially the goodness of mores; it is the purity and the stability of the maxims of government.

The laws are to be made, the maxims of government to be assured, and the mores to be regenerated. If one of these things is missing there is in a state naught but errors, pride, passions, factions, ambitions and cupidity. Far from repressing vices the republic would then only allow them freer expansion, and vice necessarily returns us

to tyranny.

Whoever is not master of himself is made to be the slave of others. This a truth that applies to peoples as well as individuals. Do you want to know who are the ambitious?

Examine who they are who protect the rogues who encourage counter-revolutionaries, who execute attacks, who hold virtue in contempt, who corrupt public morals: it was the march of the conspirators who fell under the mailed fist of the law.

To make war on crime is the path to the tomb and to immortality; to favor crime is the path to the throne and the scaffold.

Perverse beings managed to throw the Republic and human reason into chaos. It's a matter now of pulling them from this in order to create the harmony of the moral and political worlds. The French people have two guarantors of the possibility of executing this heroic enterprise: the current principles of representation and its own virtues.

The moment in which we find ourselves is favorable, but it is perhaps unique. In the state of equilibrium in which things are it is easy to consolidate liberty, and it is easy to lose it. If France were to be governed for a few months by a corrupted legislature, freedom would be lost. Victory would fall to the factions and immorality.

Your concert and your energy have astonished and defeated Europe. If you come to know this as well as your enemies you will easily triumph. I spoke of the virtue of the people. Attested to by the entire revolution, this virtue would not alone suffice to reassure us against the factions who attempt without cease to corrupt and tear apart the republic.

What is the reason for this? It's that there are two peoples in France.

The one is the mass of citizens, pure, simple thirsting for justice and friends of liberty. It is this virtuous people that spills all its blood to found the republic that is

imposing to internal enemies and shakes the thrones of tyrants.

The other is a mass of the ambitious and intriguers, it's the chatting, charlatan, artificial people who show themselves everywhere, who persecute patriotism, who grab onto the tribunes and often the public functions; who abuse the learning that the advantages of the *ancien regime* gave them in order to fool public opinion. It's this people of rogues, of foreigners, of hypocritical counter-revolutionaries who place themselves between the people and their representatives in order to fool the one and slander the other; to block their operations, to turn against the public good the most useful laws and the most salutary truths.

As long as this impure race exists the Republic will be unhappy and precarious. It's up to you to deliver it by an imposing energy and an unalterable concert.

Those who seek to divide us, those who stop the march of the government, those who slander it every day among you by perfidious insinuations, those who seek to form against it a dangerous coalition of all the evil passions, of irascible pride, of all the interests opposed to the public interest are your enemies and those of the fatherland. They are foreign agents.

They are the successors of Brissot, of Hebert, of Danton. If they were to reign one day the Fatherland would be lost.

In saying these things I sharpen daggers against myself, and it is precisely for this that I say them.

You will persevere in your principles and in your triumphal march. You will put down crime and you will save the fatherland...

I have lived long enough... I saw the French people rise up from degradation and servitude to the heights of Glory and Freedom. I saw the chains broken and the guilty thrones that weigh upon the earth near to being overthrown by triumphant hands.

I saw a yet more astonishing marvel, a marvel that monarchical corruption and the experience of the first period of our Revolution barely allowed to be seen as possible: an assembly invested with the strength of the French nation, marching with a rapid and firm step towards public happiness, devoted to the cause of the people and to the triumph of equality, worthy of giving to the world the signal of Liberty and the example of all the virtues.

Accomplish, Citizens, accomplish your sublime destiny. You have placed us in the vanguard to bear up under the first efforts of the enemies of Liberty; we will be worthy of this honor, and with our blood we will trace the route of immortality.

May you constantly deploy that unquenchable energy which you need to put down the monsters of the universe that conspire against you, and to then enjoy in peace the benedictions of the people and of the fruits of your virtues.

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