

Manifesto of the Paris Commune

To the French people:

In the painful and terrible conflict that again threatens Paris with the horrors of a siege and bombardment; that causes French blood to flow, sparing neither our brothers, our wives nor our children; crushed beneath cannonballs and rifle shot, it is necessary that public opinion not be divided, that the national consciousness not be confused.

Paris and the entire nation must know the nature, the reason, and the goal of the revolution that is being carried out. Finally, it is only just that the responsibility for the deaths, the suffering, and the misfortunes of which we are the victims fall on those who, after having betrayed France and delivered Paris to the foreigners, pursue with a blind and cruel obstinacy the ruin of the great city in order to bury, in the disaster of the republic and liberty, the dual testimony to their treason and their crime.

The Commune has the obligation to affirm and determine the aspirations and wishes of the populace of Paris, to define the character of the movement of March 18, misunderstood, unknown and slandered by the politicians seated at Versailles.

Once again, Paris works and suffers for all of France, for whom it prepares, through its combats and sacrifices, the intellectual, moral, administrative and economic regeneration, its glory and prosperity.

What does it ask for?

The recognition and consolidation of the Republic, the only form of government compatible with the rights of the people and the normal and free development of society.

The absolute autonomy of the Commune extended to all localities in France and assuring to each one its full rights, and to every Frenchman the full exercise of his faculties and abilities as man, citizen and producer.

The only limit to the autonomy of the Commune should be the equal right to autonomy for all communes adhering to the contract, whose association shall insure French unity.

The inherent rights of the Commune are:

The vote on communal budgets, receipts and expenses; the fixing and distribution of taxes; the direction of public services; the organization of its magistracy, internal police and education; the administration of goods belonging to the Commune.

The choice by election or competition of magistrates and communal functionaries of all orders, as well as the permanent right of control and revocation.

The absolute guarantee of individual freedom and freedom of conscience.

The permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas, the free defense of their interests, with guarantees given for these manifestations by the Commune, which alone is charged with overseeing and assuring the free and fair exercise of the right to gather and publicize.

The organization of urban defense and the National Guard, which elects its chiefs and alone watches over the maintenance of order in the city.

Paris wants nothing else as a local guarantee, on condition, of course, of finding in the great central administration — the delegation of federated Communes — the realization and the practice of the same principles.

But as an element of its autonomy, and profiting by its freedom of action, within its borders it reserves to itself the right to operate the administrative and economic reforms called for by the populace as it will; to create the institutions needed to develop and spread instruction, production, exchange and credit; to universalize power and property in keeping with the needs of the moment, the wishes of those concerned and the facts furnished by experience.

Our enemies are fooling themselves or are fooling the country when they accuse Paris of wanting to impose its will or its supremacy over the rest of the nation and to pretend to a dictatorship, which would be a veritable attack on the independence and sovereignty of other communes.

They are fooling themselves or are fooling the country when they accuse Paris of pursuing the destruction of that French unity constituted by the Revolution to the acclaim of our fathers, who hastened to the Fete de la Fédération from all corners of the old France.

Unity, as it has been imposed on us until today by the Empire, the monarchy or parliamentarism is nothing but unintelligent, arbitrary or onerous centralization.

Political unity, as Paris wants it, is the voluntary association of all local initiatives, the spontaneous and free concourse of all individual energies in view of a common goal: the well-being, the freedom and the security of all.

The communal revolution, begun by popular initiative on March 18, begins a new era of experimental, positive, scientific politics.

It's the end of the old governmental and clerical world, of militarism and fonctionnarisme, of exploitation, speculation, monopolies and privileges to which the proletariat owe their servitude and the Fatherland its misfortunes and disasters.

Let this beloved and great country — fooled by lies and calumnies — be reassured! The fight between Paris and Versailles is one of those that cannot be ended through illusory compromises. The end cannot be in doubt. Victory, pursued with an indomitable energy by the National Guard, will go to the idea and to right.

We call on France.

Warned that Paris in arms possesses as much calm as bravery, that it supports order with as much energy as enthusiasm, that it sacrifices itself with as much reason as energy, that it only armed itself in devotion to the liberty and glory of all: let France cease this bloody conflict!

It is up to France to disarm Versailles through the solemn manifestation of its irresistible will.

Called upon to benefit by our conquests, let it declare itself in solidarity with our efforts. Let it be our ally in this combat that can only end in the triumph of the communal idea or the ruin of Paris.

As for us, citizens of Paris, our mission is the accomplishing of the modern Revolution, the largest and most fecund of all those which have illuminated history.

It is our obligation to fight and to win.

April 19, 1871 the Paris Commune