

MAKE TERROR THE ORDER OF THE DAY



BACKGROUND: In September of 1793, the France and the city of Paris were on the verge of chaos. The political situation continued to be unstable. Revolts had sprung up across the country and the country teetered on instability. On September 5, a large body of citizens arrived at the Convention and demanded action. In response, Maximilien Robespierre and Bertrand Barère, a member of the Committee of Public Safety, delivered several stirring speeches to the National Convention. Robespierre, Barère and others, outlined in his addresses their government’s plan to save the ideals of the Revolution from what he sees as internal enemies attempting to undermine it. The plan, a political purge through terror. This address was followed by the passing of the Law of Suspects, giving the government power to take action against anyone suspected activities against the revolution. Émigrés, or nobles who had fled France at the outset of the revolution, were particularly targeted.

Directions: Read the selections from Robespierre and Barère’s addresses to the National Convention from September 5, 1793, as well as the selections from the Law of Suspects, and answer the Critical Reading questions that follow.

Analyzing Primary Source Documents

SELECTIONS FROM - PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION (5 SEPTEMBER 1793)

“Liberty will outlive the intrigues and schemes of conspirators. The solicitude of the Convention reaches out to the ills of the people. Let good citizens unite, let them make a last effort: the land of liberty, sullied by the presence of its enemies, is going to be freed from them. Today their death sentence is pronounced, and tomorrow aristocracy will cease to exist.”

“Citizens, it is the people that has made the revolution; it is up to you in particular to assure the execution of the prompt measures that must save the patrie. You ask for the establishment of a revolutionary army; your wish is achieved. Already

the Convention, heedful of everything that can intimidate and foil foreign powers and their agents, has decided that this army will soon be formed.”

“Yes, courage and justice are the order of the day. All good citizens, instead of trembling, will bless the moment when the Convention took measures to secure the fate of the revolution at last. All Frenchmen will bless the society to which you belong, the society in whose name, together, with that of the city of Paris, you come to ask for these imperative and definitive measures. All criminals will perish on the scaffold, the Convention has solemnly sworn it. Already it has taken steps to

increase the activity of the revolutionary tribunal. Tomorrow it will busy itself with increasing the number of judge and juries.”

“The convention applauds your patriotism; it welcomes you to participate in the session.”

Barère, in the name of the Committee of Public Safety: “For several days everything has seemed to point to a movement afoot in Paris. Intercepted letters, destined either for abroad or for aristocrats within the country, told of constant endeavors made by their agents to incite an immediate uprising in what they call the big city, Well! They have this last uprising – (enthusiastic applause) – but it will be organized and carried out legally by a revolutionary army that will finally put into effect the mighty slogan we owe to the Commune of Paris: ‘Make terror the order of the day.’ This is the way to make the royalists, the moderates, the counter revolutionary rabble that perturbs you disappear

in an instant. The royalists want blood; well! They will have the blood of conspirators, of the Brissots, the Marie-Antoinettes. They want to stir up a movement, well! They are going to feel its effects. We are not speaking of illegal acts of vengeance; special tribunals are going to bring this about. You will not be shocked by the means that we present to you when you understand that these criminals are still conspiring in the recesses of their prisons, that they are the rallying points of our enemies. Brissot has said and written that before his head falls, those of part of the Convention would no longer exist, and that the Mountain would be destroyed. This is the way they seek to use terror to check you in your revolutionary march.

“The royalists want to upset the work of the revolution. Conspirators, the Convention will upset yours!

SELECTIONS FROM THE LAW OF SUSPECTS (17 SEPTEMBER 1793)

1. Immediately after the publication of the present decree, all suspected persons within the territory of the Republic and still at liberty shall be placed in custody.
2. The following are deemed suspected persons: 1st, those who, by their conduct, associations, talk, or writings have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty; 2nd, those who are unable to justify, in the manner prescribed by the decree of 21 March last, their means of existence and the performance of their civic duties; 3rd, those to whom certificates of patriotism have been refused; 4th, public functionaries suspended or dismissed from their

positions by the National Convention or by its commissioners, and not reinstated, especially those who have been or are to be dismissed by virtue of the decree of 14 August last; 5th, those former nobles, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, and agents of the émigrés, who have not manifested their devotion to the Revolution; 6th, those who have emigrated during the interval between 1 July, 1789, and the publication of the decree of 30 March – 8 April, 1792, even though they may have returned to France within the period established by said decree or prior thereto.

Critical Reading Questions



Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

1. On whose behalf is Robespierre claiming he is working?
2. What do the members of the Convention mean when they say “the revolution”?
3. What does the ambiguity of “the revolution” allow for?
4. What does justice seem to be for Robespierre?
5. Who does it seem Robespierre is referring to when he says, “All criminals will perish on the scaffold...?”
6. What does Barère mean when he says the convention will make “terror the order of the day”?
7. Though Robespierre did not say the words, he was the President of the National Convention and head of the Committee of Public Safety. How does that make him culpable for these actions?
8. The *Law of Suspects* calls for the arrest of all “suspected persons”. What is the danger of arresting “suspected persons” instead of accused persons or those that have enough evidence to bring charges against them?
9. Robespierre and the National Convention used their position of popular authority to justify their violent actions against adversaries. How is this type of democratically justified violence particularly dangerous?