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Louise Michel
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1871

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In Defence of the Commune

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I do not wish to defend myself, I do not wish to be defended. I belong completely to the social revolution, and I declare that I accept complete responsibility for all my actions. I accept it completely and without reservations.

You accuse me of having taken part in the murder of the generals? To that I would reply Yes, if I had been in Montmartre when they wished to have the people fired on. I would not have hesitated to fire myself on those who gave such orders. But I do not understand why they were shot when they were prisoners, and I look on this action as arrant cowardice.

As for the burning of Paris, yes, I took part in it. I wished to oppose the invader from Versailles with a barrier of flames. I had no accomplices in this action. I acted on my own initiative.

I am told that I am an accomplice of the Commune. Certainly, yes, since the Commune wanted more than anything else the social revolution, and since the social revolution is the dearest of my desires. More than that, I have the honour of being one of the instigators of the Commune, which by the way had nothing—nothing, as is well known—to do with murders and arson. I who was present at all the sittings at the Town Hall, I declare that there was never any question of murder or arson.

Do you want to know who are really guilty? It is the politicians. And perhaps later light will be brought on to all these events which today it is found quite natural to blame on all partisans of the social revolution...

But why should I defend myself? I have already declared that I refuse to do so. You are men who are going to judge me. You sit before me unmasked. You are men and I am only a woman, and yet I look you in the eye. I know quite well that everything I could say will not make the least difference to your sentence. So a single last word before I sit down. We never wanted anything but the triumph of the great principles of the revolution. I swear it by our martyrs who fell at Satory, by our martyrs whom I acclaim loudly, and who will one day have their revenge.

Once more I belong to you. Do with me what you please. Take my life if you wish. I am not the woman to argue with you for a moment....

What I claim from you, you who call yourselves a Council of War, who sit as my judges, who do not disguise yourselves as a Commission of Pardons, you who are military men and deliver your judgement in the sight of all, is Satory where our brothers have already fallen.

I must be cut off from society. You have been told to do so. Well, the Commissioner of the Republic is right. Since it seems that any heart which beats for freedom has the right only to a lump of lead, I too claim my share. If you let me live, I shall never stop crying for revenge, and I shall avenge my brothers by denouncing the murderers in the Commission for Pardons....

I have finished. If you are not cowards, kill me!