

1973-04-03: [SOCIETY, THEORY] Mousnier, "Les offices de la Stratification Sociale," Venalité, III, iii [check this].

The nether ends of office as the chief vehicle of mobility are probably very small: Not many come up from bottom regularly, not many emerged from top into true nobility. But then, if all those who did come stayed in, willy nilly (& Paulette making office a part of ordinary inheritance meant that it was never lost to a family), then over the years the size of this "*ordre*" must have grown. Indeed, internal growth probably much greater, by several sons making the grade, than the external growth by new routuriers coming in.

Within the world of offices, as described in richness & documented detail by Mousnier, one gets a true picture of status-seeking according to fixed rules, with true mobility possible, which is almost bizarre. It was an "establishment" in its mentality, if everyone was trying to move up or consolidate his position within the system and not questioning that this was the way to "make it." The extended generational accomplishment, regulated by law, also must have given great social stability as far as not wanting the system changed: if one's father had given his life, and one was now giving his own so that his son could acquire status whereby the grandson would be noble by birth, there can have been very little impulse to change the system. The investment in lives--whole series of generations--was so great that to deny the system was to deny the worth of one's life.

It is not unlike America and its myth of the middle class of the next generation making it--except that American notion is a myth. Or was, perhaps, the French idea of rising via orders also a myth? Did it only finally dawn on French in avocat types, in later 18th century, that there really wasn't much mobility? Were there perhaps suddenly, too many of them ready to make the upward move than there was opportunity in terms of openings? One would have to see if the 3-generation-to-nobility formula was still operative in later 18th century as it seems to have been in the 17th century. If that fails, & no man feels himself involved in a transgenerational upward mobility, then the thought of changing the system is not denying one's life involvement but changing the rules so that that life can really have meaning.

But back in early 17th century all the status groups within those that have to do with "public power" (from king and Peers down licenciés) could have thought of themselves as the *one* group--those with public power--who were the leaders of the nation corporatively. If they have such a consensus, then the ruling element is well annealed, and whatever quarrels there are between them are more gentlemen's disagreements than meaningful social conflicts.

It might be most fruitful, therefore, to think of Loyseau's juridical definition of orders as those with aptitude to public power as defining a unified status group--or even a class--from King to licencié than of describing all of society.

Certainly all those from king to *licenciée* who read *Ordres* could think of themselves as the rulers, in some measure, of society, whereas the real third estate--95 per cent of society--could not. Loyseau's *Ordres*, that is, defines the establishment, and Mousnier's thought that this defines society is ridiculous. Mousnier may sociologize the notion if he wishes, but by the time he makes his subdivisional considerations law-power-status-etc., he has emasculated the good functional definition of orders (in terms of public law) which Loyseau had had.