

It's an old saying, Sire, but there's nothing constant under the sun. We must ply with circumstances – it is in reality they which govern states. The safety of the people should be the supreme law: your people, Sire, are led astray by new opinions. They have not erred from their devotion to your august person, which is extreme but – and I must not conceal it from Your Majesty – even this devotion is in large measure based on your well-known readiness to sacrifice even your own royal prerogative for the general good. Ought the right of the orders to deliberate separately be more sacred? No, Sire, I have no hesitation in saying so. It must give way to the needs of the moment, to the need to make the Estates-General work, to revive credit through public confidence, to provide for indispensable expenditure, to calm the people whilst they are experiencing a period of high food prices and are threatened with shortages.

People talk of upholding the constitution at all costs. But even if we closed our eyes to the terrifying scenario to which the strict application of this principle could lead, we should still need the means with which to act. Your Majesty has an army – it has to be paid. The royal treasury is empty: cannot these people see this army, almost from the start, reduced to free billeting and requisitions? Once discipline was slackened, would Your Majesty be able to rely on his troops? I pause before the sketch of this sad picture without including the advantage which rival powers may take of our internal troubles.

Sire, adopt the proposals which your ministers offer you. If it meets with resistance among the various orders it may perhaps only need patience and time will overcome difficulties. If, by misfortune, the result should be schism in the assembly, the people will see that their deputies have exceeded all limits without a sword having been drawn. Such is my preference. I make bold to transmit it directly to Your Majesty without having shown it to anyone, submitting it to your prudent consideration and august indulgence.

*Recueil de documents relatifs aux
Etats-Généraux*, vol. I(2), pp. 196–9

83 Barentin to the king, 22 June 1789

... Your Majesty will find enclosed the new draft [of the articles for the *séance royale*] which he charged M. Vidaud de La Tour to prepare. It has the advantage both of firmly maintaining the constitution and of opening up an avenue of conciliation which, without the king's dictating it, will have the same effects.

*Lettres et bulletins de Barentin à
Louis XVI* no. 52

84 The *séance royale* of 23 June

Declaration of the king concerning the present session of the Estates-General

- 1 The king wishes the ancient distinction between the three orders of the state to be preserved in its entirety as being indissolubly linked to the constitution of his kingdom; and that the deputies freely chosen by each of the three orders, forming three chambers, deliberating by order but able, with the sovereign's consent, to agree to deliberate together, may alone be considered as constituting the body of the representatives of the nation. Consequently the king declares null and void the decisions taken by the deputies of the Third Estate on the seventeenth of this month and any subsequently adopted as being illegal and unconstitutional. . . .
- 7 His Majesty, having exhorted the three orders, for the good of the state, to meet together for the present session of the Estates only, and to deliberate in common on matters of general interest, wishes to make known his intentions concerning the manner in which they should be effected.
- 8 The following will be expressly excluded from the matters which may be discussed in common: matters relating to the ancient and constitutional rights of the three orders, the form of organization to be given to future Estates-General, feudal and seigneurial properties and the profitable rights and honorific prerogatives of the first two orders.
- 9 The separate consent of the clergy will be necessary for all provisions tending to affect religion, ecclesiastical discipline, secular and regular orders and associations. . . .
- 11 If, with a view to facilitating their union, the three orders decide that the matters they are to discuss in common shall only be carried by a two-thirds majority, His Majesty is disposed to authorize this form.
- 15 Good order, public decency and indeed freedom of debate require that His Majesty forbid, as he does expressly, any person, other than the members of the three orders comprising the Estates-General, from attending their discussions, whether they be together or in separate chambers.

Declaration of the king's intentions (volontés)

- 1 No new tax will be imposed or any old one extended beyond the date stipulated by legislation without the consent of the representatives of the nation.
- 2 Neither future taxes nor old ones will be extended beyond the period elapsing before the next meeting of the Estates-General.