

= Women 's March on Versailles =

The Women 's March on Versailles , also known as The October March , The October Days , or simply The March on Versailles , was one of the earliest and most significant events of the French Revolution . The march began among women in the marketplaces of Paris who , on the morning of 5 October 1789 , were near rioting over the high price and scarcity of bread . Their demonstrations quickly became intertwined with the activities of revolutionaries , who were seeking liberal political reforms and a constitutional monarchy for France . The market women and their various allies grew into a mob of thousands , and encouraged by revolutionary agitators , they ransacked the city armory for weapons and marched to the Palace of Versailles . The crowd besieged the palace , and in a dramatic and violent confrontation , they successfully pressed their demands upon King Louis XVI . The next day , the crowd compelled the king , his family , and most of the French Assembly to return with them to Paris .

These events ended the king 's independence and signified the change of power and reforms about to overtake France . The march symbolized a new balance of power that displaced the ancient privileged orders of the French nobility and favored the nation 's common people , collectively termed the Third Estate . Bringing together people representing sources of the Revolution in their largest numbers yet , the march on Versailles proved to be a defining moment of that Revolution .

= = Background = =

The deregulation of the grain market implemented by Turgot , Louis XVI 's Controller @-@ General of Finances , in 1774 , was the main cause of the famine which led to the Flour War in 1775 . At the end of the Ancien Régime , the fear of famine became an ever @-@ present dread for the lower strata of the Third Estate , and rumors of the " Pacte de Famine " to starve the poor were still rampant and readily believed . Mere rumors of food shortage led to the Réveillon riots in April 1789 . Rumors of a plot aiming to destroy wheat crops in order to starve the population provoked the Great Fear in the summer of 1789 .

When the October journée took place , France 's revolutionary decade , 1789 ? 1799 , had barely begun . The revolution 's capacity for violence was as yet not fully realized . The storming of the Bastille had occurred less than three months earlier . Flush with newly discovered power , the common citizens of France ? particularly in the teeming capital , Paris ? felt a newly discovered desire to participate in politics and government . The poorest among them were almost exclusively concerned with the issue of food : most workers spent nearly half their income on bread . In the post @-@ Bastille period , price inflation and severe shortages in Paris became commonplace , as did local incidents of violence in the marketplaces .

The king 's court and the deputies of the National Constituent Assembly were all in comfortable residence at the royal city of Versailles , where they were considering momentous changes to the French political system . Reformist deputies had managed to pass sweeping legislation in the weeks after the Bastille 's fall , including the revolutionary August Decrees (which formally abolished most noble and clerical privileges) and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen . Now their attention was turned to the creation of a permanent constitution . Monarchists and conservatives of all degrees had thus far been unable to resist the surging strength of the reformers , but by September their positions were beginning , however slightly , to improve . In constitutional negotiations they were able to secure a legislative veto power for the king . Many of the reformers were left aghast by this , and further negotiations were hobbled by contentiousness .

Quiet Versailles , the seat of royal power , was a stifling environment for reformers . Their stronghold was in Paris . The bustling metropolis lay within walking distance , less than 21 kilometres (13 mi) to the northeast . The reformist deputies were well aware that the four hundred or more monarchist deputies were working to transfer the Assembly to the distant royalist city of Tours , a place even less hospitable to their efforts than Versailles . Worse , many feared that the king , emboldened by the growing presence of royal troops , might simply dissolve the Assembly , or at least renege on the August decrees . The king was indeed considering this , and when on 18

September he issued a formal statement giving his approval to only a portion of the decrees , the deputies were incensed . Stoking their anger even further , the king even stated on 4 October that he had reservations about the Declaration of the Rights of Man .

= = = Early plans = = =

Despite its post @-@ revolutionary mythology , the march was not a spontaneous event . Numerous calls for a mass demonstration at Versailles had already been made ; the Marquis of Saint @-@ Huruge , one of the popular orators of the Palais @-@ Royal , had called for just such a march in August to evict the obstructionist deputies who , he claimed , were protecting the king 's veto power . Although his efforts were foiled , revolutionaries continued to hold onto the idea of a march on Versailles to compel the king to accept the Assembly 's laws . Speakers at the Palais @-@ Royal mentioned it regularly throughout the next month , creating enduring suspicions of the proprietor , Louis Philippe II , Duke of Orléans . The idea of a march on Versailles was widespread , and was even discussed in the pages of the *Mercure de France* (5 September 1789) . A menacing unrest was in the air , and many nobles and foreigners fled the oppressive atmosphere .

= = = Royal banquet = = =

Following the mutiny of the French Guards a few hours before the storming of the Bastille , the only troops immediately available for the security of the palace at Versailles were the aristocratic Garde du Corps (Body Guard) and the Cent @-@ Suisses (Hundred Swiss) . Both were primarily ceremonial units and lacked the numbers and training to provide effective protection for the royal family and the government . Accordingly , the Flanders Regiment (a regular infantry regiment of the Royal Army) was ordered to Versailles in late September 1789 by the king 's minister of war , the Comte de Saint @-@ Priest , as a precautionary measure . On 1 October , the officers at Versailles held a welcoming banquet for the officers of the new troops , a customary practice when a unit changed its garrison . The royal family briefly attended the affair , walking amongst the tables set up in the opera house of the palace . Outside , in the cour de marbre (central courtyard) , the soldiers ' toasts and oaths of fealty to the king grew more demonstrative as the night wore on .

The lavish banquet was certain to be an affront to those suffering in a time of severe austerity , but it was reported in the *L 'Ami du peuple* and other firebrand newspapers as nothing short of a gluttonous orgy . Worst of all , the papers all dwelt scornfully on the reputed desecration of the tricolor cockade ; drunken officers were said to have stamped upon this symbol of the nation and professed their allegiance solely to the white cockade of the House of Bourbon . This embellished tale of the royal banquet became the source of intense public outrage .

= = Beginning of the march = =

On the morning of 5 October , a young woman struck a marching drum at the edge of a group of market @-@ women who were infuriated by the chronic shortage and high price of bread . From their starting point in the markets of the eastern section of Paris then known as the Faubourg Saint @-@ Antoine , the angry women forced a nearby church to toll its bells . Their numbers continued to grow and with restless energy the group began to march . More women from other nearby marketplaces joined in , many bearing kitchen blades and other makeshift weapons , as the tocsins rang from church towers throughout several districts . Driven by a variety of agitators , the mob converged on the Hôtel de Ville where they demanded not only bread , but arms . As more and more women ? and men ? arrived , the crowd outside the city hall reached between six and seven thousand , and perhaps as many as ten thousand .

One of the men was the audacious Stanislas @-@ Marie Maillard , a prominent vainqueur of the Bastille , who eagerly snatched up his own drum and led the infectious cry of " à Versailles ! " Maillard was a popular figure among the market @-@ women , and by unofficial acclamation was given a leadership role . Although hardly a gentle man , c Maillard helped suppress by force of

character the mob 's worst instincts ; he rescued the Hôtel de Ville 's quartermaster , Pierre @-@ Louis Lefebvre @-@ Laroche , a priest commonly known as Abbé Lefebvre , who had been strung up on a lamppost for trying to safeguard its gun powder storage . The Hôtel de Ville itself was ransacked as the crowd surged through taking its provisions and weapons , but Maillard helped prevent it from burning down the entire building . In due course , the rioters ' attention turned again to Versailles , and they filtered back to the streets . Maillard deputized a number of women as group leaders and gave a loose sense of order to the proceedings as he led the crowd out of the city in the driving rain .

As they left , thousands of National Guardsmen who had heard the news were assembling at the Place de Grève . The Marquis de Lafayette , in Paris as their commander @-@ in @-@ chief , discovered to his dismay that his soldiers were largely in favor of the march and were being egged on by agitators to join in . Even though he was one of France 's greatest war heroes , Lafayette could not dissuade his troops and they began threatening to desert . Rather than see them leave as another anarchic mob , the Parisian municipal government told Lafayette to guide their movements ; they also instructed him to request that the king return voluntarily to Paris to satisfy the people . Sending a swift horseman forward to warn Versailles , Lafayette contemplated the near mutiny of his men : he was aware that many of them had openly promised to kill him if he did not lead or get out of the way . At four o 'clock in the afternoon , fifteen thousand guards with several thousand more civilian latecomers set off for Versailles . Lafayette reluctantly took his place at the head of their column , hoping to protect the king and public order .

= = Goals of the march = =

The hunger and despair of the market women was the original impetus for the march , but what started as a search for bread soon took on a much more ambitious goal . The Hôtel de Ville had already opened its plentiful stores to the rioters , but they remained unsatisfied : they wanted not just one meal but the assurance that bread would once again be plentiful and cheap . Famine was a real and ever @-@ present dread for the lower strata of the Third Estate , and rumors of an " aristocrats ' plot " to starve the poor were rampant and readily believed .

At the same time , there was common resentment against the reactionary attitudes prevailing in Court circles even before the uproar sparked by the notorious banquet precipitated the political aspects of the march . Deeper planners in the crowd spread the word that the king needed to dismiss his royal bodyguards entirely and replace them all with patriotic National Guardsmen , a line of argument that had a compelling resonance among Lafayette 's soldiers .

These two popular goals coalesced around a third that was largely the revolutionaries ' idea , which was that the king and his court , and the Assembly as well , must all be moved to Paris to reside among the people . Only then would the foreign soldiers be expelled , food be reliably available , and France served by a leader who was " in communion with his own people " . The plan appealed to all segments of the crowd . Even those who were innocently supportive of the monarchy (and there were many among the women) felt the idea of bringing home le bon papa was a good and comforting plan . For revolutionaries , the preservation of their recent legislation and the creation of a constitution were paramount , and a lockdown of the king within reformist Paris would provide the best possible environment for the Revolution to succeed .

= = Siege of the palace = =

The crowd traveled the distance from Paris to Versailles in about six hours . Among their makeshift weaponry they dragged along several cannons taken from the Hôtel de Ville . Boisterous and energetic , they recruited (or impressed into service) more and more followers as they surged out of Paris in the autumn rain . In their ambiguous but always aggressive poissard slang , d they chattered enthusiastically about bringing the king back home . Less affectionately , they spoke of the queen , Marie Antoinette , and many had no restraint in calling for her death .

= = = Occupation of the Assembly = = =

When the crowd finally reached Versailles , it was met by another group that had assembled from the surrounding area . Members of the Assembly greeted the marchers and invited Maillard into their hall , where he fulminated about the Flanders Regiment and the people 's need for bread . As he spoke , the restless Parisians came pouring into the Assembly and sank exhausted on the deputies ' benches . Hungry , fatigued , and bedraggled from the rain , they seemed to confirm that the siege was a simple demand for food . The unprotected deputies had no choice but to receive the marchers , who shouted down most of the speakers and demanded to hear from the popular reformist deputy Mirabeau . The great orator declined this chance at demagoguery but nonetheless mingled familiarly with the market women , even sitting for some time with one of them upon his knee . A few other deputies welcomed the marchers warmly , including Maximilien Robespierre who was still at that time a relatively obscure figure in politics . Robespierre gave strong words of support to the women and their plight , and his efforts were received appreciatively ; his solicitations helped greatly to soften the crowd 's hostility towards the Assembly .

= = = Deputation to the king = = =

With few other options available to him , the President of the Assembly , Jean Joseph Mounier , accompanied a deputation of market @-@ women into the palace to see the king . A group of six women nominated by the crowd were escorted into the king 's apartment , where they told him of the crowd 's privations . The king responded sympathetically , and using all his charm impressed the women to the point that one of them fainted at his feet . After this brief but pleasant meeting , arrangements were made to disburse some food from the royal stores , with more promised , and some in the crowd felt that their goals had been satisfactorily met . As rain once again began to pelt Versailles , Maillard and a small cluster of market women trooped triumphantly back to Paris .

Most of the crowd , however , remained unpacified . They milled around the palace grounds with rumors abounding that the women 's deputation had been duped ? the queen would inevitably force the king to break any promises that had been made . Well aware of the surrounding dangers , Louis discussed the situation with his advisors . At about six o 'clock in the evening , the king made a belated effort to quell the rising tide of insurrection : he announced that he would accept the August decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man without qualification . Adequate preparations to defend the palace were not made , however : the bulk of the royal guards , who had been deployed under arms in the main square for several hours facing a hostile crowd , was withdrawn to the far end of the park of Versailles . In the words of one of the officers : " Everyone was overwhelmed with sleep and lethargy , we thought it was all over . " This left only the usual night guard of sixty @-@ one Gardes du Corps posted throughout the palace .

Late in the evening , Lafayette 's national guardsmen approached up the Avenue de Paris . Lafayette immediately left his troops and went to see the king , grandly announcing himself with the declaration , " I have come to die at the feet of Your Majesty " . Outside , an uneasy night was spent in which his Parisian guardsmen mingled with the marchers , and the two groups sounded each other out . Many in the crowd persuasively denounced Lafayette as a traitor , complaining of his resistance to leaving Paris and the slowness of his march . By the first light of morning , an alliance of the national guards and the women was evident , and as the crowd 's vigor was restored , their roughneck poissard clamoring resumed .

= = = Attack on the palace = = =

At about six o 'clock in the morning , some of the protesters discovered a small gate to the palace was unguarded . Making their way inside , they searched for the queen 's bedchamber . The royal guards raced throughout the palace , bolting doors and barricading hallways and those in the compromised sector , the cour de marbre , fired their guns at the intruders , killing a young member of the crowd . Infuriated , the rest surged towards the breach and streamed inside .

Two guardsmen , Miomandre and Tardivet , each separately attempted to face down the crowd and were overpowered. e The violence boiled over into savagery as Tardivet 's head was shorn off and raised aloft on a pike . As battering and screaming filled the halls around her , the queen ran barefoot with her ladies to the king 's bedchamber and spent several agonizing minutes banging on its locked door , unheard above the din . In a close brush with death , they barely escaped through the doorway in time .

The chaos continued as other royal guards were found and beaten ; at least one more was killed and his head too appeared atop a pike . Finally , the fury of the attack subsided enough to permit some communication between the former French Guards , who formed the professional core of Lafayette 's National Guard militia , and the royal gardes du corps . The units had a history of cooperation and a military sense of mutual respect , and Lafayette , who had been snatching a few hours of sleep in his exhaustion , awoke to make the most of it . To the relief of the royals , the two sets of soldiers were reconciled by his charismatic mediation and a tenuous peace was established within the palace .

= = = Lafayette 's intervention = = =

Although the fighting ceased and the two commands of troops had cleared the palace , the mob was still everywhere outside . The rank and file of both the Flanders Regiment and another regular unit present , the Montmorency Dragoons , now appeared unwilling to act against the people . Lafayette , who had earned the court 's indebtedness , convinced the king to address the crowd . When the two men stepped out on a balcony an unexpected cry went up : " Vive le Roi ! " The relieved king briefly conveyed his willingness to return to Paris , acceding " to the love of my good and faithful subjects " . As the crowd cheered , Lafayette stoked their joy by dramatically pinning a tricolor cockade to the hat of the king 's nearest bodyguard .

After the king withdrew , the exultant crowd would not be denied the same accord from the queen , and her presence was demanded loudly . Lafayette brought her to the same balcony , accompanied by her young son and daughter . The crowd ominously shouted for the children to be taken away , and it seemed the stage might be set for a regicide . Yet , as the queen stood with her hands crossed over her chest , the crowd ? some of whom had muskets leveled in her direction ? warmed to her courage . Amid this unlikely development , Lafayette cannily let the mob 's fury drain away until , with dramatic timing and flair , he knelt reverently and kissed her hand . The demonstrators responded with a muted respect , and many even raised a cheer which the queen had not heard for quite a long time : " Vive la Reine ! "

The goodwill generated by this surprising turn of events defused the situation , but to many observers the scene on the balcony was mere theatricality without long @-@ term resonance . However pleased it may have been by the royal displays , the crowd insisted that the king come back with them to Paris .

= = = Return to Paris = = =

At about one o 'clock in the afternoon of 6 October 1789 , the vast throng escorted the royal family and a complement of one hundred deputies back to the capital , this time with the armed National Guards leading the way . By now the mass of people had grown to over sixty thousand , and the return trip took about nine hours . The procession could seem merry at times , as guardsmen hoisted up loaves of bread stuck on the tips of their bayonets , and some of the market women rode gleefully astride the captured cannon . Yet , even as the crowd sang pleasantries about their " Good Papa " , their violent mentality could not be misread ; celebratory gunshots flew over the royal carriage and some marchers even carried pikes bearing the heads of the slaughtered Versailles guards . A sense of victory over the ancien régime was imbued in the parade , and it was understood by all that the king was now fully at the service of the people .

No one understood this so viscerally as the king himself . After arriving at the dilapidated Tuileries Palace , abandoned since the reign of Louis XIV , he was asked for his orders and he replied with

uncharacteristic diffidence , " Let everyone put himself where he pleases ! " Then , with a sullen poignancy , he asked for a history of the deposed Charles I of England to be brought from the library .

= = Aftermath = =

The rest of the National Constituent Assembly followed the king within two weeks to new quarters in Paris . In short order , the entire body settled in only a few steps from the Tuileries at a former riding school , the Salle du Manège . However , some fifty @-@ six monarchien deputies did not come with them , believing the mob threat in the capital to be personally dangerous . The October journées thus effectively deprived the monarchist faction of significant representation in the Assembly as most of these deputies retreated from the political scene ; many , like Mounier , fled the country altogether .

Conversely , Robespierre 's impassioned defense of the march raised his public profile considerably . The episode gave him a lasting heroic status among the poissardes and burnished his reputation as a patron of the poor . His later rise to become virtual dictator of the Revolution was greatly facilitated by his actions during the occupation of the Assembly .

Lafayette , though initially acclaimed , found that he had tied himself too closely to the king . As the Revolution progressed , he was hounded into exile by the radical leadership . Maillard returned to Paris with his status as a local hero made permanent . He participated in several later journées , but in 1794 became stricken with illness , dying at the age of thirty @-@ one . For the women of Paris , the march became the source of apotheosis in revolutionary hagiography . The " Mothers of the Nation " were highly celebrated upon their return , and they would be praised and solicited by successive Parisian governments for years to come .

King Louis XVI was officially welcomed to Paris with a respectful ceremony held by mayor Jean Sylvain Bailly . His return was touted as a momentous turning point in the Revolution , by some even as its end . Optimistic observers such as Camille Desmoulins declared that France would now enter a new golden age , with its revived citizenry and popular constitutional monarchy . Others were more wary , such as journalist Jean @-@ Paul Marat , who wrote :

It is a source of great rejoicing for the good people of Paris to have their king in their midst once again . His presence will very quickly do much to change the outward appearance of things , and the poor will no longer die of starvation . But this happiness would soon vanish like a dream if we did not ensure that the sojourn of the Royal Family in our midst lasted until the Constitution was ratified in every aspect . L 'Ami du Peuple shares the jubilation of its dear fellow citizens , but it will remain ever vigilant .

It would take almost two full years until the first French Constitution was signed on 3 September 1791 , and it required another popular intervention to make it happen . Louis attempted to work within the framework of his limited powers after the women 's march but won little support , and he and the royal family remained virtual prisoners in the Tuileries . Desperate , he made his abortive flight to Varennes in June 1791 . Attempting to escape and join up with royalist armies , the king was once again captured by a mixture of citizens and national guardsmen who hauled him back to Paris . Permanently disgraced , Louis was forced to accept a constitution more denuding of his kingship than any previously put forward . The spiral of decline in the king 's fortunes culminated at the guillotine in 1793 .

= = = Orléanist conspiracy theory = = =

Even while the women were marching , suspicious eyes looked upon Louis Philippe II , Duke of Orléans , already behind the July uprisings , as being somehow responsible for the event . The Duke , a cousin of Louis XVI , was an energetic proponent of constitutional monarchy , and it was an open secret that he felt himself to be uniquely qualified to be king under such a system . Though allegations of his specific actions concerning the October march remain largely unproven , he has long been considered a significant instigator of the events . The Duke was certainly present as a

deputy to the Assembly , and he was described by contemporaries as smiling warmly as he walked among the protesters at the height of the siege ; many of them are said to have hailed him with greetings like " Here is our king ! Long live King Orléans ! " Many scholars believe that the Duke paid agents provocateurs to fan the discontent in the marketplaces and to conflate the women 's march for bread with the drive to bring the king back to Paris . Others suggest he coordinated in some way with Mirabeau , the Assembly 's most powerful statesman at the time , to use the marchers to advance the constitutionalist agenda . Still others go so far as to assert that the crowd was guided by such important Orléanist allies as Antoine Barnave , Choderlos de Laclos , and the duc d 'Aiguillon , all dressed as poissardes in women 's clothes . Yet most of the Revolution 's foremost histories describe any involvement of the Duke as ancillary to the action , efforts of opportunism that neither created nor defined the October march.^f The Duke was investigated by the crown for complicity and none was proven . Still , the pall of suspicion helped convince him to take on Louis XVI 's offer of a diplomatic mission conveniently outside the country . He returned to France the following summer and resumed his place in the Assembly where both he and Mirabeau were officially exonerated of any misdeeds regarding the march . As the Revolution moved forward into the Terror , the Duke 's royal lineage and alleged avarice convicted him in the minds of radical leaders and he was sent to his execution in November 1793 .

= = Legacy = =

The women 's march was a signal event of the French Revolution , its impact on a par with the fall of the Bastille . For its inheritors , the march would stand as an inspirational example , emblematic of the power of popular movements . The occupation of the deputies ' benches in the Assembly created a template for the future , forecasting the mob rule that would frequently influence successive Parisian governments . But it was the crudely decisive invasion of the palace itself that was most momentous ; the attack removed forever the aura of invincibility that once cloaked the monarchy . It marked the end of the king 's resistance to the tide of reform , and he made no further open attempts to push back the Revolution . As one historian states , it was " one of those defeats of royalty from which it never recovered " .