

document 22

The Republic of Virtue

Robespierre's speech of 5 February 1794 set down the moral aims of the Revolution. Revolutionary terror would lead to a new republic of virtue, where everyone would respect the nation and its laws and the sovereignty of the people.

What is our ultimate aim? The peaceful enjoyment of liberty and equality; the reign of eternal justice, whose laws are engraved, not on marble or stone, but in the hearts of all men, even in that of the slave who forgets them and of the tyrant who rejects them. (*Applause*) We desire to see an order of things where all base and cruel feelings are suppressed, and where the law encourages beneficent and generous feelings; where ambition means the desire for glory and the service of the Republic; where social distinctions emerge from conditions of equality; where the citizen is subject to the magistrate, the magistrate to the people, and the people to the principle of justice; where the nation assures the well being of every individual and where every individual proudly enjoys the prosperity and glory of the nation; where all men's spirits are uplifted by the continual sharing of republican sentiments, and by the need to be worthy of the esteem of a great people; where the arts adorn the liberty which ennobles them; where commerce is a source of public wealth, not only of the monstrous affluence of a few families. In our country we wish to substitute morality for egoism, honesty for mere love of honour, principles for customs, duties for convention, the reign of reason for the tyranny of fashion, the fear of vice for the fear of bad luck; we want to substitute pride for insolence, magnanimity for vanity, love of glory for love of money, good men for mere good company, merit for intrigue, genius for slickness, truth for brilliance, the appeal of happiness for the boredom of sensuality, the grandeur of man for the pettiness of great men; a happy, powerful and magnanimous people for one that is amiable, frivolous and discontented. That is to say, we wish to replace the vices and follies of monarchy by the virtues and miraculous achievements of the Republic. (*Applause*) In a word, we wish to fulfil the plan of nature and promote the destiny of humanity, to fulfil the promises of enlightened philosophy, to absolve providence for a long reign of crime and tyranny. All this in order that France, formerly illustrious among enslaved countries, will eclipse the glory of all the free peoples who have ever existed and will become a model for all nations to imitate; so that France will become the scourge of oppressors, the saviour of

the oppressed, the bright star of the universe; and whilst we seal our achievements with our blood, we can at least see the stars of universal happiness shining . . . that is our ambition: that is our aim.

Archives Parlementaires, vol. lxxxiv, Paris 1962, p. 143.

document 23

Revolutionary enthusiasm

This address, sent by the société populaire of Bergerac, in the Dordogne, to the National Convention on 16 April 1794 after the arrest and execution of the Dantonists, provides an insight into the attitudes and activities of local militants, with their somewhat inflated sense of importance.

Legislators – We shook with indignation when we learned that you have been surrounded by the darkest conspiracy. What! Were they trying to destroy the national government? It would have been the most pure and zealous defenders of the people who would have been the first victims! The Mountain has been polluted by conspirators! The monsters! They have suffered the fate of enemies of the nation. Your courage and determined surveillance will continue to strike such blows . . .

Destroy all factions with the same energy, annihilate all plots aiming to undermine liberty. Our Parisian brothers are there already. They will preserve the integrity of the national government. Foreigners, traitors in disguise, still circulate among them . . .

If they need assistance, we demand to be the first to be called and, as at the time of the overthrow of the monarchy, we will be the first to arrive.

Printed in H. Labroue, *La Société Populaire de Bergerac pendant la Révolution*, Paris, Librairie Rieder, 1915, p. 356.