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The Future of France

Honored Assemblymen,

It is no small claim that the future of France lies in the decisions made by the National Assembly. Together, we work towards our common goal of providing for the French people through the modernity of protected natural rights and the stability of our shared customs. We have seen the plight of our people first hand and swore on a tennis court to “never separate... until the Constitution of the kingdom shall be established and consolidated upon firm foundations” (Carnes 115). I remind all gathered of our solemn oath that we took not for ourselves or our constituents, but for our noble state and all who inhabit her. We have the unique opportunity to right ancient wrongs, but this must be done with extreme care so as not to jeopardize the security of our fledgling government. As Rousseau counsels, “It is not men’s prerogative to prolong their lives; it is their prerogative to prolong the life of the State as long as possible” (Dunn 217). In the Constitution of 1791, we have all the makings of a strong state that values the safety of its citizens. This is done by giving them representation within a framework that promises international recognition. It is with a sound mind and a full heart that I endorse the constitutional monarchy laid out in our current draft of the Constitution. My critics, like Arthur Young, say that “Monsieur l’Abbé Sieyès... is one of the most zealous sticklers for the popular cause,-- being in fact a violent republican...” (Carnes 112) but I wear that charge as a badge of pride. The job of the government is to represent the General Will while guarding against the

Particular, and I believe that after examining other forms of government as well as the current state of France, it will become apparent that this is our best course of action.

Some may argue that a democracy is the only way to ensure the people are heard and their opinions respected. While this is a correct assessment of the strengths of such a system, it neglects to mention the environment needed for successful implementation as well as inherent weaknesses. Rousseau asserts that democracy requires a small state with a simple culture and relatively equal economic prosperity to take root (Dunn 201). I hope I need not go into specifics as to why France fails all of these requirements (the last two with great bounds). If equality of voice is what is desired, it must be said that this system can only be taken in parts if we are to introduce it into our country. As for weaknesses, one of democracy's biggest critics comes from one of the only examples of a true democracy. After experiencing Athens first hand, "Aristotle observes that a democracy has many striking points of resemblance with a tyranny" (Carnes 161). Majority rule was the instrument used to destroy Athens from the inside as educated opinions went unheard and the underqualified went unchallenged. This is not to say that the elements of populism cannot be applied to other systems, it just means that "the more the State expands, the more the government should contract; so that the number of leaders should diminish as a result of an increase in the number of the people" (Dunn 199). This way, the General Will is reflected without endangering itself.

The opposite of a democracy is no better in its purest form. While a Monarchy is amenable to the size and character of France, "the best kings wish to have the power to be wicked if they please, without ceasing to be masters" (Dunn 204). The same fear of unprepared legislators that was realized in a democracy comes to fruition in a monarchy as "the public voice hardly ever raises to the highest posts any but enlightened and capable men... only petty

mischievous makers,” which leaves the country poorly run (Dunn 205). Though a monarchy offers great stability through expediency of decisions and great efficiency of action, such a trait is not desirous of a government. There must be checks in place to ensure that proper deliberation is conducted by those that will be affected by any legislation passed. Just as a pure democracy in a state such as France would cause ruinous deadlock at best and tyrannical majority rule at worst, a pure monarchy requires no rumination of ideas and allows a single unit (if king and advisors are grouped) free reign over the countryside.

What is best for France is a combination of the two governments listed in the form of a constitutional monarchy where the monarch functions as a heavily limited executive and a unicameral legislature represent the will of the people through law. As Rousseau says when describing who should govern in politics, this system is “one that combines the stability of an ancient people with the docility of a new one” (Dunn 189). My Jacobin colleagues have the best interests of the people in mind when they denounce any system with a monarchy in place, but I fear this view is overly cautious with the potential of sending our new government on a long walk off a short pier. Not only does the system in place create fail-safes to prevent the majority from making headlong decisions negligent of proper debate, it provides pragmatic security. Moreso, it goes so far in limiting the faculties of the King that it warranted an incredibly thorough letter of complaint from His Royal Highness which was released before the very first assembly session.

As for the actual makeup of this constitutional monarchy, it is imperative that the legislative body is unicameral in order to preserve the mandate of the public. While the argument for a bicameral legislature based on the English system establishes needed checks and balances, it fails to complete its first and foremost job of representing the people as a whole (Carnes 30). If

we establish something akin to the House of Lords, we will undo the equalizing work done by the August Decrees which ensured that the true French people, the Third Estate, are represented proportionally (Carnes 16). A critique of our current system that I previously asserted in my essay, “What is the Third Estate,” “the government has become the patrimony of a particular class, it has been distended beyond all measure; places have been created, not on account of the necessities of the governed, but in the interests of the governing” (Carnes 109). Let us not make the same mistakes as we made before by establishing a corruptible, unqualified, and immoral aristocracy that stands apart from the honest working class.

Careful readers will note that while I have indicated on multiple occasions the need for proper deliberation in a government, I have yet to address such a check in our proposed system. After much debate, the suspensive veto has been added to our current draft of the constitution. This veto allows the King to suspend legislation, and it can be overridden by two successive legislative sessions (Carnes 143). The effects of the veto are best put by Alexandre de Lameth, a monarchist who strongly opposes the royal sanction. Lameth states that the veto “can only be suspensive, because if the people persist in desiring the proposed law, if the people persevere in charging their representatives to pursue that law, the monarch no longer has either right or ability to resist” (Blackman). If this is the voice of the conservative opposition, it is clear that veto is not in place to give undo power to the crown, but merely to protect the people. Rousseau himself said that “men always desire their own good, but do not always discern it; the people are never corrupted, though often deceived, and it is only then they seem to will what is evil” (Dunn 172). This measure exists solely to protect the people from succumbing to mob mentality and sacrificing reason for celerity. While I acknowledge the fears of my Jacobin brothers, I ask them

to have more faith in the momentum of the Revolution. As Burke says, the discourse the veto will inspire will “[draw] out the harmony of the universe” (Carnes 147).

While talk of the theoretical is wonderful nourishment for our seedling civic designs, France’s current environment must be taken into account before our government can take root. After our loss in the Seven Years War, the French position on the European Stage is unclear (Carnes 43). Furthermore, a lack of tax influx and waning loyalty to the king means “the French army and navy struggle to keep the armed forces in a state of readiness” (Carnes 43). Officers have already deserted to join the King's brother, Count d’Artois in Coblenz where they make plans to invade (Carnes 44). With our weakened state, we have also seen German and Austrian desires rise for the incorporation of the contested areas of Alsace and Lorraine. The Diplomatic Revolution that stabilized our relationship with Austria and the HRE through a series of treaties and Marie Antoinette’s marriage to Louis XVI has been called into question, and we should all fear retaliation from Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II (Lesaffer). All of Europe’s superpowers watch France with rapt attention, ready to stabilize the balance of power through hostile takeover if necessary. If we begin our government on the wrong foot by eliminating the role of King, it may very well be the last step that the Revolution takes.

The Constitution of 1791 is the culmination of the blood, sweat and tears spilled for the common good. We have worked to ensure that we protect the people and their best interests in all of its clauses. Through the unicameral legislature, we promise that their voices will be heard. Through the suspensive veto, we promise that careful thought will be put into all actions. Through a limited monarchy, we promise their security and international recognition. This Constitution signs love of country into law and ensures that love will stand the test of time.

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