

# LE CONTRE-POISON.

AVIS

AU CITOYENS

DE VERSAILLES.

The Antidote. Advice to the Citizens of Versailles.<sup>1</sup>

TREMBLE, Citizens, the enemy is within your walls. It is already in place; soon it will plunge you into the abyss.

Lift the coat tails that cover them, these hypocrites who call themselves your friends, and you will soon recognize, by its lily-livered look, an envy that only finds pleasure in disorder.

A God looks after you and looks down upon you. This God is la Fayette.<sup>2</sup> But if your anxiety (as unjust as it is dangerous), your inexpedient impulses, your thoughtless speeches, your unreasonable claims create obstacles, even temporary ones, that slow the progress of his single minded, consistent plan to watch over us; how will he achieve his aim?

The Aristocracy, on their last legs, believed they could only improve their lot, however slightly, by being among you or by using you. In your already too unhappy City they thought they would find minds more predisposed to help them. They know that misery sours the character, that suffering makes people unjust; this is why they have placed their firing power here. But they are careful not to show themselves for what they are. They are too well aware that true Citizens would arrest them if they made a move.

Their projects no longer being heeded they have put on the mask of that selfsame popularity that is cherished all around. Protected by this revered costume they march with a firm, if shadowy, step.

Yes, Citizens, they are insinuating themselves, little by little, into you hearts, by preaching your own saintly doctrines, by repeating your precepts, by using your own manner of speaking. The Court, at which they first started calumniating you, this Court, that they want to take away from you, even hoping that you will never see it again within your walls, this Court seems already, in their eyes, too favourable towards you in its inclinations: they are even envious of the bread the King has just offered to desperate fathers who lack work; the bread that can be earned through useful labour, but that they could not obtain, the one that has been made available only for them, this bread has awakened all their hatred: they want to make this heavenly and unexpected manna disappear from your unlucky land. They quite understood that they could not approach the

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<sup>1</sup> This pamphlet has neither a date nor a publisher's name. What follows is conjecture. The text was probably written in October 1789 following the removal of the royal family from their palace in Versailles (the seat of French royalty since 1664) to Paris by a mob of angry Parisians. De Gouges's fury at the aristocracy would have been fuelled by eye witness reports that the duc d'Orléans had been in Versailles encouraging the crowd. He was believed by some to have designs on Louis XVI's position as head of state. Since the debacle following de Gouges's open letter to the duc in July 1789 it is unsurprising that she was more circumspect in this pamphlet.

<sup>2</sup> In mid-July 1789 La Fayette had been elected by Parisian voters to command the newly formed citizens' militia, named the National Guard. It had been created to counter the fear of both an aristocratic plot and a popular revolt. What was later termed 'La Grande Peur' was underway with country-wide riots and insurrection resulting in arson, looting and murder. During the October Days La Fayette ensured the safety of the royal family at personal risk to himself though he was also accused of doing too little to prevent the events unfolding.

Benefactor to stop the flow of this benefit. So they seek to arrest its course among those that are in need. For this they only need disorder: they already believe that they will triumph. Calumny, their faithful companion, has opened its pestiferous mouth and its impure breath has already enveloped your entire horizon.

The good Citizens who devote their labour and their fortunes to your interest, these Fathers of the Commune that you yourselves placed in the civic Tribunal where, day and night, your needs and your resources are examined; the Officer who is worthier than ever of your choice and your affection for he forgets himself in order to devote himself entirely to you; the worthy second to la Fayette who, following his example, never allows care or fatigue to cool his ardour for a moment, since his soul is above disgust or discouragement; now they too are the butt of attacks from those abusers who stay in hiding! And yet you have seen that at the most critical junctures they never for one moment lose the poor from sight. This Officer, second in command, whom you will cherish more and more as you get to know him better, has shown a truly wonderful prudence and understanding in forecasting the affects of the insurrections that ill-intentioned people sought to foment; did he not, with great wisdom, anticipate the danger that threatened your homes several times?

But the period of tumult has arrived. Your enemies are too well aware of this. If they fail at this penultimate period of the revolution that is nearing completion, they will be left with no corner on earth in which to breathe their dark schemes. They will all be overthrown forever. Ah well! Let them fail, yes, let them fail, repeat this word. It is in your power to make them fail. Stay calm; wait in silence for a few more days. Encase your hearts in layers of bronze, harden them against all those seditious ideas that seek to weaken them. Only a few more days of watchful, but imperturbable, patience and you will finally see shining in your Firmament the dawn of a pure and serene day. Trust and be worthy of the administration that is being prepared on your behalf. Reflect that the zeal and courage of your Municipality, the irreproachable and measured conduct of the Officer, second in command, and the effect of the National Guard will be responsible for the happy destiny that the National Assembly has in store for you.

One word more and I will leave you. See if those cowards who seek to inspire you through the spurious aspect of your own self-interest, through suspicion, through disturbances, who whisper impatience and complaint, without allowing you the time to think, see if they make themselves known, these traitors and perfidious enemies of your tranquility; see if they show themselves! Virtue proceeds openly. If it makes accusations it does so out in the open because it has proof and because it acts for the good of society. It is only the corrupt who hide.

*THE END*