

afraid of his agreeing to the proposal. You took that method before.

Aye, but you say the people were anxious for peace in 1797. I say they are friends to peace now; and I am confident that you will one day acknowledge it. Believe me, they are friends to peace; although by the laws which you have made, restraining the expression of the sense of the people, public opinion cannot now be heard as loudly and unequivocally as heretofore. But I will not go into the internal state of this country. It is too afflicting to the heart to see the strides which have been made, by means of and under the miserable pretext of this war, against liberty of every kind, both of power of speech and of writing; and to observe in another kingdom the rapid approaches to that military despotism which we affect to make an argument against peace. I know, sir, that public opinion, if it could be collected, would be for peace as much now as in 1797; and that it is only by public opinion, and not by a sense of their duty or by the inclination of their minds, that ministers will be brought, if ever, to give us peace.

I conclude, sir, with repeating what I said before: I ask for no gentleman's vote who would have reprobated the compliance of ministers with the proposition of the French government. I ask for no gentleman's support to-night who would have voted against ministers if they had come down and proposed to enter into a negotiation with the French. But I have a right to ask, and in honor, in consistency, in conscience I have a right to expect, the vote of every honorable gentleman who would have voted with ministers in an address to his Majesty diametrically opposite to the motion of this night.

## MIRABEAU



**MIRABEAU**, French statesman, was born at Bignon, in Provence, France, March 9, 1749, and died at Paris, April 2, 1791. As a youth, he had a bad upbringing and had a tyrant for his father, though his inherent disposition was vicious and erratic, and his manhood was one of wild, disease-breeding indulgence, save when he was in prison. In spite of these vices, his personal deformities, and lack of moral sense, his countrymen, when he died, expressed an intoxicating admiration of the man and an almost frenzied sorrow at his decease. This was due, in part, to Mirabeau's sympathy with the masses, and, though he was no lover of anarchy, to his attitude against the monarchy preceding the Revolution; and in part to his commanding genius and passionate eloquence in the Assembly, where he took the foremost place until his death in his forty-third year, his health being undermined by his early excesses and the burden of his labors. Had he lived, France might have been saved many of the horrors of the Revolution, for few could command the masses as he could; while even royalty, under wholesome restraints, might have been restored and purged of its errors and feebleness. Brief as his career was, his name cannot be forgotten in the history of his country. His chief writings, the outcome of his temporary exile in Prussia, are "History of the Prussian Monarchy under Frederick the Great" and "Secret History of the Court of Berlin." See the "French Revolution," by Taine, and the "History of the French Revolution," by Carlyle. Appended is Mirabeau's speech in the States-General with reference to the financial proposals of Jacques Necker, the statesman and financier of the era.

### SPEECH ON NECKER'S FINANCIAL PROJECT

SEPTEMBER 26 AND OCTOBER 2, 1789

**G**ENTLEMEN,—In the midst of so much tumultuous debate can I not restore the deliberation of the day by asking a few very simple questions?

Condescend, gentlemen, condescend to reply.

Has not the First Minister of Finances presented the most frightful picture of our present situation?

Has he not told you that any delay aggravates the danger?—that a day, an hour, a moment may make it fatal?

(259)

Have we any plan to substitute for the one he proposes? "Yes," someone has cried in the Assembly. I implore him who answers "yes" to consider that his plan is not known, that time is required to develop it, to examine it, to demonstrate it; that, were it immediately submitted to our deliberation, its author might be mistaken; that, were it exempt from all error, one might believe him to be mistaken; that when everybody is wrong, everybody is right; that therefore it is possible that the author of this other project, even though he may be right, may be wrong as opposed to every one, since without the assent of public opinion the greatest talent cannot triumph over circumstances. . . . As for myself I do not believe M. Necker's means to be the best possible; but heaven preserve me, in a situation so critical, from placing my opinions in opposition to his. I should offer them as preferable in vain: one does not rival in a moment such a prodigious popularity, gained by brilliant services, by long experience, the well-known financier's reputation for the highest talent, and, if it must be said, a destiny such as has fallen to the lot of no other mortal.

But we must return to M. Necker's plan.

Have we the time to examine it, to sound its bases, to verify its calculations? . . . No, no, a thousand times no. Insignificant questions, chance conjectures, untrustworthy gropings, these are all that are in our power at this moment. What shall we accomplish then by deferring deliberation?—miss the decisive moment, provoke our self-love to change something to an ensemble we have not even conceived, and by our indiscreet intervention diminish the influence of a minister whose reputation as a financier is and ought to be greater than ours? . . . Gentlemen, there is neither wisdom nor foresight in this; . . . is there even good faith?

Oh! if less solemn declarations did not guarantee our respect for the public faith, our horror of the infamous word "bankruptcy," I should dare scrutinize our own secret motives, of which, perhaps, alas! we are ignorant, which make us so imprudently recoil at the moment of proclaiming the act of a great devotion, surely inefficacious, if it be not swift and truly spontaneous. I should say to those who have accustomed themselves to the idea of neglecting public engagements, through fear of excessive sacrifices, through terror of taxation, . . . What is bankruptcy if it is not the most cruel, the most iniquitous, the most unjust, the most disastrous of taxes? . . . My friends, listen to one word, one single word.

Two centuries of depredations and robbery have hollowed out the abyss which is ready to swallow up the kingdom. This frightful abyss must be heaped full. Well! here is the list of French proprietors. Choose among the richest in order to sacrifice the citizens less. But choose; for must not a small number perish to save the mass of the people? Well, then. These two thousand notables possess enough to make up the deficit. Bring back order into your finances, peace and prosperity into the kingdom. Strike, sacrifice without pity these sad victims, hurl them into the abyss; it will be closed. . . . You recoil with horror. . . . Inconsistent, faint-hearted men! What! Do you not see, then, that by decreeing bankruptcy, or, what is more odious still, by making it inevitable without the decree, you defile yourselves with an act a thousand times more criminal and, incomprehensible to relate! gratuitously criminal?—for, after all, this horrible sacrifice would at least put an end to the deficit. But, do you believe, because you will not have paid, that you will no longer owe anything? Do you believe that the thousands, the millions of men who will lose in one moment, by the terrible explosion or by its

results, all the consolation of their lives, and perhaps their sole means of support, will let you peacefully enjoy your crime? Stoic contemplators of the incalculable evils that this catastrophe will vomit upon France; impassive egoists, who think that these convulsions of despair and misery will pass like so many others, and all the more swiftly because they will be more violent, are you very sure that so many men without bread will let you calmly relish the viands the number or delicacy of which you will not have diminished? . . . No, you will perish; and in the universal conflagration that you have not shuddered to kindle, the loss of your honor will not save a single one of your detestable pleasures.

That is where we are marching. . . . I hear patriotism spoken of, outbursts of patriotism, invocations to patriotism. Ah! do not prostitute these words, "country" and "patriotism." So the effort to give a portion of one's revenue to save all that one possesses is very magnanimous! Ah! gentlemen, that is only simple arithmetic; and he who will hesitate can only disarm indignation by the scorn which his stupidity ought to inspire. Yes, gentlemen, it is the most ordinary prudence, the most trivial wisdom, it is your grossest interests that I invoke. I say no more to you than I have already said: Will you be the first to give to the nations the spectacle of a people assembled to break the public faith? I say no more to you. Ah! what titles have you to liberty, what means will you have left to maintain it if from your first step you surpass the baseness of the most corrupt governments; if the need of your co-operation and your supervision is not the pledge of your constitution? . . . I tell you: you will all be involved in the universal ruin; and the first interested in the sacrifice which the government asks of you is yourselves.

Vote then for this extraordinary subsidy. . . . And may

it be sufficient! Vote for it, because if you have doubts about the means (vague, dim doubts), you have none concerning the necessity and our helplessness to find a substitute for it, at least immediately. Vote for it, because the public circumstances allow no delay, and we should be accountable for all hesitation. Beware of asking for time; misfortune never grants any. . . . Ah! gentlemen, in regard to a ridiculous motion of the Palais Royal, a laughable insurrection which never had any importance save in the feeble imaginations or the perverse designs of a few faithless men, you have lately heard these mad words: Catiline is at the gates of Rome, and the people deliberate. Surely, around us there has been neither Catiline, nor dangers, nor factions, nor Rome. . . . But to-day bankruptcy, hideous bankruptcy is there; it threatens to consume you, your property, your honor. . . . and you deliberate!

[Specially translated by Helen B. Dole.]

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ON THE ACCUSATION OF IMPLICATION IN THE INSURRECTION OF OCTOBER 5, 1789

DELIVERED OCTOBER 2, 1790

I DO not mount this tribune to defend myself. The object of ridiculous accusations, not one of which has been proved, and which would establish nothing against me even if each one should be proved, I do not regard myself as accused; for if I believed that a single man of sense (I except the small number of enemies whose outrages I esteem an honor) could believe me accusable I should not defend myself in this Assembly. I should wish to be judged; and as your jurisdiction is limited to deciding whether I ought or

ought not to be submitted to a trial, there is nothing left for me but to make a demand upon your justice and solicit a favor of your benevolence, that would be a tribunal.

But I cannot doubt your opinion; and if I present myself here it is in order not to miss a solemn occasion to clear facts which my profound scorn for libels, and my possibly too great indifference to calumnious reports, have never allowed me to attack outside of this Assembly; which, however, sanctioned by malevolence, might cause some strange suspicions of partiality to reflect upon those who believe they ought to absolve me. What I disdained when it concerned myself alone, I must closely scrutinize when I am attacked in the bosom of the National Assembly and as forming a part of it.

The explanations I am going to give, although they will doubtless appear very simple to you, since my witnesses are in this Assembly, and my arguments in the series of the most common combinations, offer, however, to my mind, I should say, a very great difficulty.

It is not to repress the just resentment which has weighed upon my heart for a year past, and to which at last I am forced to give vent. In this affair scorn is apart from hatred; it blunts it, it dulls it; and where is the soul so cast down that an opportunity for pardon does not seem to it a pleasure?

It is not even the difficulty of speaking of the tempests of a just revolution without recalling that if the throne has wrongs to excuse, national clemency has had plots to put into oblivion; for since in the bosom of the Assembly the King has come to espouse our stormy revolution, this magnanimous will, by forever effacing the deplorable appearances which perverse counsellors have given till then to the first citizen of the empire, has it not equally blotted out the more false appearances which the enemies of the public welfare have tried to find in the

popular movements, and the revival of which seems to have been the first object of the procedure of the Châtelet?

No, the real difficulty of the subject is entirely in the very history of the procedure. That history is profoundly odious. The annals of crime offer few examples of villainy so shameless and at the same time so unskilful. Time will know it; but the hideous secret cannot be revealed to-day without producing great trouble. Those who gave rise to the procedure of the Châtelet made the horrible combination so that if success escaped they would find in the very patriotism of him whom they wished to sacrifice the guarantee of their impunity. They felt that the public spirit of the offended would turn to his ruin or save the offender. . . . It is very hard thus to leave to intriguers a part of the salary on which they themselves had counted! But the country demands this sacrifice; and surely it has a right to still greater ones.

I will speak to you then only of facts which are purely personal to me; I will isolate them from all their surroundings; I give up explaining them except in themselves and by themselves; I give up, to-day at least, examining the contradictions of the procedure and its various readings, its episodes and its obscurities, its superfluities and its reticences; the fears that it has given to the friends of liberty, and the hopes it has lavished among its enemies; its secret aim and its apparent course, its momentary and its future success; the terror with which they desired to inspire the throne, perhaps the recognition they wished to obtain from it. I will not examine the conduct, the discourses, the silence, the movements, the repose of any actor in this great and tragic scene; I will content myself with discussing the three principal charges made against me, and with giving the answer to an enigma which your committee has believed it ought to keep secret, but which it is my honor to divulge.

If I were compelled to grasp the procedure as a whole, when a few shreds torn from it are sufficient for me; if I had to organize a great work for an easy defence, I should first establish that, as it concerned an accusation of complicity against me, and as this pretended complicity was not relative to the individual excesses which might have been committed, but to the cause of these excesses, it ought to be proved against me that there exists a prime mover in this affair; that the prime mover is the one against whom the procedure is principally directed, and that I am his accomplice. But as this course has not been employed against me in the accusation I am not at all obliged to follow it in my defence. It is sufficient for me to examine the witnesses, such as they are; the charges, such as are laid against me; and I shall have said everything when I have discussed three principal facts, since the triple malignity of the accusers, of the witnesses and judges, has been able neither to furnish nor acquire anything further from them.

I am accused of having run through the ranks of the Régiment de Flandre sword in hand, that is to say, I am accused of a great absurdity. The witnesses should have been able to make it all the more piquant, for, born among patricians, and yet a deputy of those who were then called the *tiers état*, I always made it a religious duty to wear the costume recalling the honor of such a choice. Surely the gait of a deputy in black coat, round hat, cravat and cloak, walking at five o'clock in the evening with drawn sword in hand, in a regiment, deserved to find a place among the caricatures of such a procedure. Nevertheless I observe that one can be very ridiculous without ceasing to be innocent. I observe that the action of carrying a sword in hand would be neither a crime of high treason against the King, nor of high treason against the

state. So, everything weighed, everything examined, the evidence of M. Valfond has nothing really shamefully about it, except for M. Gamanche, who found himself legally and vehemently suspected of being very ugly, since he resembles me.

But here is a more positive proof that M. Valfond is at least short-sighted. I have in this Assembly an intimate friend, and one whom, in spite of this well-known friendship, no one will dare tax with disloyalty or lying, M. La Marck. I spent the entire afternoon of October 5 at his house, alone with him, examining geographical maps, to study positions which were so interesting at that time to the Belgian provinces. This work, which absorbed his whole attention and attracted all mine, occupied us to the very moment when M. La Marck conducted me to the National Assembly, from which place he took me back home with him.

But in regard to this evening there is a remarkable fact which I call M. La Marck to witness; it is that having used scarcely three minutes to say a few words about the circumstances of the moment, about the siege of Versailles which was to be carried on by those terrible amazons spoken of by the Châtelet; and considering the fatal probability that perverse counsellors would compel the King to go to Metz, I said to him: "The dynasty is lost if Monsieur does not remain and does not take the reins of the government." We agreed on the means of having an audience with the Prince immediately if the King's departure took place. Thus it was that I began my rôle of accomplice and prepared to make M. d'Orléans lieutenant-general of the kingdom. Possibly you will find these facts more convincing and more certain than my costume of Charles XII.

I am reproached with having made this remark to M. Mou-