

"Terror Is the Order of the Day"

05 September 1793 – a meeting of the Convention

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...

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... Where is that powerful being who will crush all these reptiles who corrupt everything they touch and whose venomous stings stir up our citizens...

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...

... 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 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...

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