

SPRING	SUMMER
Germinal (Buds)	Messidor (Harvest)
Floral (Flowers)	Thermidor (Heat)
Prairial (Meadow)	Fructidor (Fruit)

The effect of these names, as I have said, is such that by simply pronouncing the name of the month one will be perfectly aware of the nature and implications of the season, the temperature, and the state of vegetation. Thus on 1 Germinal, the ending of the word will effortlessly depict to the imagination that Spring is beginning; the construction and the image that the word presents will suggest that the elements are at work; the significance of the word, that seeds are developing.³

42. Robespierre, *Report on the Principles of Political Morality* (5 February 1794)

By the end of 1793, revolutionary government had in large part achieved its military goals. The rebellious "federalist" cities had been subjugated by republican armies, Toulon had been evacuated by the British, counter-revolutionary forces in the Vendée had been decisively defeated, and the armies of the European powers turned back. In this context, the policies of the Committee of Public Safety came under growing criticism in the ideological struggle between moderates like Danton, who thought the apparatus of the Terror should now be dismantled, and extremists like Hébert who asserted the sans-culotte program for social levelling and revolutionary activism. In this celebrated speech, presented to the Convention on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety, Maximilien Robespierre explained his own views regarding the nature and uses of terror. His report served as a prelude to the elimination of the two opposing factions: Hébert and his associates were executed on 24 March; Danton on 6 April.

3. Fabre d'Églantine went on to propose that the fifth day of each *décade* celebrate a domesticated animal, and the tenth an agricultural instrument. He also proposed the naming of the *sansculottides* discussed in note 1.

From *The Ninth of Thermidor: The Fall of Robespierre*, edited by Richard T. Bienvenu, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 32–49.

17 Pluviôse, Year II [5 February 1794]

Citizen-representatives of the people.

Some time ago we set forth the principles of our foreign policy; today we come to expound the principles of our internal policy.

After having proceeded haphazardly for a long time, swept along by the movement of opposing factions, the representatives of the French people have finally demonstrated a character and a government. A sudden change in the nation's fortune announced to Europe the regeneration that had been effected in the national representation. But, up to the very moment when I am speaking, it must be agreed that we have been guided, amid such stormy circumstances, by the love of good and by the awareness of our country's needs rather than by an exact theory and by precise rules of conduct, which we did not have even leisure enough to lay out.

It is time to mark clearly the goal of the revolution, and the end we want to reach; it is time for us to take account both of the obstacles that still keep us from it, and of the means we ought to adopt to attain it: a simple and important idea which seems never to have been noticed. Eh! how could a lax and corrupt government have dared realize it? A King, a haughty senate, a Caesar, a Cromwell are obliged above all to cover their plans, to compromise with all the vices, to humor all the parties, to crush the party of the honest folk, to oppress or deceive the people, in order to reach the goal of their perfidious ambition. If we had not had a greater task to fulfill, if we had been concerned here only with the interests of a faction or of a new aristocracy, we could have believed, like certain writers still more ignorant than they are depraved, that the plan of the French revolution was written out in full in the books of Tacitus and Machiavelli, and we could have sought the duties of the people's representatives in the histories of Augustus, Tiberius, or Vespasian, or even in that of certain French legislators; because, except for a few nuances of perfidy or cruelty, all tyrants are alike.

For ourselves, we come to make the world privy to your political secrets, so that all our country's friends can rally to the voice of reason and the public interest; so that the French nation and its representatives will be respected in all the countries of the world where the knowledge of their real principles can penetrate; so that the intriguers who seek always to replace other intriguers will be judged by sure and easy rules.

We must take far-sighted precautions to return the destiny of liberty into the hands of the truth, which is eternal, rather than into those of men, who are transitory; so that if the government forgets the interests of the people, or if it lapses into the hands of corrupt individuals, according to the natural course of things, the light of recognized principles will illuminate their treachery, and so that every new faction will discover death in the mere thought of crime.

Happy the people who can arrive at that point! Because, whatever new outrages are prepared against them, what resources are presented by an order of things in which the public reason is the guarantee of liberty!

What is the goal toward which we are heading? The peaceful enjoyment of liberty and equality; the reign of that eternal justice whose laws have been inscribed, not in marble and stone, but in the hearts of all men, even in that of the slave who forgets them and in that of the tyrant who denies them.

We seek an order of things in which all the base and cruel passions are enchained, all the beneficent and generous passions are awakened by the laws; where ambition becomes the desire to merit glory and to serve our country; where distinctions are born only of equality itself; where the citizen is subject to the magistrate, the magistrate to the people, and the people to justice; where our country assures the well-being of each individual, and where each individual proudly enjoys our country's prosperity and glory; where every soul grows greater through the continual flow of republican sentiments, and by the need of deserving the esteem of a great people; where the arts are the adornments of the liberty which ennobles them and commerce the source of public wealth rather than solely the monstrous opulence of a few families.

In our land we want to substitute morality for egotism, integrity for formal codes of honor, principles for customs, a sense of duty for one of mere propriety, the rule of reason for the tyranny of fashion, scorn of vice for scorn of the unlucky, self-respect for insolence, grandeur of soul for vanity, love of glory for the love of money, good people in place of good society. We wish to substitute merit for intrigue, genius for wit, truth for glamor, the charm of happiness for sensuous boredom, the greatness of man for the pettiness of the great, a people who are magnanimous, powerful, and happy, in place of a kindly, frivolous, and miserable people—which is to say all the virtues and all the miracles of the republic in place of all the vices and all the absurdities of the monarchy.

We want, in a word, to fulfill nature's desires, accomplish the destiny of humanity, keep the promises of philosophy, absolve providence from the long reign of crime and tyranny. Let France, formerly illustrious among the enslaved lands, eclipsing the glory of all the free peoples who have existed, become the model for the nations, the terror of oppressors, the consolation of the oppressed, the ornament of the world—and let us, in sealing our work with our blood, see at least the early dawn of universal bliss—that is our ambition, that is our goal.

What kind of government can realize these wonders? Only a democratic or republican government—these two words are synonyms, despite the abuses in common speech, because an aristocracy is no closer than a monarchy to being a republic. Democracy is not a state in which the people,

continually meeting, regulate for themselves all public affairs, still less is it a state in which a tiny fraction of the people, acting by isolated, hasty, and contradictory measures, decide the fate of the whole society. Such a government has never existed, and it could exist only to lead the people back into despotism.

Democracy is a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are of their own making, do for themselves all that they can do well, and by their delegates do all that they cannot do for themselves.

It is therefore in the principles of democratic government that you should seek the rules of your political conduct.

But, in order to lay the foundations of democracy among us and to consolidate it, in order to arrive at the peaceful reign of constitutional laws, we must finish the war of liberty against tyranny and safely cross through the storms of the revolution: that is the goal of the revolutionary system which you have put in order. You should therefore still base your conduct upon the stormy circumstances in which the republic finds itself; and the plan of your administration should be the result of the spirit of revolutionary government, combined with the general principles of democracy.

Now, what is the fundamental principle of popular or democratic government, that is to say, the essential mainspring which sustains it and makes it move? It is virtue. I speak of the public virtue which worked so many wonders in Greece and Rome and which ought to produce even more astonishing things in republican France—that virtue which is nothing other than the love of the nation and its laws.

But as the essence of the republic or of democracy is equality, it follows that love of country necessarily embraces the love of equality.

It is still true that that sublime sentiment supposes the preference of public interest to all particular interests, whence it follows that love of country implies or produces all the virtues. There is no other force, for what are they but the strength of soul which makes men capable of these sacrifices? And how, for example, can the slave of avarice or ambition be made to sacrifice his idol for the good of the country?

Not only is virtue the soul of democracy, but virtue can only exist within that form of government. Under a monarchy I know of only one individual who can love his country—and who, for this, does not even need virtue—the monarch. The reason for this is that among all the people of his state, the monarch alone has a fatherland. Is he not the sovereign, at least in fact? Does he not stand in place of the people? And what is the fatherland if it is not the land where one is a citizen and a participant in the sovereign power? As a consequence of the same principle, within aristocratic states the word *patric* means nothing except to the patrician families who have invaded sovereignty.

It is only under a democracy that the state is the fatherland of all the

individuals who compose it and can count as many active defenders of its cause as it has citizens. There lies the source of the superiority of free peoples above all others. If Athens and Sparta triumphed over the tyrants of Asia and the Swiss over the tyrants of Spain and Austria, one can seek no other cause.

But the French are the first people of the world who have established real democracy, by calling all men to equality and full rights of citizenship; and there, in my judgment, is the true reason why all the tyrants in league against the Republic will be vanquished.

There are important consequences to be drawn immediately from the principles we have just explained.

Since the soul of the Republic is virtue, equality, and since your goal is to found, to consolidate the Republic, it follows that the first rule of your political conduct ought to be to relate all your efforts to maintaining equality and developing virtue; because the first care of the legislator ought to be to fortify the principle of the government. Thus everything that tends to excite love of country, to purify morals, to elevate souls, to direct the passions of the human heart toward the public interest, ought to be adopted or established by you. Everything which tends to concentrate them in the abjection of selfishness, to awaken enjoyment for petty things and scorn for great ones, ought to be rejected or curbed by you. Within the scheme of the French revolution, that which is immoral is impolitic, that which is corrupting is counter-revolutionary. Weakness, vice, and prejudices are the road to royalty. Dragged too often, perhaps, by the weight of our former customs, as much as by the imperceptible bent of human frailty, toward false ideas and faint-hearted sentiments, we have less cause to guard ourselves against too much energy than against too much weakness. The greatest peril, perhaps, that we have to avoid is not that of zealous fervor, but rather of weariness in doing good works and of timidity in displaying our own courage. Maintain, then, the sacred power of the republican government, instead of letting it decline. I do not need to say that I have no wish here to justify any excess. The most sacred principles can indeed be abused. It is up to the wisdom of the government to pay heed to circumstances, to seize the right moments, to choose the proper means; because the manner of preparing great things is an essential part of the talent for performing them, just as wisdom is itself an element of virtue.

We do not intend to cast the French Republic in the Spartan mold; we wish to give it neither the austerity nor the corruption of a monastic cloister. We have come to present to you in all its purity the moral and political principle of popular government. Thus you have a compass which can guide you amid the storms of all the passions and the whirlwinds of intrigue which surround you. You have the touchstone by which you can test

all your laws, all the proposals which are made to you. In comparing them unceasingly with that principle, you can from now on avoid the usual perils which threaten large assemblies, the danger of surprises and of hasty, incoherent, and contradictory measures. You can give to all your operations the cohesion, the unity, the wisdom and the dignity that ought to distinguish the representatives of the first people of the world.

The obvious consequences of the principle of democracy do not require detailed description; it is the simple and fruitful principle itself which deserves to be expounded.

Republican virtue can be considered as it relates to the people and as it relates to the government. It is necessary in both. When the government alone is deprived of it, there remains a resource in the virtue of the people; but when the people themselves are corrupt, liberty is already lost.

Happily virtue is natural to the people, despite aristocratic prejudices to the contrary. A nation is truly corrupt when, having gradually lost its character and its liberty, it passes from democracy to aristocracy or to monarchy; this is the death of the body politic through decrepitude. When after four hundred years of glory avarice finally drove from Sparta its morality together with the laws of Lycurgus, Agis died in vain trying to bring them back! Demosthenes thundered in vain against Philip of Macedon, Philip found more eloquent advocates than Demosthenes among the degenerate inhabitants of Athens. There was still as large a population in Athens as in the times of Miltiades and Aristides, but there were no longer any true Athenians. And what did it matter that Brutus killed a tyrant? Tyranny still lived in every heart, and Rome existed only in Brutus.

But, when, by prodigious efforts of courage and reason, a people breaks the chains of despotism in order to make of them trophies to liberty; when, by the force of its moral character, it leaves, as it were, the arms of death in order to recapture the vigor of youth; when it is in turn sensitive and proud, intrepid and docile—such a people can be stopped neither by impregnable ramparts nor by the countless armies of tyrants ranged against it; it halts only before the image of the law. If such a people does not move rapidly forward to the height of its destiny, it can only be the fault of those who govern it.

Moreover one could say, in a sense, that in order to love justice and equality the people have no need of a great degree of virtue; it suffices if they love themselves.

But the magistrate is obliged to sacrifice his interest to the interest of the people, and his pride in power to equality. The law must speak with authority especially to those who are its instruments. The government must weigh heavily upon its parts in order to hold them all in harmony. If there exists a representative body, a highest authority constituted by the people,

it is up to it to inspect and ceaselessly control all the public functionaries. But who will curb the legislature itself, if not its own sense of virtue? The higher this source of public order is elevated in position, the purer it should be; the representative body must begin, then, by submitting all the private passions within it to the general passion for the public welfare. Fortunate are the representatives when their glory and even their interests, as much as their duties, attach them to the cause of liberty!

We deduce from all this a great truth—that the characteristic of popular government is to be trustful towards the people and severe towards itself.

Here the development of our theory would reach its limit, if you had only to steer the ship of the Republic through calm waters. But the tempest rages, and the state of the revolution in which you find yourself imposes upon you another task.

This great purity of the French revolution's fundamental elements, the very sublimity of its objective, is precisely what creates our strength and our weakness: our strength, because it gives us the victory of truth over deception and the rights of public interest over private interests; our weakness, because it rallies against us all men who are vicious, all those who in their hearts plan to despoil the people, and all those who have despoiled them and want impunity, and those who reject liberty as a personal calamity, and those who have embraced the revolution as a livelihood and the Republic as if it were an object of prey. Hence the defection of so many ambitious or greedy men who since the beginning have abandoned us along the way, because they had not begun the voyage in order to reach the same goal. One could say that the two contrary geniuses that have been depicted competing for control of the realm of nature, are fighting in this great epoch of human history to shape irrevocably the destiny of the world, and that France is the theater of this mighty struggle. Without, all the tyrants encircle you; within, all the friends of tyranny conspire—they will conspire until crime has been robbed of hope. We must smother the internal and external enemies of the Republic or perish with them. Now, in this situation, the first maxim of your policy ought to be to lead the people by reason and the people's enemies by terror.

If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue, amid revolution it is at the same time [both] virtue and *terror*: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue. It is less a special principle than a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most pressing needs.

It has been said that terror was the mainspring of despotic government. Does your government, then, resemble a despotism? Yes, as the sword which glitters in the hands of liberty's heroes resembles the one with which

tyranny's lackeys are armed. Let the despot govern his brutalized subjects by terror; he is right to do this, as a despot. Subdue liberty's enemies by terror, and you will be right, as founders of the Republic. The government of the revolution is the despotism of liberty against tyranny. Is force made only to protect crime? And is it not to strike the heads of the proud that lightning is destined?

Nature imposes upon every physical and moral being the law of providing for its own preservation. Crime slaughters innocence in order to reign, and innocence in the hands of crime fights with all its strength.

Let tyranny reign for a single day, and on the morrow not one patriot will be left. How long will the despots' fury be called justice, and the people's justice barbarism or rebellion? How tender one is to the oppressors and how inexorable against the oppressed! And how natural—whoever has no hatred for crime cannot love virtue.

Yet one or the other must succumb. Indulgence for the royalists, some people cry out. Mercy for the scoundrels! No—mercy for innocence, mercy for the weak, mercy for the unfortunate, mercy for humanity!

Social protection is due only to peaceful citizens; there are no citizens in the Republic but the republicans. The royalists, the conspirators are, in its eyes, only strangers or, rather, enemies. Is not the terrible war, which liberty sustains against tyranny, indivisible? Are not the enemies within the allies of those without? The murderers who tear our country apart internally; the intriguers who purchase the consciences of the people's agents; the traitors who sell them; the mercenary libelers subsidized to dishonor the popular cause, to kill public virtue, to stir up the fires of civil discord, and to prepare political counter-revolution by means of moral counter-revolution—are all these men less to blame or less dangerous than the tyrants whom they serve? All those who interpose their partialist gentleness to protect the wicked from the avenging blade of national justice are like those who would throw themselves between the tyrants' henchmen and our soldiers' bayonets. All the outbursts of their false sensitivity seem to me only longing sighs for England and Austria.

Well! For whom, then, would they be moved to pity? Would it be for two hundred thousand heroes, the elite of the nation, cut down by the iron of liberty's enemies or by the daggers of royalist or federalist assassins? No, those are only plebeians, patriots; in order to be entitled to their tender interest, one must be at least the widow of a general who has betrayed our country twenty times. To obtain their indulgence, one must almost prove that he has sacrificed ten thousand Frenchmen, as a Roman general, in order to obtain his triumph, was supposed to have killed, I believe, ten thousand enemies. They listen composedly to the recital of the horrors committed by the tyrants against the defenders of liberty—our women hor-

ribly mutilated, our children murdered at their mothers' breasts, our prisoners undergoing horrible torments for their moving, sublime heroism. The too slow punishment of a few monsters who have fattened on the purest blood of our country is termed by them a horrible butchery.

They suffer patiently the misery of generous citizens who have sacrificed their brothers, children, husbands to the finest of causes, while they lavish their most generous consolations upon conspirators' wives. It is accepted that such women can seduce justice with impunity, pleading (against liberty) the cause of their near relations and their accomplices. They have been made almost a privileged corporation, creditor and pensioner of the people.

With what simple good-heartedness are we still the dupes of words! How aristocracy and moderation still govern us by the murderous maxims they have given us!

Aristocracy defends itself better by its intrigues than patriotism does by its services. Some people would like to govern revolutions by the quibbles of the law courts and treat conspiracies against the Republic like legal proceedings against private persons. Tyranny kills; liberty argues. And the code made by the conspirators themselves is the law by which they are judged.

When it is a matter of the national safety, the testimony of the whole world cannot compensate for the proof of actual witnesses, nor obviousness itself for documentary evidence.

Slowness of judgments is equal to impunity. Uncertainty of punishment encourages all the guilty. Yet there are complaints of the severity of justice, of the detention of enemies of the Republic. Examples are sought in the history of tyrants because our enemies do not wish to select them from the history of peoples nor derive them from the spirit of threatened liberty. In Rome, when the consul discovered a plot and simultaneously smothered it by putting to death the accomplices of Catiline, he was accused of having violated the legal forms. And by whom? By the ambitious Caesar, who wanted to swell his faction with the horde of conspirators, by Piso, Clodius, and all the evil citizens who themselves feared the virtue of a true Roman and the severity of the laws.

To punish the oppressors of humanity is clemency; to pardon them is barbarity. The rigor of tyrants has only rigor for a principle; the rigor of the republican government comes from charity.

Therefore, woe to those who would dare to turn against the people the terror which ought to be felt only by its enemies! Woe to those who, confounding the inevitable errors of civic conduct with the calculated errors of perfidy, or with conspirators' criminal attempts, leave the dangerous schemer to pursue the peaceful citizen! Perish the scoundrel who ventures

to abuse the sacred name of liberty, or the redoubtable arms which liberty has entrusted to him, in order to bring mourning or death into patriots' hearts! This abuse has existed, one cannot doubt it. It has been exaggerated, no doubt, by the aristocracy. But if in all the Republic there existed only one virtuous man persecuted by the enemies of liberty, the government's duty would be to seek him out vigorously and give him a dazzling revenge.

But must one conclude from these persecutions, brought upon the patriots by the hypocritical zeal of the counter-revolutionaries, that one must give freedom to the counter-revolutionaries and renounce severity? These new crimes of the aristocracy only show the need for severity. What proves the audacity of our enemies, if not the weakness with which they have been pursued? That is due, in large part, to the slack doctrine that has been preached lately in order to reassure them. If you listen to those counsels, your enemies will reach their goal and will receive from your own hands the ultimate prize of their evil crimes.

How frivolous it would be to regard a few victories achieved by patriotism as the end of all our dangers. Glance over our true situation. You will become aware that vigilance and energy are more necessary for you than ever. An unresponding ill-will everywhere opposes the operations of the government. The inevitable influence of foreign courts is no less active for being more hidden, and no less baneful. One senses that crime, frightened, has only covered its tracks with greater skill.

The internal enemies of the French people are divided into two factions, like two corps of an army. They march under the banners of different colors and by diverse routes, but they march toward the same goal. That goal is the disruption of the popular government, the ruin of the Convention—which is to say, the triumph of tyranny. One of these two factions pushes us toward weakness, the other toward excess. The one wants to change liberty into a frenzied nymph, the other into a prostitute.

The minor intriguers, and often even some good but misled citizens, are ranged in one or the other of these parties. But the chiefs belong to the cause of royalty or aristocracy and always unite against the patriots. The rascals, even when they make war upon each other, hate each other much less than they detest the well-meaning folk. Our country is their prey; they fight each other in order to divide it. But they form a league against those who are defending it.

One group has been given the name of moderates. There is perhaps more wit than accuracy in the term *ultra-revolutionaries* by which the others have been called. That name, which cannot be applied in a single case to the men of good faith whose zeal and ignorance can carry them beyond the sound policy of the revolution, does not precisely characterize

the perfidious men whom tyranny hires in order, by a false and deadly diligen-
 gence, to compromise the sacred principles of our revolution.

The false revolutionary is even more often, perhaps, short of rather than
 in excess of the revolution. He is moderate; he is insanely patriotic, ac-
 cording to the circumstances. What he will think tomorrow is set for him
 today by the committees of Prussia, England, Austria, even by those of
 Muscovy. He opposes energetic measures and exaggerates their import-
 when he has been unable to impede them. He is severe toward innocence
 but indulgent toward crime, accusing even the guilty who are not rich
 enough to purchase his silence nor important enough to merit his zeal, but
 carefully refraining from being compromised to the point of defending
 slandered courage; now and then discovering plots that have already been
 discovered, ripping the masks off traitors who are already unmasked and
 even decapitated, but extolling living and still influential traitors; always
 eager to embrace the opinion of the moment and not less alert never to en-
 lighten it, and above all never to clash with it; always quick to adopt bold
 measures, provided they have many drawbacks; slandering those who
 speak only of the advantages, or better, adding all the amendments which
 can render the measures harmful: speaking the truth sparingly, and just so
 much as he must in order to acquire the right to lie with impunity; exuding
 good drop by drop and pouring out evil in torrents; full of fire for the grand
 resolutions which signify nothing; worse than indifferent to those which
 can honor the people's cause and save our country; giving much attention
 to the forms of patriotism; very much attached, like the devout whose en-
 emy he declares himself to be, to formal observances—he would prefer to
 wear out a hundred red caps than to do one good deed.

What difference can you find between the false revolutionaries and your
 moderates? They are servants employed by the same master, or, if you
 wish, accomplices who feign a quarrel in order better to hide their crimes.
 Judge them not by the different words they use but by the identity of the
 results. He who attacks the National Convention by his senseless speeches,
 and he who deceives it in order to compromise it, are they not in agree-
 ment? He who, by unjust rigors forces patriotism to tremble for itself, in-
 vokes amnesty in favor of aristocracy and treason. Such a man, who was
 calling France to the conquest of the world, had no other goal than to call
 the tyrants to the conquest of France. The foreign hypocrite who for five
 years has been proclaiming Paris the capital of the globe only expresses, in
 another jargon, the anathemas of the vile federalists who dedicated Paris to
 destruction. To preach atheism is only a way of absolving superstition and
 accusing philosophy; and the war declared against divinity is only a diver-
 sion in royalty's favor.

What other method remains for combating liberty? Will one, on the
 example of the first champions of the aristocracy, go about praising the de-
 lights of servitude and the benefits of the monarchy, the supernatural ge-
 nius and the incomparable virtues of kings?

Will one go about proclaiming the vanity of the rights of man and the
 principles of eternal justice?

Will one go about extolling the nobility and the clergy or calling for the
 inprescriptible rights of the high bourgeoisie to their double inheritance?

No. It is much more convenient to don the mask of patriotism in order
 to disfigure, by insolent parodies, the sublime drama of the revolution, in
 order to compromise the cause of liberty by a hypocritical moderation or
 by studied extravagance.

And so the aristocracy establishes itself in popular societies; counter-
 revolutionary pride hides its plots and its daggers beneath rags; fanaticism
 smashes its own altars; royalism sings victory hymns to the Republic; the
 nobility, overwhelmed with memories, tenderly embraces equality in order
 to smother it; tyranny, tainted with the blood of the defenders of liberty,
 scatters flowers on their tomb. If all hearts are not changed, how many
 countenances are masked! How many traitors meddle in our affairs only to
 ruin them!

Do you wish to test these people? Ask of them, in place of oaths and
 declamations, real services.

Is action needed? They orate. Is deliberation required? Then they clamor
 for action. Have the times become peaceful? They obstruct all useful
 change. Are times stormy? Then they speak of reforming everything, in
 order to throw everything into confusion. Do you want to keep sedition in
 check? Then they remind you of Caesar's clemency. Do you want to deliver
 patriots from persecution? Then they propose to you as a model the firmness
 of Brutus. They discover that so-and-so was a noble when he served the
 Republic; they no longer remember this as soon as he has betrayed it. Is
 peace appropriate? Then they display the rewards of victory. Has war be-
 come necessary? They praise the delights of peace. Must our territory be
 defended? They wish to go and punish the tyrants beyond the mountains
 and seas. Is it necessary to recapture our own fortresses? They want to take
 the churches by assault and ascend to heaven. They forget the Austrians in
 order to make war on the devout. Do we need the faithful support of our
 allies? They declaim against all the governments of the world and suggest
 that you put on trial the great Mogul himself. Do the people come to the
 capital to give thanks to the gods for their victories? They intone lugubrious
 chants over our previous reverses. Is it a matter of winning new victories?
 In our midst they sow hatreds, divisions, persecutions, and discourage-

ment. Must we make the sovereignty of the people a reality and concentrate their strength by a strong, respected government? They discover that the principles of government injure popular sovereignty. Must we call for the rights of the people oppressed by the government? They talk only of respect for the laws and of obedience owed to constituted authority.

They have found an admirable expedient for promoting the efforts of the republican government: it is to disorganize it, to degrade it completely, to make war on the patriots who have joined in our successes.

Do you seek the means for provisioning your armies? Are you busy wresting from greed and fear the supplies of food that they have caused to be hidden away? They groan patriotically over the public misery and announce a famine. The desire to foresee evil is for them always a reason for magnifying it. In the north they have killed the hens and deprived us of eggs on the pretext that the hens eat grain. In the south it was a question of destroying the mulberry trees and the orange trees on the pretext that silk is a luxury article and oranges are superfluous.

You could never have imagined some of the excesses committed by hypocritical counter-revolutionaries in order to blight the cause of the revolution. Would you believe that in the regions where superstition has held the greatest sway, the counter-revolutionaries are not content with burdening religious observances under all the forms that could render them odious, but have spread terror among the people by sowing the rumor that all children under ten and all old men over seventy are going to be killed? This rumor was spread particularly through the former province of Brittany and in the *départements* of the Rhine and the Moselle. It is one of the crimes imputed to [Schneider] the former public prosecutor of the criminal court of Strasbourg. That man's tyrannical follies make everything that has been said of Caligula and Heliogabalus credible; one can scarcely believe it, despite the evidence. He pushed his delirium to the point of commanding women for his own use—we are told that he even employed that method in selecting a wife. Whence came this sudden swarm of foreigners, priests, nobles, intriguers of all kinds, which at the same instant spread over the length and breadth of the Republic, seeking to execute, in the name of philosophy, a plan of counter-revolution which has only been stopped by the force of public reason? Execrable conception, worthy of the genius of foreign courts leagued against liberty, and of the corruption of all the internal enemies of the Republic!

Thus among the continual miracles worked by the virtue of a great people, intrigue still mingles the baseness of its criminal plots, baseness directed by the tyrants and quickly incorporated into their ridiculous *manifestos*, in order to keep the ignorant peoples in the mire of shame and the chains of servitude.

Eh! what effects do the heinous crimes of its enemies have upon liberty? Is the sun, veiled by a passing cloud, any less the star which animates nature? Does the impure scum on the beach make the Ocean any less mighty? In deceitful hands all the remedies for our ills turn into poisons. Everything you can do, everything you can say, they will turn against you, even the truths which we come here to present this very day.

Thus, for example, after having disseminated everywhere the germs of civil war by a violent attack against religious prejudices, these individuals will seek to fortify fanaticism and aristocracy against the very measures, in favor of freedom of religion, that sound policy has prescribed to you. If you had left free play to the conspiracy, it would have produced, sooner or later, a terrible and universal reaction; but if you stop it, they will still seek to turn this to their account by urging that you protect the priests and the moderates. You must not even be surprised if the authors of this strategy are the very priests who have most boldly confessed that they were charlatans.

If the patriots, carried away by a pure but thoughtless zeal, have somewhere been made the dupes of their intrigues, they will throw all the blame upon the patriots; because the principal point of their Machiavellian doctrine is to ruin the Republic, by ruining the republicans, as one conquers a country by overthrowing the army which defends it. One can thereby appreciate one of their favorite principles, which is that one must count men as nothing—a maxim of royal origin, which means that one must abandon to them all the friends of liberty.

It is to be noticed that the destiny of men who seek only the public good is to be made the victims of those who seek to advance themselves, and this comes from two causes: first, that the intriguers attack using the vices of the old regime; second, that the patriots defend themselves only with the virtues of the new.

Such an internal situation ought to seem to you worthy of all your attention, above all if you reflect that at the same time you have the tyrants of Europe to combat, a million and two hundred thousand men under arms to maintain, and that the government is obliged continually to repair, with energy and vigilance, all the injuries which the innumerable multitude of our enemies has prepared for us during the course of five years.

What is the remedy for all these evils? We know no other than the development of that general motive force of the Republic—virtue.

Democracy perishes by two kinds of excess: either the aristocracy of those who govern, or else popular scorn for the authorities whom the people themselves have established, scorn which makes each clique, each individual take unto himself the public power and bring the people through excessive disorders, to annihilation or to the power of one man.

The double task of the moderates and the false revolutionaries is to toss us back and forth perpetually between these two perils.

But the people's representatives can avoid them both, because government is always the master at being just and wise; and, when it has that character, it is sure of the confidence of the people.

It is indeed true that the goal of all our enemies is to dissolve the Convention. It is true that the tyrant of Great Britain and his allies promise their parliament and subjects that they will deprive you of your energy and of the public confidence which you have merited; that is the first instruction for all their agents.

But it is a truth which ought to be regarded as commonplace in politics that a great body invested with the confidence of a great people can be lost only through its own failings. Your enemies know this; therefore do not doubt that they are applying themselves above all to awaken in your midst all the passions which can further their sinister designs.

What can they do against the national representation if they do not succeed in beguiling it into impolitic acts which can furnish the excuse for their criminal declamations? They are therefore necessarily obliged to desire two kinds of agents, those who seek to degrade it by their speeches, and those in its very bosom, who do their utmost to deceive it in order to compromise its glory and the interests of the Republic.

In order to attack this Convention with success, it was useful to begin civil war against the representatives in the *départements* which had justified your confidence, and against the Committee of Public Safety; and so they have been attacked by men who seemed to be fighting among themselves.

What better could they do than to paralyze the government of the Convention and to smash its mainsprings at the moment which is to decide the destiny of the Republic and of the tyrants?

Far from us is the idea that there yet exists in our midst a single man weakling enough to wish to serve the tyrants' cause! But farther from us still is the crime, for which we would not be pardoned, of deceiving the National Convention and betraying the French people by a culpable silence! For this is the good fortune of a free people, that truth, which is the scourge of despots, is always its strength and safety. Now it is true that there still exists a danger for our liberty, perhaps the only serious danger which remains for it to undergo. That danger is a plan which has existed for rallying all the enemies of the Republic by reviving the spirit of faction; for persecuting patriots, disheartening them, ruining the faithful agents of the republican government, rendering inadequate the most essential parts of our public service. Some have wished to deceive the Convention about men and about things; they have sought to put it on the wrong track about

the causes of abuses which they have at the same time exaggerated, so as to make them irremediable; they have studiously filled it with false terrors, in order to lead it astray or paralyze it; they seek to divide it, above all to divide the representatives sent out to the *départements* and the Committee of Public Safety. They have sought to influence the former to contradict the measures of the central authority, in order to bring disorder and confusion; they have sought to embitter them upon their return, in order to make them the unknowing instruments of a cabal. The foreigners profit from all private passions, even from abused patriotism.

They first decided on going straight to their goal by slandering the Committee of Public Safety; they flattered themselves aloud that it would succumb under the weight of its laborious duties. Victory and the good fortune of the French people defended it. Since that time they have decided on praising it while paralyzing it and destroying the fruit of its labors. All those vague declamations against necessary agents of the Committee; all those plans for disorganization, disguised under the name of reforms, already rejected by the Convention, and reproduced today with a strange affection; this eagerness to extol the intrigues whom the Committee of Public Safety was obliged to remove; this terror inspired in good citizens; this indulgence with which one flatters the conspirators—this entire scheme of imposture and intrigue, whose principal author is a man [Fabre d'Églantine] whom you have driven from your bosom, is directed against the National Convention and tends to give reality to the vows of all the enemies of France.

It is since the time when this scheme was made public and made real by public actions, that aristocracy and royalism have again begun to raise their insolent heads and patriotism has again been persecuted in a part of the Republic, that the national authority has experienced resistance of a sort which the intriguers had not lately displayed. Even if these indirect attacks had served only to divide the attention and energy of those who have to carry the immense burden which is your charge, and to distract them too often from the great measures of public safety, to occupy themselves with thwarting dangerous intrigues,—even so, they could still be considered as a division useful to our enemies.

But let us reassure ourselves. Here is the sanctuary of truth; here reside the founders of the Republic, the avengers of humanity and the destroyers of tyrants.

Here, to destroy an abuse it suffices to point out its existence. It suffices for us to appeal, in the name of our country, from counsels of self-love or from the weaknesses of individuals, to the virtue and the glory of the National Convention.

We are beginning a solemn debate upon all the objects of its anxiety, and

everything that can influence the progress of the revolution. We adjure it not to permit any particular hidden interest to usurp ascendancy here over the general will of the assembly and the indestructible power of reason.

We will limit ourselves today and proposing that by your formal approval you sanction the moral and political truths upon which your internal administration and the stability of the Republic ought to be founded, as you have already sanctioned the principles of your conduct toward foreign peoples. Thereby you will rally all good citizens, you will take hope away from the conspirators; you will assure your progress, and you will confront the kings' intrigues and slanders; you will honor your cause and your character in the eyes of all peoples.

Give the French people this new gage of your zeal to protect patriotism, of your inflexible justice for the guilty, and of your devotion to the people's cause. Order that the principles of political morality which we just expounded will be proclaimed, in your name, within and without the Republic.

43. The Festival of the Supreme Being (8 June 1794)

Although not the first of the great revolutionary festivals, the Festival of the Supreme Being is the most famous, and the one most closely associated with Robespierre, whose ideas and political ascendancy it reflected. Having eliminated the moderate (Dantonist) and extremist (Hébertist) factions he attacked in his *Report on the Principles of Political Morality*, Robespierre moved to inaugurate the Reign of Virtue anticipated in that speech. In May, he proposed an entire cycle of revolutionary festivals, to begin with the Festival of the Supreme Being. This latter was intended to celebrate a new civil religion as opposed to Christianity as it was to the atheism of the extreme dechristianizers (whose earlier Cult of Reason Robespierre and his associates had repudiated). The ceremony was planned in great detail by the most outstanding painter of the revolutionary period, Jacques-Louis David. Robespierre presided over the entire affair as president of the Convention. In the following selection, his two speeches have been inserted at the appropriate points in the published instructions for the participants in the festival.

From *Procès-verbaux du Comité d'instruction publique de l'Assemblée législative*, edited by James Guillaume, 7 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1891-1959), vol. 4, pp. 561-66; and *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, 32 vols. (Paris, 1838-1863), vol. 20, pp. 683-84. Translated for this volume by Caroline Ford and Keith Michael Baker.

Two days after the Festival of the Supreme Being, the Terror was intensified by the passage of a new law expanding the definition of suspected persons and relaxing the rules of evidence for the Revolutionary Tribunal. During this Great Terror, more than 1,300 persons were executed within six weeks. However, covert opposition to Robespierre was growing within the Convention and the revolutionary committees. He was overthrown by the Convention on 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794) and executed the following day.

At exactly five in the morning, a general call will be sounded in Paris.

All citizens, men and women, will be invited by this call immediately to adorn their houses with the cherished colors of liberty, either by hanging their flags once more, or by embellishing the houses with garlands of flowers and greenery.

They will then go to the seats of their respective sections to await the signal for departure.

All men will be unarmed, excepting youths fourteen to eighteen years old, who will be armed with sabers and with guns or pikes.

In each section, these youths will form a square battalion marching twelve across, in the middle of which will be placed the banners and flags of the armed force of each section, carried by those who are ordinarily entrusted with them.

Each male citizen and young boy will hold an oak branch in his hand. All female citizens, mothers and girls, will be dressed in the colors of liberty. Mothers will hold bouquets of roses in their hands, and girls will carry baskets filled with flowers.

To stand on the mountain raised in the Champ de la Réunion, each section will choose ten old men, ten mothers, ten girls from fifteen to twenty years old, ten youths from fifteen to eighteen years old, and ten male children below the age of eight.

The ten mothers chosen by each section will be in white and wear a ticolored sash from right to left.

The ten girls will also be in white and will wear the sash like the mothers. The girls will have their hair braided with flowers.

The ten youths will be armed with swords. . . .

Citizens, male and female, will take care to provide themselves with oak branches, and with bouquets, garlands, and baskets of flowers, and to deck themselves in the colors of liberty.

At exactly eight in the morning a volley of artillery fired at the Pont Neuf will signal the moment to proceed to the National Garden.