

UNE PATRIOTE
PERSÉCUTÉE
À LA
CONVENTION NATIONALE,

A Persecuted Patriotic Woman Addresses the National Convention.¹

CITIZENS, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NATION,

YOUR sublime constitution sanctions the maxim: *do unto others, as you would have others unto you do*. Today I invoke the application of this axiom!

Meanwhile, regardless of this sacred principle, I languish, sick, in a cell. I have been robbed of my freedom thanks to the specious argument that I wanted to suggest three forms of government...How absurd!

My detractors offer, in vain, a malevolent interpretation of the work that has drawn upon me such cruel persecution. This work confounds them by its nature: the Convention, as well as posterity, will be its judge.

In the meantime, this composition, printed as a poster, was never placarded; before giving it the light of day I presented it to the committee of national safety. I awaited its response before using it. After taking such precautions is it reasonable that I should be arrested and brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Of what am I accused? What is my crime? Why am I being targeted by a law detrimental to individual liberty? It is an impenetrable and iniquitous mystery.

Everyone remembers how I served the motherland. Everyone knows how enthusiastically republican I have been and everyone, astonished, wonders what motive is behind my incredible and long captivity.

The Convention and the committee of national safety meet only in order to protect the innocent; what audacity to use its authority to victimise me on the basis of a personal vendetta that is unjustified.

I have served my country; I have served the cause of the people and the cause of liberty with heroic courage. What more is asked of me?...My blood? I am ready to spill it but it would be refining cruelty to prolong my life, for it is now but a painful agony.

The plaything of constituted powers I am now thrown from tribunal to tribunal for none is willing to address my cause. Is it credible that in a Republic there are legislators and judges who are afraid to celebrate innocence? No. However reasonable my complaints I rather believe that you fear uncovering the guilty. That is the reason I am confident in my desire to solicit the Convention to pronounce my fate.

Representatives of a people who admire, above all else, justice and glory what decree of fate could persuade you to be silent about the arbitrary act to which I have been subjected? How many maxims could I not cite proving that governments are lost only through the excesses of prejudice, cruelty and tyranny? Surveillance is no doubt a sound duty at a time of revolution when it only catches the enemies of the common good but when, following this surveillance, personal enmities indiscriminately pursue patriots and even women who have distinguished themselves during the revolution and who have, through their writings and their actions, brought about the triumph of the republic, then all is lost and suspicion takes hold, indignation rules hearts, opinions are divided, clever aristocrats, under the mask of republicanism, fan the flames of discord and fires light up

¹ Written from prison (end of August/early September) 1793 this blue poster was smuggled out and pasted up on the walls of Paris; in it de Gouges courageously expresses her opinions with regards to her detention, reaffirms her fundamentally pacific republican sentiments and throws down the gauntlet to her captors. Her exertions were fruitless for the poster failed to move either the general public or the powers detaining her.

everywhere as civil war destroys all parts. This is what I have been predicting in my texts for a long while.

My last poster, entitled *the welfare of the motherland [The Three Urns]*, proffered the only solution that could save us from this destructive blight that will certainly tear France apart. My method alone can save her, we will return to it later, for whatever tyranny is used against me it will bring about the reunion of the *départements*. What will the rebels or the foreign powers be able to achieve if the majority of French rally around the altar of the motherland? This is the project that my enemies seek to relegate to the shadows. They wish neither to crown this philanthropic work nor to judge me. Never before have those who are above suspicion, who ceaselessly toil on behalf of the motherland, been incarcerated and held in cells.

The agents of *Pitt* and *Cobourg* spare nothing to rekindle those barbarous events that were unknown to the world until the 2nd of September of last year.² *Pitt* and *Cobourg*, those dreadful Machiavellis, are in no doubt that a second massacre would make of Paris, that queen of cities that excites their jealousy, a second Troy and that shortly all the *départements*, united against her, will come and fire on her inhabitants as if they were shooting at wild beasts.

Indeed, if this massacre were to take place I could be one of its first sacrificial victims; let my assassins tremble, all will be accounted for when I am no longer here. The people will be acquainted with all that I did on their behalf; they will be told: 'This woman, immolated by vile assassins, supported you during the 'great' winter; she was sincerely and unanimously described as the mother of the nation. Her humane and popular writings encouraged the goodwill of the wealthy and the members of the court, she knew how to purposefully intimidate them with the despair of the nation and this healthy fear moved the hearts of all in favour of the poor and of out of work labourers. She suggested public workshops; she offered the project of voluntary taxation along with numerous other equally precious projects for the public good. She did more, despising the court and its favours, she sacrificed her entire fortune and died in poverty. You have been deprived of such a woman!'

Indeed, everything leads me to believe that this will be the language used to describe me. Good deeds are never without value in this world; experience teaches us that the virtuous individual, persecuted in his lifetime, whose memory is honoured after death, gathers unto him tears of gratitude.

French Senate! Forget, if you can, all the useful and great things that I did for the motherland and for the people; I will remind you, in broad terms only, what you owe to the weakest, the most ignorant and the most overlooked of individuals: I will remind you of your sacred duties with the constitution by my side.

A *Republican Woman* could never abase herself; cannot beg for pardon when she is owed an exceptional redress. It is this courage and this pride that is today perceived as a crime in the eyes of the parvenu slaves now raised up as tyrannous modern princelings. Yet probity has imprescriptible rights that weigh heavier on the minds of the people's representatives. *French Senate!* May the cry of honour and oppressed virtue resound in the sanctuary of law, then you may be my judge.

I will be defended by my project of the three urns: it is time to give it the light of day; it is time for everyone to be apprised of the motive that gave rise to my imprisonment.

Attempting to prejudice the reader's judgement by offering a personal interpretation of my words would be an offence against the reader. The well-meaning aim of this poster

² On 2 September 1792 Verdun was taken by the Prussian army with no contest, the panic that ensued marked the start of a vicious and indiscriminate five day massacre of prisoners in Paris by hostile crowds; the duke of Saxe-Cobourg was at the head of the Austrian army in 1792 with plans to invade France, his name, when allied to that of William Pitt (British prime-minister from 1783 – 1801) represented the anti-revolutionary European coalition. The British were also happy to fund spies and agents provocateurs to embroil France in crises that would weaken it both militarily and economically.

will not escape him; it will suffice to say that I devised this project on the 10th May [printed July 1793]. We had no constitution; the *départements* were threatening Paris. The unlimited freedom of the press encouraged my happy project of reuniting people, of making a solemn internal peace, so that France, en masse, would rise up and chase away the foreigners and the rebels forever.

I would have wished to prevent the troubles that are now overwhelming France; am I therefore, like Cassandra, the victim of my foresight and solicitude? Taken for one of the unfortunates who violated all society's decrees I have been languishing in prison, for over two months, without being able to obtain a judgement or the alleviation of my woes!

Representatives of a free people! It is to you that I address my lament; it is up to you, up to the people, to appreciate its fairness: it is up to those who love liberty and the motherland to judge the rigours of a captivity made more terrible by being undeserved. My enemies have been able to triumph momentarily! But I defy them from the depths of my cell. I am protected by the law; one day I will confound them, I wish for no other revenge than to expose to the light of day my conduct and my writings; they will show the world who cared the most for the motherland; it will be apparent that everything I did, everything I sacrificed was on behalf of the people and fetters are the reward for my patriotism! I am detained... accused... traduced in front of the revolutionary tribunal...

Then let me judged!... Death or freedom.

Signed OLIMPE [sic] DE GOUGES.