

OBSERVATIONS SUR LES ÉTRANGERS.

*Observations concerning foreigners.*¹

I warn my readers that in praising the salutary distrust of other nations towards foreigners, and on the other hand in blaming the extreme confidence of the French towards foreigners, I am not claiming to approve extremes. My aim is only to engage my fellow citizens to reconcile their urbanity with the reserve needed to not be duped by the manoeuvres of other governments. Let foreigners be warmly welcomed, let us not push them away from society because of national prejudices that are always unjust, let us through consideration and kindness persuade all the inhabitants of the universe to forget the pleasures of their own motherlands, I approve of this conduct and I applaud the beautiful maxim of tolerance.

*I am human and nothing human is alien to me.*²

But things must stop there and those who go further are really not thinking: when the National Assembly decreed that being French would be a necessary qualification for eligibility for public employment, it was convinced that the Nation could not prudently entrust the direction of its affairs to a man who would have no interest in managing them well, and could wish for the opposite. It had calculated the influence of love for the motherland and had sensed the importance of validating this glorious passion. How is it possible therefore that, with total disregard for the spirit that dictated this decree, the deputies allow foreigners to attend their deliberations? How is it possible that they adopt the opinions of journalists known to be in the pay of various European Courts? How is it

¹ This pamphlet was written in July 1791 following the fusillade that had taken place on the Champ de Mars on the 17th of that month. The National Assembly after Louis XVI's flight to Varennes (and return to Paris a few weeks earlier) had been forced to consider his position. Had he abdicated his rights as some claimed or had he been 'abducted' against his will. The constitution that would define royal powers was almost ready to be declared. This was a delicate moment, particularly as removing the King could lead to war, so on the 15 July the deputies decreed Louis to be inviolable and suspended his position until he ratify the new constitution. In the interim various parties had sought to organise petitions to prove the King had abandoned his post and was not to be recognised as France's head of state. A mass signing was planned for July 17 on the Champ de Mars, by a construction known as the altar to the motherland, and a crowd gathered early to hear speeches. By mid-day, following the National Assembly's decree, organisers withdrew their petition. Another was immediately created. As people approached to sign two men, probably vagrants, were discovered hiding beneath the altar. Assumed to have wicked intentions (i.e. to prevent the signing through force, though some suggested they were merely indulging in an earlier form of upskirting) they were dispatched by the crowd. The ensuing commotion allowed Bailly, the mayor of Paris, to declare martial law and send in the National Guard to disperse the crowd. A number of citizens were shot though it is not clear if such orders were given – somewhere between fifteen to fifty individuals in a crowd of possibly up to fifty thousand – others were arrested. Marat, Desmoulins and Danton who were present managed to evade capture and go into hiding. This event became emblematic of a government's willingness to attack its own people, fearing mob rule, and harmed the constitutional movement while encouraging a nascent republicanism. The press and hearsay spoke of foreigners being responsible for the mayhem; this was probably not the case as most of those arrested were later released without charge. De Gouges welcomed foreigners, hated clichéd xenophobia, but did fear the influence of hostile forces and their agents. Responding immediately this event seemed to her to typify the work of these foreign agitators whose aim could only be to destabilise a monarchy about to benefit from its first constitution.

² This quote 'Homo sum et nihil humani a me alienum puto.' is from the first scene of *Heauton timoroumenos* (*The Self-Tormentor*) a play by P. Terentius Afer (aka Terence c 195 BCE – 159? BCE). He was a North African slave, educated and freed by his master, who became a successful playwright. Terence's works were widely studied and translated in Renaissance educational establishments throughout Europe and were an important influence on theatrical writing from that time forth. Molière was known to have based a play on one by Terence and de Gouges would certainly have been aware of the Roman playwright's place in European theatre.

possible that they are welcome in their clubs, their fraternal societies, and that it is they who, to the resentment of the French, propose and pay for the most incendiary motions? I would very much like to know what pressing interest animated that man from Neuchâtel who wanted to present a petition to the National Assembly, at the head of six thousand people. By what right did this foreigner come to influence the deliberations of the representatives of the French Nation?³ In Athens a law punished by death any foreigner who interfered in the people's assemblies, because he was usurping sovereignty. In France prison should be the penalty for whomsoever interferes in our political affairs. It would be all the more necessary because it is common knowledge that Pitt and the King of Prussia maintain agents in the capital and that they have more belief in their infamous patriotism than in the strength of their army.⁴ It is common knowledge that the bankrupt, and people turned away from the bosom of all nations due to their crimes, spread through Paris to excite revolt hoping to profit from the disorder, and restore a depleted fortune. Ah! If we listen to the insidious opinions of these men we will not have peace for a long while. Would it not be a wantonness of Revolution, this movement which encourages us to open our political discussions to foreigners? Does it not unite with French vanity to plunge us into an abyss of misery! We have been told so often that our Constitution would one day be that of all the peoples, and that the national cockade would go around the world! Let us learn to quietly be joyful, let us not aspire to the vain glory of establishing universal freedom, and whilst condemning religious missionaries let us not follow their example with an immoderate ardour to spread our principles, this being less a sign of happiness than a desire for brilliance.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR.

A mistake, as basic as it is rudimentary, on the part of my printer in this instance, gives me the opportunity through your paper to make it public.

The pamphlet that bears the title *Will He, or Will He Not, Be King?* contains this mistake. The ministers of the new regime are compromised by it, by me in all innocence, due to this inconceivable error. This pamphlet being printed hastily at night, I did not have time to correct my proofs. I will add furthermore: it had been distributed when I noticed it. On page 10 one reads: 'This man is in charge of a business. He is trusted by the committees and the ministers agents of the *Ancien Régime* and so-called patriots of the new. I will not name him but he will read this text.' 'The' in the singular should make the error of the plural obvious and here is literally the construction of this passage: 'This man

3 De Gouges is referring to Jean-Paul Marat born in Neuchâtel (then a Prussian principality, becoming Swiss in 1848) in 1743 and was murdered in his bath by Charlotte Corday in Paris in 1793. Marat is almost the only revolutionary figure that de Gouges openly loathed; his sanguinary mentality and determination to inflict a dictatorship on France revolted her sense of equality and justice.

4 William Pitt the Younger (1759 – 1806) Prime Minister of Great Britain 1783 – 1801 and 1804 – 1806 was strongly opposed to the French Revolution seeing it as a real threat to the British monarchy. It was a commonly held belief at the time in France that, at his behest, vast quantities of British cash had poured into the country during the early years of the revolution to fund spies and troublemakers. Many people wrote about it in their memoirs and pamphlets etc. thus it became accepted as historically accurate. Alfred Cobban writing in *The English Historical Review* of April 1954 deduced from his meticulous analysis of the available data that although the British did indeed fund a considerable number of agents in France this only really proliferated after the outbreak of war in 1793. Before that date, although many agitators did flood into France from elsewhere, these 'shady characters' who gravitated towards the 'muddy waters' of the Palais Royal were not English agents but 'disaffected democrats' who had failed to effect revolutions in their own countries. Olivier Blanc (1995) and Hugues Marquis (1996) writing from the French historical perspective also broadly agree that the major incursion of British agents into France began post 1793. Reciprocal animosity between Britain and France since the 1750s was such that it was all too easy to believe the former was responsible for inciting rebellion during the latter's pre-war revolutionary times.

is in charge of a business, an agent of ministers under the Ancien Régime and a so-called patriot of the new.⁵

I have the temerity to believe, Gentlemen, that you will diligently make public this inconsequence, one that the envious and enemies of order would not fail to make consequential.

I have the honour, Gentlemen, to be your very humble servant.

From the imprimerie du Postillon, rue Basse-du-Rempart-de-la-Madeleine, n° 22.

⁵ The error does appear to suggest that all ministers were also agents i.e. spies, as de Gouges feared, 'patriots' is also a plural further on in the phrase compounding the blunder. The discovery will have been unpleasant, one any published writer fears.