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Coussergues and the Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis

April 7, 2018 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

By far the highest point of the Bourbon Restoration, possibly after the conquest of Algeria depending on your priorities, was the so-called “Spanish expedition” of 1823, when a 60,000-strong French army entered the Pyrenees, smashed the Spanish liberals at the Fuerte de Trocadero and restored Ferdinand VII to power from his house arrest under a three-year period of a liberal-constitutionalist coup (1820-1823), the “*triennio liberal*.”

This also ties in as an addendum to my [previous post](#)

(<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2018/04/04/metternich-and-his-secret-police/>) on Metternich and conservative internationalism, of which the “Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis” (the popular name for the 1823 intervention in Spain itself) as approved by the Congress of Verona was certainly a fine hour. It is perhaps also one of the last examples of a familial and chivalric component in foreign policy, involving as it did a Bourbon coming to the aid of another Bourbon.

One of the intervention’s most forceful advocates was the intransigent MP Jean-Claude Clausel de Coussergues (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Claude_Clausel_de_Coussergues) (1759-1846), for whom it had major symbolic implications for the future of the conservative order in the continent. A recurring figure in his pamphlet treatment (<https://books.google.com/books?id=POsB77GCwgoC>) is Henry IV of France.

With the installation of Joseph Bonaparte on the Spanish throne in 1808 began a massive insurgent resistance in Spain during the Peninsular War, with the Iberian peninsula splitting into many provisional governments called juntas. Though many of them were traditionalist, there were also a lot of modernizing elements, the “*afrancesados*” who had been devotees of the enlightened absolutism of Charles III. After the Siege of Cadiz ended in 1812 with Allied victory, a unicameral body now known as the Cadiz Cortes claimed national sovereignty and passed the Spanish Constitution of 1812, a landmark event in liberal history. Concurrently, juntas in Spanish America pushed for their independence.

After the restoration of Ferdinand VII of Spain in 1814, the constitution was abolished. In 1820 a mutiny led by Rafael del Riego evolved into a coup against the monarchy as the 1812 constitution was restored and a *progresista* government appointed. Among other charming reforms during this *trienio liberal* was

the imposition of an intendancy system

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1822_territorial_division_of_Spain), as the basis of administrative divisions in the country.

To this day, the period from Ferdinand VII's second restoration until his death is known by its liberal pejorative, the "década ominosa." Yet despite Ferdinand's absolutist tendencies, when for instance in 1824 he demanded a *donativo* from the Basque Provinces for three million reales, he ultimately agreed to a deal with the provincial junta for a lower sum and in return for confirmation of local police prerogatives (see *Vizcaya on the Eve of Carlism*, p.101), whereas under the subsequent liberal ministry of Mendizabal a decade later, there was no such mercy.

The Duke of Sully, Henry IV's most eminent minister, was an early advocate of the type of power politics that aimed to unseat earlier dynastic-familial considerations, which Coussergues and many of the conservative diplomatists — Hardenberg, Gentz, Ficquelmont, Montmorency-Loval, etc. — were ostensibly advocating for. Sully, in his *Grand Design*, stated that "peace is the great and common Interest in Europe. Its petty Princes ought to be continually employed in preserving it between the greater Powers... and the greater Powers should force the lesser into it, if necessary, by assisting the weak and oppressed." Sully envisioned a Europe split into about 15 equally balanced states, a rather different ideal from a concert operating on the principle of legitimacy.

Coussergues appears to have instead brought up Henry IV as a role model owing to his deference to the Catholic faith after the Siege of Paris in 1590, and his apt combination of repression and clemency in dealing with dissidents: lustrating the clerks, fining the financiers and executing the great rebels. Specifically, he cites an edict dated to December 27, 1592 (but not ratified in the parlement of Tours until February 1, 1593) ordering the divestment of all leagues and associations so that the king would "receive them with perpetual forgetfulness of past things," but also declaring those who obstinately refused as conspirators and instigators of *lèse-majesté*. Sedition and libel was punishable up to death.

(Popular sovereignty and Calvinism, to Coussergues, have an intimate connection, and he regards Frederick II of Prussia ("the Great") as one of its most devastating carriers. "Ministers and kings themselves no longer believed in the principle of their power.")

He fired back at England for refusing to approve the Spanish intervention, as "the impunity, or even the rewards given to the great political crimes since 1814, and the apology for the revolt (and all its consequences for the monarchs) made this year by the ministers of England, have left a stronger impression than the declarations and the words of the kings." The specific example he gives is the bloody aftermath of the siege of Madrid in May 20, 1808 when the French troops led by Gen. Bessieres were slaughtered by the constitutionalist militias under Gen. Zayas, leaving about 600 dead. Many of these appear to have been women and children. The two French officers who had come in afterward with a flag of truce were also fired upon. He likens this incident to Joachim Murat in Italy under Napoleon.

"A great prince enters this country at the head of a powerful army: the people go to meet their liberator: no defense remains to the leaders of the conspiracy; universally abhorred, they have neither soldiers nor money. In other centuries, such men, in such circumstances, would have seen a resource only in the flight or in the clemency of their monarch. Today, the unavenged crimes of the revolutionaries, their models, deliver them from any fear. The French army is at the gates of Madrid, and Zayas is strafing the Spanish royalists, old men, women, and children, who think to shout "Long live the King!" Our army is in the city, and the murderers of Vinuesa dare to appear there," Coussergues writes.

(About a decade later, an outbreak of cholera in Madrid was blamed on “Carlist sympathizer” monks poisoning wells, and on July 17, 1834, some 75 monks were massacred by a mob in the “La Latina” district.)

If anything, Coussergues actually regarded the regency and the juntas as being overly sclerotic and insufficiently faithful to the cause of their king. Their nationalistic bias compromised their legitimacy (being in this case foreign-backed) and led them into, if not sympathy with, a certain leniency toward the constitutionalists as despite nominally rejecting revolution, the cortes and juntas did not wish to decisively and unambiguously declare them criminals and traitors.

The reason for this? He in fact blamed the Congress of Vienna for not going all the way with counterrevolution, certainly not with the level of enthusiasm that Alexander I of Russia had. Their realism had gotten in the way of their anti-Jacobinism.

“The complete triumph which the allied sovereigns procured for the revolutionaries of France in 1814, and which they guaranteed by their all-powerful influence and even by their deeds, until the time of the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818; This sort of sanction, granted by all kings to the principles of the French Revolution, was the principal, and one might say, the sole cause of the revolutions of Spain, Portugal, Naples, and Piedmont. The conspirators undertook these revolutions, in full safety. Did they need money to win soldiers? The capitalists of all parts of Europe have opened their purses to them; These clever calculators hastened to take a mortgage on the proceeds of the present and future assassinations, on the spoliation of the churches and the most respectable families, and all this in safety.”

(Here he is most likely referencing the stationed Allied forces, particularly the English, and their influence on Louis XVIII which motivated him to dissolve the *chambre introuvable*, the fiercely conservative and overwhelming ultra-royalist majority parliament in the early phases of the Bourbon Restoration. The Duc de Richelieu, appointed as PM, was also a moderating force due to his interest in appeasing the Allies and reducing France’s war indemnities. There was, of course, in addition the whole paradox of a monarchist parliament applying legislative pressure to force the monarch into being more monarchist. If Maria Sofia Corciulo’s research is to be believed, Louis XVIII just wasn’t a particularly reactionary king to begin with — which made Coussergues’ appeals to France’s past in Henry IV all the more relevant to the time.)

“According to the new principles of European policy, at the time of the restoration of Louis XVIII, not only the regicides, but the most devoted ministers and servants of the usurper remained in Paris, and preserved all their agents in the provinces. Buonaparte was able to govern France on the island of Elba; at length he came, on regulated days, from the coasts of Provence to Paris, like a sovereign who returns to his capital after having visited his provinces. And if this man of misfortune had ceased to exist, or if he had first been deported to St. Helen’s Island, another more extensive and dangerous conspiracy would have attacked the monarchy.”

(Although the so-called “Second White Terror” of 1815 had driven out big-time Bonapartists like Fouché and Cambacères, a good deal remained as civil servants, and many of the men who had endorsed the *federes* of the Hundred Days would go on to be Orleanists and ultimately supporters of Louis-Napoleon’s coup.)

“At this period of 1814, as we have already remarked, the allied sovereigns, after having destroyed the power of Buonaparte, treated with the ancient leaders of the revolution as with a legitimate power, and they guaranteed him all his conquests. These days, the same powers declared that they did not pretend to impose a government on France, and they implicitly recognized that in every country every inhabitant

could enter into deliberation as to the choice of a government; that he could therefore take up arms for his opinion, and that foreign sovereigns had no other duty than to declare themselves for the victorious party: a policy according to which there would no longer exist, anywhere, any government by right; by virtue of which conspiracies could change every day the governments of fact, and which, at this time of the Hundred Days, obliged Europe, in the absence of principles, to arm a million men and to shed so much blood in Waterloo.”

(Here likely in reference to the Treaty of Paris forcing Louis XVIII into adopting a constitution, as well as again the high war indemnities that the restored France had to pay. In fact, his restoration was not at all guaranteed at first. It was Wellington who was the most influential advocate of putting the Bourbon line back. Metternich greatly admired Napoleon, saying that “this age” belonged to him, and spoke highly of Napoleon’s Memoirs of St. Helena. So, accusing the Viennese Congress of leniency had a good deal of truth here.)

“The continual undertakings of the revolutionaries of France, the revolutions of Spain, Portugal, Naples, and Piedmont, have at last made Europe feel the fatal consequences of these new doctrines: the monarchs of Russia, Austria, and Prussia proclaimed, in the Congress of Laibach, the eternal maxims which are the safety of nations; and the King of France, who had already put them into practice, by rejecting the constitution decreed by the Senate on the 6th of April, 1814, published them from the height of his throne, announcing that he was arming to restore to Spain the legitimate authority.”

(And here is the model of the Holy Alliance — far more forceful, confident and unterrified in general.)

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