

The Demands of the Commune

Directions: Read the following selections, and summarize the main ideas of each. Be prepared for class discussion.

Document 1

From the Official Journal of the Commune, 20 April 1871

. . . The Commune has the duty of affirming and determining the aspirations and wishes of the people of Paris; to explain the true character of the movement of March eighteenth—a movement which had been up to this time misunderstood, misconstrued, and calumniated by the politicians sitting at Versailles. Once more Paris labors and suffers for the whole of France, for whom she is preparing, by her battles and her sacrifices, an intellectual, moral, administrative, and economic regeneration, to win a glorious prosperity.

What does she demand?

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

The absolute autonomy of the Commune and its extension to all localities in France, and the assurance by this means to each person of the integrity of his rights, to every Frenchman the full exercise of his faculties and capacities as a man, a citizen, and a worker.

The autonomy of the Commune will be limited only by the equal right of autonomy to be enjoyed by the other Communes which adhere to the contract, from which association will come the unity of France.

The inherent rights of the Commune are:

The right of voting the Communal budget of receipts and expenditure; of fixing and apportioning the taxation; of directing local services; of organizing its own magistracy, internal police, and public education; of administering the property belonging to the Commune.

The right of choosing by election or competition, with responsibility and a permanent right of control and recall, the communal magistrates and officials of all ranks.

The right of individual liberty under an absolute guarantee, and of liberty of conscience and of labor.

The right of permanent participation by the citizens in communal affairs by means of the free manifestation of their ideals, and a free defense of their own interests, guarantees being given for such manifestations by the Commune, which is alone charged with the duty of guarding and securing the free and just right of meeting and of publicity.

The right of organizing the urban defenses and the national guard, which is to elect its own officers, and alone provide for the maintenance of order in the city.

Paris desires no more guarantee than this, with the condition, of course, that she shall find in the grand central administration, composed of delegates from the Federal Communes, the realization and practice of the same principles.

To insure, however, her own independence, and her own freedom of action, Paris reserves to herself the liberty of effecting as she may think fit, in her own sphere, those administrative and economic reforms which her population shall demand, of creating such institutions as are proper

for developing and extending education, production, commerce, and credit; and of extending the enjoyment of power and property in accordance with the necessities of the moment, the wish of the persons interested, and the data furnished by experience. . . .

The Communal Revolution initiated by the people on the eighteenth of March inaugurated a new political principle, experimental, positive, and scientific.

It was the end of the old official and clerical world, of militarism, and bureaucracy, of exploitation, stock-jobbing, monopolies, and privileges, to which the working class owed its state of servitude, and the country its misfortunes and disasters. . . .

Document 2

From *The Civil War in France, March–May 1871*, Karl Marx

The provincial French middle class saw in the Commune an attempt to restore the sway their order held over the country under Louis Philippe, and which, under Louis Napoleon, was supplanted by the pretended rule of the country over the towns. In reality, the Communal Constitution brought the rural producers under the intellectual lead of the central towns of their districts, and there secured to them, in the working men, the natural trustees of their interests. The very existence of the Commune involved, as a matter of course, local municipal liberty, but no longer as a check upon the now superceded state power. . . .

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. . . . They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economic agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant. . . .

Opposed to this new world at Paris, behold the old world at Versailles—that assembly of ghouls of all defunct regimes, Legitimists and Orleanists, eager to feed upon the carcass of the nation—with a tail of antediluvian republicans, sanctioning, by their presence in the Assembly, the slaveholders' rebellion, relying for the maintenance of their parliamentary republic upon the vanity of the senile mountebank at its head [Thiers], and caricaturing 1789 by holding their ghastly meeting in the *Jeu de Paume*. There it was, this Assembly, the representative of everything dead in France, propped up to the semblance of life by nothing but the swords of the generals of Louis Bonaparte. Paris all truth, Versailles all lie; and that lie vented through the mouth of Thiers.

Document 3

**From Karl Marx's Address to the General Council
of the International Workingman's Association
on the Civil War in France, 1871**

Paris, the central seat of the old governmental power, and, at the same time, the social stronghold of the French working class, had risen in arms against the attempt of Thiers and the Rurals to restore and perpetuate the old governmental power bequeathed to them by the empire. Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men. This fact was now to be transformed into an institution. The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.

Document 4

From *The Times*, 1 June 1871

Human nature shrinks in horror from the deeds that have been done in Paris. The crimes of the Insurgents have surpassed the most gloomy forebodings of what would be accomplished under the Red Flag. The burning of Paris was diabolical; the shooting of hostages "a deed without a name." But it seems we are destined to forget the work of these maddened savages in the spectacle of the vengeance wreaked upon them. The wholesale executions inflicted by the Versailles soldiery, the triumph, the glee, the ribaldry of the "Party of Order," sicken the soul.

- 1.) Analyze the point of view of each document.
- 2.) Summarize the main point of each article in one sentence.
- 3.) Write a one paragraph response to the following statement: "The Paris Commune was the final stage of the French Revolution."

