


CARNOT

AZARE NICOLAS MARGUERITE CARNOT, French statesman, scientist, and soldier, was born at Nolay, Burgundy, May 13, 1753, and died at Magdeburg, Prussia, Aug. 3, 1823. A member of an old and distinguished family in France, he received a good education, and, entering the army, obtained a lieutenancy in the corps of engineers. He was returned as a deputy to the Legislative Assembly in 1791 for Pas de Calais, and there espoused the cause of the Revolution, becoming a member of the Committee of Public Safety under Robespierre, and voting for the overthrow of the nobility and the execution of Louis XVI. Taking an active interest in the army and solicitous for its discipline and success in the field, he took part in the defeat of the Austrians by the French army under Jourdain, in which exploit, in October, 1793, he himself led the charge on foot and was hailed as "the Victor of Wattignies." To his military service on that occasion he owed his safety after the fall of Robespierre, when he became one of the Five Directors of the Republic, accepting the post also of minister of war and proposing a plan for the invasion of England. In the upheaval of the era he was proscribed and had to take refuge in Germany, but returned to Paris prior to the establishment of the Consulate, and voted against the extension of the latter, and against the making of Napoleon consul for life. The speech he made against the latter is here appended. For a time he lived now in retirement, interesting himself in science as an active member of the French Institute. In 1814, he became governor of Antwerp, which he defended until Napoleon's abdication. On the latter's return from Elba, he was made minister of the interior under Napoleon, and when the empire was overthrown, he withdrew first to Warsaw, then to Magdeburg, where he died in his seventieth year.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM IN FRANCE

DELIVERED AGAINST MAKING NAPOLEON CONSUL FOR LIFE IN 1802

FELLOW-CITIZENS—Among the orators who have preceded me, and who have all touched on the motion of our colleague Curee, several have anticipated the objections that might be made to it, and have responded with as much talent as amenity; they have given an example of a moderation which I shall endeavor to imitate
(420)

by proposing a few ideas which have apparently escaped them. And as to those whom I oppose, and thus render myself liable to that suspicion that my motives are merely personal, whoever would attribute such to me are ignorant of the character of a man entirely devoted to his country. In reply, I ask them to examine carefully my political conduct since the commencement of the revolution, and all the record of my private life.

I am far from desiring to diminish the praises accorded the First Consul; if we owed him but the code civil, his name would worthily be immortalized to posterity. But whatever the services a citizen has rendered his country, he must expect honors but in the extent of the national recognition of his work. If the citizen has restored public liberty, if he has been a benefactor to his country, would it be a proper recompense to offer him the sacrifice of that liberty? Nay! would it not be an annulment of his own work to convert that country into his private patrimony?

From the very moment it was proposed to the French people to vote to make the consulate an office for life, each easily judged there was a mental reservation, and saw the ulterior purpose and end of the proposal. In effect, there was seen the rapid succession of a series of institutions evidently monarchical; but at each move anxiety was manifested to reassure disturbed and inquiring spirits on the score of liberty, that these new institutions and arrangements were conceived only to procure the highest protection that could be desired for liberty.

To-day is uncovered and developed in the most positive manner the meaning of so many of these preliminary measures. We are asked to declare ourselves upon a formal proposition to re-establish the monarchical system, and to

confer an imperial and hereditary dignity on the First Consul.

At that time I voted against a life consulate; I shall vote now against any re-establishment of a monarchy, as I believe it my duty to do. But it was done with no desire to evoke partisanship; without personal feeling; without any sentiment save a passion for the public good, which always impels me to the defence of the popular cause.

I always fully submit to existing laws, even when they are most displeasing. More than once I have been a victim to my devotion to law, and I shall not begin to retrograde to-day. I declare, therefore, that while I combat this proposition, from the moment that a new order of things shall have been established, which shall have received the assent of the mass of our citizens, I shall be first to conform my actions; to give to the supreme authority all the marks of deference commanded by the constitutional oligarchy. Can every member of society record a vow as sincere and disinterested as my own?

I shall not force into the discussion my preference for the general merits of any one system of government over another. On these subjects there are numberless volumes written. I shall charge myself with examining in few words, and in the simplest terms, the particular case in which present circumstances place us. All the arguments thus far made for the re-establishment of monarchy in France are reduced to the statement that it is the only method of assuring the stability of the government and the public tranquility, the only escape from internal disorder, the sole bond of union against external enemies, that the republican system has been vainly essayed in all possible manners; and that from all these efforts only

anarchy has resulted. A prolonged and ceaseless revolution has reawakened a perpetual fear of new disorders, and consequently a deep and universal desire to see re-established the old hereditary government, changing only the dynasty. To this we must make reply.

I remark here that the government of a single person is no assurance of a stable and tranquil government. The duration of the Roman Empire was no longer than that of the Roman Republic. Their internecine troubles were greater, their crimes more multiplied. The pride of republicanism, the heroism, and the masculine virtues were replaced by the most ridiculous vanity, the vilest adulation, the boldest cupidity, the most absolute indifference to the national prosperity. Where was any remedy in the heredity of the throne? Was it not regarded as the legitimate heritage of the house of Augustus? Was a Domitian not the son of Vespasian, a Caligula the son of Germanicus, a Commodus the son of Marcus Aurelius? In France, it is true, the last dynasty maintained itself for eight hundred years, but were the people any the less tormented? What have been the internal dissensions? What the foreign wars undertaken for pretensions and rights of succession, which gave birth to the alliances of this dynasty with foreign nations? From the moment that a nation espouses the particular interests of one family, she is compelled to intervene in a multitude of matters which but for this would be to her of uttermost indifference. We have hardly succeeded in establishing a republic among us, notwithstanding that we have essayed it under various forms, more or less democratic. . . .

After the peace of Amiens, Napoleon had choice between the republican and monarchical systems; he could

do as he pleased. He would have met but the slightest opposition. The citadel of liberty was confided to him; he swore to defend it; and, holding his promise, he should have fulfilled the desire of the nation which judged him alone capable of solving the grand problem of public liberty in its vast extent. He might have covered himself with an incomparable glory. Instead of that, what is being done to-day? They propose to make for him an absolute and hereditary property of a great power of which he was made the administrator. Is this the real desire and to the real interest of the First Consul himself? I do not believe it.

It is true the State was falling into dissolution, and that absolutism pulled it from the edge of the abyss. But what do we conclude from that? What all the world knows—that political bodies are subject to affections which can be cured but by violent remedies; that sometimes a dictator is necessary for a moment to save liberty. The Romans, who were so jealous of it, nevertheless recognized the necessity of this supreme power at intervals. But because a violent remedy has saved a patient, must there be a daily administration of violent remedies? Fabius, Cincinnatus, Camillus saved Rome by the exercise of absolute power, but they relinquished this power as soon as practicable; they would have killed Rome had they continued to wield it. Caesar was the first who desired to keep this power: he became its victim; but liberty was lost for futurity. Thus everything that has ever been said up to this day on absolute government proves only the necessity for temporary dictatorships in crises of the State, but not the establishment of a permanent and irresponsible power.

It is not from the character of their government that great republics have lacked stability; it is because, having

been born in the breasts of storms, it is always in a state of exaltation that they are established. One only was the labor of philosophy, organized calmly. That republic, the United States of America, full of wisdom and of strength, exhibits this phenomenon, and each day their prosperity shows an increase which astonishes other nations. Thus it was reserved for the New World to teach the Old that existence is possible and peaceable under the rule of liberty and equality. Yes, I state this proposition, that when a new order of things can be established without fearing partisan influences, as the First Consul has done, principally after the peace of Amiens, and as he can still do, it becomes much easier to form a republic without anarchy than a monarchy without despotism. For how can we conceive a limitation which would not be illusory in a government of which the chief had all the executive power in his hand and all the places to bestow?

They have spoken of institutions to produce all these good effects. But before we propose to establish a monarchy, should we not first assure ourselves and demonstrate to those who are to vote on the question, that these institutions proposed are in the order of possible things, and not metaphysical obstructions, which have been held a reproach to the opposite system? Up to this moment nothing has been successfully invented to curb supreme power but what are called intermediary bodies or privileges. Is it, then, of a new nobility you would speak when you allude to institutions? But such remedies—are they not worse than the disease? For the absolute power of a monarch takes but our liberty, while the institution of privileged classes robs us at the same time of our liberty and our equality. And if even at the commencement dignities and ranks were but

personal, we know they would finish always as the fiefs of other times, in becoming hereditary.

To these general principles I shall add a few special observations. I assume that all the French give assent to these proposed changes; but it will be the real free will and wish of Frenchmen which is produced from a register where each is obliged to individually sign his vote? Who does not know what is the influence in similar cases of the presiding authority? From all parties in France, it would be said, springs a universal desire of the citizens for the re-establishment of the hereditary monarchy; but can we not look suspiciously on an opinion, concentrated thus far almost exclusively among public functionaries, when we consider the inconvenience they would have to manifest any contrary opinion; when we know that the liberty of the press is so enfeebled that it is not possible to insert in any journal the most moderate and respectful protests?

Doubtlessly there will be no making any choice of the hereditary chief, if they declare it necessary to have one.

Is it hoped, in raising this new dynasty, to hasten the period of general peace? Will it not rather be a new obstacle? Are we assured that the other great powers of Europe will assent to this new title? And if they do not, do we take up arms to constrain them? Or after having sunk the title of First Consul in that of Emperor, will he be content to remain First Consul to the rest of Europe while he is Emperor only to Frenchmen, or shall we compromise by a vain title the security and the prosperity of the entire nation?

It appears, therefore, infinitely doubtful if the new order of things can give us the stability of the present state. There is for the government one method of consolidation and strength. It is to be just; that no favoritism or bias

be of avail to influence its services; that there be a guarantee against robbery and fraud. It is far from me to desire to make any particular application of my language or to criticise the conduct of the government. It is against arbitrary power itself I appeal, and not against those in whose hands this power may reside. Has liberty then been shown to man that he shall never enjoy it? Shall it always be held to his gaze as a fruit that when he extends the hand to grasp he must be stricken with death? And nature, which has made liberty such a pressing need to us, does she really desire to betray our confidence? No! I shall never believe this good, so universally preferred to all others—without which all others are nothing—is a simple illusion. My heart tells me that liberty is possible, that its régime is easier and more stable than any arbitrary government, than any oligarchy.

But, nevertheless (I repeat it), I shall be always ready to sacrifice my dearest affections to the interest of our common country; I shall be satisfied to have once more caused to be heard the accents of an independent mind; and my respect for the law will be so much the more sure, as it is the fruit of long misfortunes, and of this reason, which commands us imperiously at this day to reunite as one body against the implacable enemy of one party as well as the other—of this enemy, which is always ready to foment discord, and to whom all means are lawful provided he can attain his end, namely—universal oppression and tyranny over the whole extent of the ocean.

I vote against the proposition.