When the three estates met at the royal palace in 1789, representatives brought with them their region’s list of grievances (cahiers de doléances). Below is a selected sample of some of the many brought and discussed.

The Clergy of Blois and Romoratin

The clergy of the bailliage of Blois have never believed that the constitution needed reform. Nothing is wanting to assure the welfare of king and people except that the present constitution should be religiously and inviolably observed.

The constitutional principles concerning which no doubt can be entertained are:

1. That France is a true monarchy, where a single man rules and is ruled by law alone.
2. That the general laws of the kingdom may be enacted only with the consent of the king and the nation. If the king proposes a law, the nation accepts or rejects it; if the nation demands a law, it is for the king to consent or to reject it; but in either case it is the king alone who upholds the law in his name and attends to its execution.
3. That in France we recognize as king him to whom the crown belongs by hereditary right according to the Salic law.
4. That we recognize the nation in the States General, composed of the three orders of the kingdom, which are the clergy, the nobility and the third estate.
5. That to the king belongs the right of assembling the States General, whenever he considers it necessary. For the welfare of the kingdom we ask, in common with the whole nation, that this convocation be periodical and fixed, as we particularly desire, at every five years, except in the case of the next meeting, when the great number of matters to be dealt with makes a less remote period desirable.
6. That the States General should not vote otherwise than by order.
7. That the three orders are equal in power and independent of each other, in such a manner that their unanimous consent is necessary to the expression of the nation's will.
8. That no tax may be laid without the consent of the nation.
9. That every citizen has, under the law, a sacred and inviolable right to personal liberty and to the possession of his goods.

The Nobility of Blois

Deep and established ills cannot be cured with a single effort: the destruction of abuses is not the work of a day. Alas! Of what avail to reform them if their causes be not
removed? The misfortune of France arises from the fact that it has never had a fixed constitution. A virtuous and sympathetic king seeks the counsels and cooperation of the nation to establish one; let us hasten to accomplish his desires; let us hasten to restore to his soul that peace which his virtues merit. The principles of this constitution should be simple; they may be reduced to two: Security for person, security for property; because, in fact, it is from these two fertile principles that all organization of the body politic takes its rise.

PERSONAL LIBERTY

Art. I. In order to assure the exercise of this first and most sacred of the rights of man, we ask that no citizen may be exiled, arrested or held prisoner except in cases contemplated by the law and in accordance with a decree originating in the regular courts of justice.

That in case the States General determine that provisional detention may be necessary at times, it ought to be ordained that every person so arrested shall be delivered, within twenty-four hours into the hand of appropriate judges, to be judged with the least possible delay, in conformity with the laws of the kingdom; that evocations be abolished, and that no extraordinary commission be established in any instance; finally that no person be deprived of his position, civil or military, without judgment in due form.

From the right of personal liberty arises the right to write, to think, to print and to publish, with the names of authors and publishers, all kinds of complaints and reflections upon public and private affairs, limited by the right of every citizen to seek in the established courts legal redress against author or publisher, in case of defamation or injury; limited also by all restrictions which the States General may see fit to impose in that which concerns morals and religion.

We indicate further a number of instances in which natural liberty is abridged:

1. The abuse of police regulations, which every year, in an arbitrary manner and without regular process, thrusts a number of artisans and useful citizens into prisons, work-houses and places of detention, often for trivial faults and even upon simple suspicion;
2. The abuse of exclusive privileges which fetter industry;
3. The guilds and corporations which deprive citizens of the right of using their faculties;
4. The regulations governing manufactures, the rights of inspection and marque, which impose restrictions that have lost their usefulness, and which burden industry with a tax that yields no profit to the public treasury.

TAXES

Art. 2. A tax is a partition of property.
This partition ought not to be otherwise than voluntary; in any other case the rights of property are violated: Hence it is the indefeasible and inalienable right of the nation to consent to its taxes.

According to this principle, which has been solemnly recognized by the king, no tax, real or personal, direct or indirect, nor any contribution whatsoever, under whatsoever name or form, may be established except with the consent and free and voluntary approval of the nation. Nor may said power of consenting to a tax be transferred or delegated by the nation to any magistracy or other body, or exercised by the provincial estates nor by the provincial, city or communal assemblies: superior and inferior courts shall be especially charged to attend to the execution of this article, and to prosecute as exactors those who may undertake to levy a tax which has not received the proper sanction.

SPECIAL MATTERS

3. Throughout the whole kingdom there should be but one code of laws, one system of weights and measures.
4. That a commission be established composed of the most eminent, men of letters of the capital and provinces, and citizens of all orders, to formulate a plan of national education for the benefit of all classes of society; and for the purpose of revising elementary text-book.
5. That all customs duties collected in the interior of the kingdom be abolished, and all custom-houses, offices and customs barriers be removed to the frontier.

CONCERNING THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION 
AND THE MEANS OF OBTAINING THE ABOLITION OF ABUSES

Art. 8. Up to this point we have merely indicated the abuses which have accumulated in France during a long succession of centuries; we have made it evident that the rights of citizens have been abridged by a multitude of laws which attack property, liberty and personal safety.

That these rights have suffered injury as well in the nature as in the imposition of the taxes; in the administration of justice in both civil and criminal law; that this has been the case especially in the administration of the public revenues.

It is not sufficient to suppress these abuses; it is necessary to prevent their return; there must be established in ever-active influence, moving without interruption in the direction of public prosperity, which shall bear in itself the germ of all good, a principle destructive of all evil.

In order to accomplish this great object the nobility of the bailliage of Blois demand:

That the States General about to assemble shall be permanent and shall not be dissolved until the constitution be established; but in case the labors connected with the
establishment of the constitution be prolonged beyond a space of two years, the assembly shall be reorganized with new deputies freely and regularly elected.

That a fundamental and constitutional law shall assure forever the periodical assembly of the States General at frequent intervals, in such manner that they may assemble and organize themselves at a fixed time and place, without the concurrence of any act emanating from the executive power.

That the legislative power shall reside exclusively in the assembly of the nation, under the sanction of the king, and shall not be exercised by any intermediate body during the recess of the States General.

That the king shall enjoy the full extent of executive power necessary to insure the execution of the laws; but that he shall not be able in any event to modify the laws without the consent of the nation.

That the form of the military oath shall be changed, and the troops promise obedience and fidelity to the king and the nation.

That taxes may not be imposed without the consent of the nation; that taxes may be granted only for a specified time, and for no longer than the next meeting of the States General.


The Third Estate of Dourdon

The order of the third estate of the City, Bailliage, and County of Dourdan, imbued with gratitude prompted by the paternal kindness of the King, who deigns to restore its former rights and its former constitution, forgets at this moment its misfortunes and impotence, to harken only to its foremost sentiment and its foremost duty, that of sacrificing everything to the glory of the Patrie and the service of His Majesty. It supplicates him to accept the grievances, complaints, and remonstrances which it is permitted to bring to the foot of the throne, and to see therein only the expression of its zeal and the homage of its obedience.

It wishes:

1. That his subjects of the third estate, equal by such status to all other citizens, present themselves before the common father without other distinction which might degrade them.
2. That all the orders, already united by duty and a common desire to contribute equally to the needs of the State, also deliberate in common concerning its needs.
3. That no citizen lose his liberty except according to law; that, consequently, no one be arrested by virtue of special orders, or, if imperative circumstances necessitate such orders, that the prisoner be handed over to the regular courts of justice within forty-eight hours at the latest.

4. That no letters or writings intercepted in the post [mails] be the cause of the detention of any citizen, or be produced in court against him, except in case of conspiracy or undertaking against the State.

5. That the property of all citizens be inviolable, and that no one be required to make sacrifice thereof for the public welfare, except upon assurance of indemnification based upon the statement of freely selected appraisers. . . .

15. That every personal tax be abolished; that thus the capitation and the taille and its accessories be merged with the vingtiemes in a tax on land and real or nominal property.

16. That such tax be borne equally, without distinction, by all classes of citizens and by all kinds of property, even feudal and contingent rights.

17. That the tax substituted for the corvee be borne by all classes of citizens equally and without distinction. That said tax, at present beyond the capacity of those who pay it and the needs to which it is destined, be reduced by at least one-half. . . .

Justice

1. That the administration of justice be reformed, either by restoring strict execution of ordinances, or by reforming the sections thereof that are contrary to the dispatch and welfare of justice. . . .

7. That venality of offices be suppressed. . . .

8. That the excessive number of offices in the necessary courts be reduced in just measure, and that no one be given an office of magistracy if he is not at least twenty-five years of age, and until after a substantial public examination has verified his morality, integrity, and ability. . . .

10. That the study of law be reformed; that it be directed in a manner analogous to our legislation, and that candidates for degrees be subjected to rigorous tests which may not be evaded; that no dispensation of age or time be granted.

11. That a body of general customary law be drafted of all articles common to all the customs of the several provinces and bailliages. . . .

12. That deliberations of courts . . . which tend to prevent entry of the third estate thereto be rescinded and annulled as injurious to the citizens of that order, in contempt of the authority of the King, whose choice they limit, and contrary to the welfare of justice, the administration of which would become the patrimony of those of noble birth instead of being entrusted to merit, enlightenment, and virtue.

13. That military ordinances which restrict entrance to the service to those possessing nobility be reformed.
Finances

1. That if the Estates General considers it necessary to preserve the fees of aides, such fees be made uniform throughout the entire kingdom and reduced to a single denomination.
2. That the tax of the gabelle be eliminated if possible, or that it be regulated among the several provinces of the kingdom.
3. That the taxes on hides, which have totally destroyed that branch of commerce and caused it to go abroad, be suppressed forever.
4. That all useless offices, either in police or in the administration of justice, be abolished and suppressed.

Agriculture

4. That the right to hunt may never affect the property of the citizen; that, accordingly, he may at all times travel over his lands, have injurious herbs uprooted, and cut luzernes, sainfoins, and other produce whenever it suits him; and that stubble may be freely raked immediately after the harvest.

11. That individuals as well as communities be permitted to free themselves from the rights of banalité, and corvee, by payments in money or in kind, at a rate likewise established by His Majesty on the basis of the deliberations of the Estates General.

15. That the militia, which devastates the country, takes workers away from husbandry, produces premature and ill-matched marriages, and imposes secret and arbitrary taxes upon those who are subject thereto, be suppressed and replaced by voluntary enlistment at the expense of the provinces.