

Paris June 14th 1795

Sir,

It seemed probably after the movement of the 12 Germinal (2nd of April) and which terminated in the banishment or rather deportation (for the hand of Government was never withdrawn from them) of Barrere Billaud de Varennes and Coilot d'Herbois, and the arrestation of several others of the leading members in the mountain party that the convention would be left at liberty, to pursue for the future the great objects of the revolution, and without further molestation. And the calm which ensued for a considerable time that movement, although the scarcity of bread continued gave strength to this presumption. But a late event has shewn that the victory which was gained upon that occasion, by the convention, over the enemies of the present system was not so decisive as there was reason to presume it would be; for within a few days after my last, which was on the 17th of May, another attempt was made upon that body, and which menaced for a while, at least in respect to the personal safety of the members the most alarming consequences. I am happy however to be able now to assure you, that this has likewise failed, and without producing, according to present prospects and in regard to the main course of the revolution, any material effect.

The circumstances which characterize this latter movement were in general the same with those of that which preceded it, except that it was attended with greater violence and its views were more completely unfolded. On the 20th of May a party from the Fauburgs of S^t Antoine and S^t Marceau armed and consisting of several thousands approached the convention¹ early in the morning having previously circulated a paper declaring that their object was a duss of grievances, of which the scarcity of bread was the principal, and which could only be accomplished by the establishment of the constitution of 1793 and the Cecal of Barrere and his colleagues, or in other words the revival of the reign of terror. As these measures could not be carried into immediate effect, without the overthrow of the preponderating party, so the movement appeared to be directed unequivocally to that object. The centinels of the convention were forced upon the first approach, and in an instant the party, preceded by a legion of Women, entered and spread itself throughout the hall of that assembly. The sitting was broken and everything was in the utmost confusion. In a contest which took place between Ferraud ~ one of the deputies (a gallant and estimable young man) and some of the party, for the protection of the chair and person of the President, which were threatened with violation, the former was slain, and soon afterwards his head was severed from his body and borne on a pike, by the perpetrator of this atrocious crime in triumph into the bosom of the convention itself. It really seemed for some time as if that body, or at least the leading members in the preponderating party, were doomed to destruction, or safety to be secured only by disguise and flight. During this conflict however the whole assembly behaved with the utmost magnanimity; no symptoms of fear were betrayed, no disposition to yield or otherwise dishonour the great theatre on which they stood and Boissy d'Anglas, who happened to preside, not only kept his seal, but observed in his

¹Page Break

deportment a calmness and composure which became the dignified and important² station which he filled. This state of confusion lasted 'till about 12 at night, when it was terminated by the decisive effort of a body gathered from the neighbouring sections, planned by the U. Committees of public safety, surely general and militaire, and led on by several deputies, among whom were most distinguished Bervelegan Anguis, Mathieu, Delmas, Furon and Segendier. They entered precipitately the hall, attacked the intruders, sabre and bayonet in hand, nor did they cease the charge until they had rescued it from the profanation. A little after 12 the convention was reestablished, and proceeded as upon the former occasion, to a review of what had passed in the course of the day.

Whilst the insurgents were in possession of the reigns of government, and after Boissy d'Anglas had retired, they placed the President, Vernier, in the chair by force, and began an organization upon the principles that were at first avowed. They repealed in a mass all the laws that were passed since the 9th of Thermidor; recalled Barrerre, Billaud de Varennes and Collot d'Herbois; took possession of the tocfin and the tellegraphe; ordered the barriers of the City to be closed, and were upon the point of arresting all the members of the committees of the Executive branch, having appointed a commission of four deputies to take their places and with full power to act in their stead, so that in truth the reign of terror was nearly revived and with accumulated force. At this moment however, the plan of the committees who had continued their sitting, was ripe for execution, and fortunately the stroke was given before the system was completed.

But the commotion was not ended by the expulsion³ of the insurgents from the hall of the convention itself. They retreated back to the Fauburgs to which they belonged, and where for a while they opposed its authority. In the course however of the ensuing day a considerable force was collected, under the authority of the convention, from those sections who voluntarily offered their service, amounting perhaps to 20 thousand, and which being marched against them in different directions, surrounding in a great measure both fauburgs, reduced them immediately to order, and without the effusion of blood.

On the same day an insurrection took place at Foulon of the same kind and with the same objects in view, and which for several days unrested that port and its dependencies, the fleet excepted, from the authority of the government. Upon that theatre too, some outrages were committed, and fatal consequences in other respects were apprehended. But this was likewise lately suppressed by the efforts of good citizens, drawn by the representatives in mission there, from Marseilles and the neighbouring country, a report to that effect being yesterday presented to the convention by the committee of public safety: so that order may be considered as completely reestablished the authority of the convention being triumphant every where.

As soon as the convention resumed its deliberations, the punishment of those who had offended in the course of the commotion was the first object which engaged its attention. Whilst the insurgents were in possession of the hall and enacting their short but comprehensive code of

² Page Break

³ Page Break

legislation, several members of the mountain party not only retained their seats but joined in⁴ the work. Four were appointed to the commission which was designed to supersede the committee of the Executive administration and who accepted the trust. These circumstances with many others which occurred, created a belief that the movement was in harmony with that party. It was therefore concluded that more decisive measures ought to be taken with those members and with the party generally than had been heretofore adopted, and in consequence about 30 of them were arrested on that and the succeeding days within the course of a week, and who are to be tried, according to a late decree, in common with others charged with offences, said to be committed in the cause of the commotion, by a military commission appointed at the time and invested with full power for the purpose.

It is to be observed that the character of this movement was decisively antimonarchical: its success if it had succeeded, would have revived the reign of terror and most probably carried eventually all the aristocrats with the leading members of the preponderating party to the scaffold. Bread and the constitution of 1793 were written upon the hats of many of the insurgents, and whilst the hall and its vicinity resounded in favour of the patriots meaning Barrere &c, the feeble voice of one solitary aristocrat only, was heard in favour of the constitution of 1789. Indeed the aristocrats who had before the 12th of Germinal contributed much to foment the discontents which broke out on that day, in the hope that if a commotion took place and the convention was overthrown, the standard of Royalty would be erected and the monarchy reestablished and⁵ who were in the interval from the dubious character of that movement, which was crushed before it had fully unfolded itself; of neither side, for, nor against the convention, were observed in the commencement of this to remain in the same state of inactivity, greatly agitated but taking no part. As soon however as the object of this latter movement was understood, and it became obvious that in case it succeeded, terrorism and not royalty would be reestablished, the disposition of this party towards the convention changed: it no longer shewed an indifference to its welfare; on the contrary it became active in its support.

But in truth the force of this party, in this City, and especially upon the late emergencies did not appear to be great. The most gallant of its members are either upon the frontiers at war against the republic, or have fallen already in the cause of royalty. There too consists of those who were of sufficient age to take their parts in the commencement, for the young men of Paris who are descended from it, or from others of the more wealthy inhabitants of the City, and who have attained their maturity during the revolution, or are now growing up, have imbibed the spirit which it was natural to expect such splendid examples of patriotism would create upon young and generous minds, and are in general on the side of the revolution.

That there should be a party of any force within the republic, or rather of sufficient force to disturb the government in the manner we have seen, disposed to subvert the present system and reestablish that of terror, must excite your surprise. You will naturally be inclined to ask of

⁴Page Break

⁵Page Break

what character of citizens is⁶ it composed, what their numbers and ultimate views, since it is to be presumed that a system of terror as a permanent system of government, cannot be wished by any one? You have seen that the movement in question proceeded principally from the Faubourgs of S^t Antoine and Marceau. The inquiry therefore will be satisfied by exposing the character of those sections. In general I am told they are artisans and among the most industrious in Paris. Many of them are said to be foreigners, Germans, and which explains the motive of their partiality for the constitution of 1793: which naturalizes them. That they are opposed to monarchy is certain, for such has been their character from the epoch of the destruction of the Bastille, in which they had a principal hand, to the present time. Indeed upon this point the late movements speak with peculiar force, for if those movements were spontaneous and commenced by the people themselves, it follows, as they cannot be suspected of any political finesse, and of aiming at royalty through the medium of terrorism, that the latter and not the former was the object. And if they were set on foot by foreign influence, as it believed by many, the conclusion must be the same, for as royalty is unquestionably the object of those powers who are suspected of such interference, it is to be presumed that if practicable they would have taken a more direct course to promote it, by an immediate declaration in its favour, since thereby they would rally under its standard all those who were the friends of that system: whereas by declaring in favour of terrorism the opposite effect was produced, for the royalists themselves were thereby driven into the expedient of using their utmost endeavours to save the convention as⁷ the only means whereby they could save themselves. In every view therefore they must be deemed enemies to royalty, and as such it is natural to expect they will feel a great sensibility upon all those questions which in their judgment have a tendency to promote it. Whether any such have been agitated or contemplated, is perhaps doubtful: I have thought otherwise and still think so. But that many circumstances have presented themselves in the course of the collision of parties, that were sufficient to create a suspicion with persons, of that portion of discernment which laborious artisans usually possess, that the leading members of the preponderating party, were disposed to abandon the republican scale, and incline towards monarchy, is certain. The inhabitants of these Faubourgs, having sided always with the mountain party, have of course brought upon themselves the particular enmity of the royalists. They have therefore, or rather their leaders have been, in their turn, persecuted by the royalists. But they have likewise thought themselves persecuted by the present preponderating party with whom they were engaged in uninterrupted warfare, before and since the time of Robespierre. In this respect therefore they saw the present preponderating party and the royalists, acting apparently in harmony together, and concluded that the former were likewise royalists. They have likewise seen under the administration of this party the royalists enlarged from prison, and other measures of that kind adopted which have probably fortified them in this belief. A report too which has been circulated through the City that under the name of organic laws, it is contemplated⁸ by the committee of 11 to introduce some

⁶ Page Break

⁷ Page Break

important changes in the constitution of 1793, has not doubt tended in a great measure to increase their disquietude. In an attempt to explain the cause of these movements the above circumstances have appeared to me to merit attention and with that view I have presented them.

But that there was no real harmony of political views between the present preponderating party and the royalists, even with respect to the terrorists, is a fact of which I have no doubt. The reign of terror continued until it could last no longer; it was necessary to suppress it and it was suppressed. That the royalists wished this event and gave it all the aid they could, is certain: but that their efforts were of any service in that respect, is doubtful: indeed I was persuaded that for sometime they produced the opposite effect, and for reasons that are obvious: for as the preponderating party sought the establishment of the republic, and knew that the mountain party had the same object in view, it was reasonable to expect that after the former had gained the ascendancy, it would be disposed to exercise towards the latter some degree of moderation and humanity, and equally so to presume that the same spirit of magnanimity which inculcated this disposition towards its antagonist, chiefly from a respect for its political principles, would dispose it to reject with disdain the aid of the royalists who were enemies to both. This sentiment I think is to be traced through all the measures of the convention from the 9th of Thermidor to the 1st of Praireal: for we behold through that interval, the preponderating party rescuing⁹ from the guillotine and prison, the royalists whilst they reprobated their principles; and terminating in other respects the reign of terror, whilst they avoided as far as possible the punishment of those who had been the principal authors and agents under that reign. Indeed this party has appeared to me to be, and so I have often represented to you, as equally the enemy of the opposite extremes of royalty and anarchy; as resting upon the interest and the wishes of the great mass of the French people, and who I have concluded and from those data the revolution itself has furnished, as well as from my own observations since my arrival, (the latter of which it is true have been confined to a small circle) were desirous of a free republican government: one which should be so organized as to guard them against the pernicious consequences that always attend, a degeneracy into either of those extremes.

You will likewise ask what effect have these movements had upon the public mind in regard to the present system? It is not probable they have already wearied the people out and in consequence inclined them to royalty merely from a desire of repose? That they are all wearied is most certain, and what may be the course of events in the progress of time I do not pretend to determine. These lye beyond my reach and indeed beyond the reach of all men. I only undertake to deduce immediate consequences from those facts which I witness: and when I see that these movements have produced upon the royalists themselves the opposite effect, and forced them at least for the present, to renounce their creed and cling to the convention for their safety, I cannot presume that¹⁰ the moderatists, who are republicans, will quit the safe ground, on which they

⁸ Page Break

⁹ Page Break

¹⁰ Page Break

rest, their own ground too, and become royalists. Royalty therefore, I consider at present as altogether out of the question. But that these convulsive shocks, and which proceed from the opposite extreme, may produce some effect, is probable. In my opinion they will produce a good one; for I am persuaded they will occasion, and upon the report of the committee of 11, some very important changes in the constitution of 1793, such as a division of the legislature into two branches, with an organization of the executive and judiciary upon more independent principles than that constitution admits of; upon those principles indeed which some exist in the American constitutions, and are well understood there. Should this be the case the republican system will have a fair experiment here, and that it may be the case must be the wish of all those who are the friends of humanity every where.

On the day that this late commotion commenced M^E Pinckney arrived here on his way to Madrid, and was a spectator of the great scene it exhibited to the close: a few days after which he pursued his rout by way of Bordeaux, where before this he is probably arrived. Whilst here I presented to his view what had passed between this government and myself upon the subject of his mission, assuring him from what I had heard and seen that I was of opinion that in case he would explain himself to the committee upon that subject, and express a wish they would give what aid they conveniently could, in support of his negotiation, satisfying them at the same¹¹ time that they were not injured by M^E Jay's treaty, they would do it. I likewise shewed him a letter I had just before received from M^E Short, written at the instances of the Duke de la Alcudia, to request that I would promote by certain communications to this government, a negotiation between Spain and this republic, he having previously and positively assured M^E Short, that our demands should be yielded and adjusted at the same time. M^E Pinckney was sensible of the benefit which the aid of this republic would yield, in his negotiation and wished it: but upon mature consideration he was of opinion he could not request such aid without having previously exposed to view M^E Jay's treaty, and which he did not chuse to do, for considerations delicacy, forbade me to inquire into. It was however equally his and my wish that his journey through the country, should be marked with all those circumstances of reciprocal civility between the government and himself, which are always due and are generally paid, when the Minister of a friendly power passes through the territory of another, and in consequence I announced his arrival to the committee and obtained for him an amicable interview, with the members of its diplomatic section, and by whom he was received with the most perfect attention.

You have already seen that England and Spain are each and without the knowledge of the other, seeking a separate peace with this republic. What the motive for such secrecy on the part of the former is, remains to be hereafter unfolded: but what it is on the part of the latter is easily understood: for as she¹² apprehends in case a peace with France is made a declaration of war from England, and of course in case the attempt to obtain a peace is known, some new pressure from that power, it follows that she must wish the arrangement to be complete, to guard her

¹¹ Page Break

¹² Page Break

against the ill consequences which might otherwise attend such an event, before any thing upon that head transpires. As soon however as it is known to Spain that England seeks a separate peace, her jealousy of the views of England will be increased, as likewise will be the motive for an immediate accommodation with this republic. The period therefore, when a good understanding embracing perhaps the ancient connection between the two nations will be revived, cannot be considered as remote. Whether our claims upon Spain will be attended to render existing circumstances in that adjustment is a point upon which it is impossible for me to determine; for as I was not possessed of M^r Jay's treaty, and could give not other information on that head than I had before given, I have latterly forborne all further communication with the committee upon that subject. M^r Pinckney will be able soon after his arrival at Madrid, to ascertain the temper of the Spanish court in regard to our demands, and the means by which his negotiation may be forwarded; and as he likewise knows the state of things here, he will be able also to point out the line in which, if in any, I may be serviceable: and in the interim I shall not only be prepared to cooperate with him in whatever movement he may suggest but¹³ to obey with promptitude any instructions you may be pleased to give me in this or any other respect.

Since my last the treaty with the U. Provinces has been concluded and ratified, of which I send you a copy; and the garrison of Luxembourg consisting of 12,000 men with an immense amount of military Stores cannon etc has surrendered. The achievement of this post, one of the strongest in Europe, has opened the campaign on the part of France with great brilliancy: as it was taken too after a long siege, and when all possible efforts to raise it had proved abortive, it not only demonstrates the superiority of the French arms in the present stage of the war, but furnishes satisfactory ground whereon to calculate according to the ordinary course of events, its ultimate issue.

You will perhaps have heard before this, that the British have recommended the seizure of our vessels laden with provisions destined for the ports of this republic. An American just from Hamburg charged with other articles, informed me the other day that he was boarded on his way by two frigates whose officers informed him, they were ordered to take in all vessels thus laden.

Within a few days past the son of the late King departed this life. A minute report will be published by the government of his decline, having lingered for some time past, and of the care that was taken to preserve him. They are aware of the criticisms to which this event may expose them, and suffer on that account an additional mortification. His concession to Spain as was contemplated, made his life with the¹⁴ government an object of interest, since it would have forwarded in some respect its views in the depending negotiation.

I have just been honoured with yours of April 7th and shall pay due attention to its contents, being with great respect and esteem your most obedient and very humble servant.

Ja^s Monroe

¹³ Page Break

¹⁴ Page Break

P.S. I am sorry to inform you of the death of Mr. Coffyn, Consul for the port of Dunkirk. This loss is to be regretted as he was able, diligent and faithful in the discharge of the duties of his office. His son is very desirous of succeeding him and certainly if any one not an American is appointed, it will be impossible to find for it a more suitable person. In my opinion however American only should be appointed. In any event I think the merits of the father who was distinguished for his services and attachment to our country entitle his memory to some attention and doubt not your letter of acknowledgement addressed to his son on that head through me will be gratefully received.