

1974-03-17a: [DYNASTIC OFFICIALDOM] 16th & 18th Century Mentalities.

In respect to the Estates-General, the 16th century resistance-right thinkers saw it as a way to check the king by means of a personal confrontation. It was a way to controlling royal power, not of overriding it. Exceptionally, we might say, the E.G. might depose a king, but only to appoint another one and to allow him to rule in a just way without the E.G.. As I envision it, deducing the statement of Beza, who is the most articulate on the role of the E.G., it is a contingent aspect of government, that exists on the same level as the king on an hypothetical three-dimensional diagram of rulership, as a potential force behind the king, who is, in the foreground, full and real, a force that may have to become concrete sometimes in order to rectify the king's bad behaviour, and if necessary to change the ruler, and then immediately retreat to its shadowy existence again. It is, therefore, a safety device for the office of the king, in case the incumbent should not serve his function well. It is not a normal organ of government with power to represent the ruled regularly. It represents the ruled only in terms of the original contract that the king must rule justly. The E.G. is like the *ephor* or tribune, designed only to protect against malfeasance, not to play an active role in the business of governance but to step in only when it looks like it is failing. In the organic theory of society, with its hierarchical sense, the lower elements are normally subject to the higher ones; although their respective mutual operations should be respected.

In the 18th-century notion, the E.G., when finally called, is clearly a device to reflect the will of the nation as a whole. National sentiment had replaced royal sentiment, la nation had replaced le roi as the main patriotic notion sometime in the middle of the 18th century. The whole bureaucratic apparatus, as I see it, believed that it was working with the king, as part of a complicated mechanical instrument to keep the nation running. Anti-royalism was now in terms of checks and balances of independently valid parts of government. The notion of the king as the head, in some organological fashion--the universal metaphor of the middle ages and well into the 17th century, has almost completely disappeared.

What are the preconditions for this changed view of the state?

--A sense that French is more important than Breton (or whatever). The term patria in the 16th century still meant foremost the province; by the end of the 18th century at least it meant France.

--The sense of cultural, linguistic, and intellectual unity of the country. How much this was due to the age of Louis XIV, how much to the *Academies royales*, and to their provincial counterparts (which is territorially limited, did not have intellectual limits to their concerns).

--The triumph of a sense of national law over the *coutumiers*. Still not well proven, though the work of Domat *et. al.*, from the later 17th century onwards, in preparing the basis for the Civil Code of 1804, is not much appreciated.

--The existence of a national administration, which, if not yet organized along the purely bureaucratic lines of the Revolution and the 19th century, was still that standardized in procedure, and its members that interchangeable between one unit and another, that an unofficial sense of common cause prevailed. This in spite of the fact that they had proprietary right to their offices, and superficial estimates might judge that they were above all self-interested.

--If we can make a clear differentiation between the mentality of the new class of officeholders in the time of their rise in the later 16th century, and their mentality in the age of their mature operation in the 18th century, we will have as good an index of the changed political condition of France as is possible. The main line of the argument would probably be that at first the officeholders were just seeking to have personal family security, and that they were very

behold to the king for their offices; they were, therefore, an extension of the old notion of truly monarchical rule, in which all authority (which he got from God) passed through him to all lesser magistrates. On the level of his class, the nobility, he was supposed to be responsive to his peers in the feudal sense. In the 18th century, this office-holding class had acquired nobility for the largest part, so that the status of their family in society had been won irreparably. The office was not a great part of their wealth. Their performance was true service. They did not see themselves as functionaries of the king, but of the nation. Their language reveals this. They were not organized juridically into *compagnies* or *corps*, as merchants tended to be still, but nonetheless possessed a sense of common purpose and function which was outgoing in spirit, rather than withdrawing as the old corporate notion was. To organize into *compagnies* is to try to protect oneself against intruders; the robins, as I see them, saw their group as a national professional association of government technocrats. Not an *ordre*, as far as I see it, because their social position was ambiguous; if noble, then less than the best, for there were a half-dozen or more expressions to describe the nobles, in a progression nuancée (Bluche, *La vie quotidienne de la Noblesse Française au XVIIIe siècle*, P., 1973, 17) if no longer bourgeois, then still not that far removed from bourgeois status, with lots of relatives who were still bourgeois, that they had the respect for their former status.

[Can one believe that the first in a line to become born noble in that moment was taught to disdain all his ancestors because they were *routuriers*? Or did he learn from his status that family devotion had given him what he was, and that solid bourgeois virtue was the normal route to nobility of people like himself? If so, is he not still bourgeois in some ways?]