

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Old school cuckservatism

October 4, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

[A shorter and smoother piece this time around.]

The French historian Auguste de Gerando recounts an exchange (<https://archive.org/stream/latransylvaniee01grgoog#page/n39/mode/2up>) between members of the Hungarian high and low nobility, in his Transylvanian travelogue published in 1845:

One day [one of these] gentlemen came to complain to a neighboring magnate. He took off his hat, which he held in his hand while the lord listened to him. The latter induced the gentleman to cover himself, for the weather was cold.

"I will not do it," said the gentleman. "I know what respect I owe you."

"What?," replied the smiling man, who was a man of wit, "Are we not both equal, both nobles?"

"No doubt, but I am a simple gentleman, and you are a powerful lord."

"I can not be more powerful than you, we have the same privileges. I am only rich."

"This is true."

"So you're bowing to my purse?"

"In fact, you are right. You are rich, and I am not. There is no other difference." And he proudly put on his hat.

Such an ideal of aristocratic egalitarianism, most powerfully expressed by the Polish szlachta, was nevertheless an animating impulse for noblemen throughout Europe. Hence thinkers like Boulainvilliers, Dubuat-Nancay and Francois de Villiers would seek historical justifications for their noble prerogatives in episodes such as the Frankish invasion of Roman Gaul, the primary purpose being the identification of a dignified class intrinsically separate from and ruling over the *tiers-etat*, whatever its internal divisions by rank may be.

As the provincial and lower nobles would progressively be shut off from political office, these posts being occupied mostly by jurists, with the occasional sinecure for blood-princes and magnates of older lineage, a feeling of resentment would brew among them.

Their privileges start to become burdens. They want to marry that young *fraulein*, but they risk abrogating their title. They have a beef with some haute-bourgeois judge or parlementaire who wrongfully convicted their father. (That was Lally-Tollendal's case, in fact.) They want to engage in a speculative venture, but if they enter commerce, their tax exemptions are toast. They want to personify the body politic, but they are now just one among many others, their noble titles debased and inflated by Machiavellian kings and their ministers of state for the purpose of neutralizing their class.

Shafted by scoundrelous kings who refused to follow the limits that the clergy tried to instill into them, and envying the higher nobles with their pomp and seignioral income, the provincials attempted to ally themselves with the people, advocating fiscal and legal equality to crush those above them and tempt those below them, but including an escape hatch (such as perhaps a chamber of peers) to elevate themselves higher. This would blow up in their faces, as the people simply looked on them as reactionary taxmen and parasitic idlers, proceeding to drive them out into exile or outright murder them — while keeping the Rights of Man for themselves.

The *monarchiens*, a faction of the Constituent Assembly that saw its heyday for about half a year in the early phases of the Revolution, was one such grouping. Its aim was to make a parliamentary monarchy out of France, and in many ways they can be regarded as the progenitors of conservatism, in the sense that they were neither total Jacobin levellers nor reactionaries, but reformers who wanted to retain the forms of the old regime, yet steer them into a more rationalized direction based off the political blueprints of English liberalism. In some respects, they exemplified the politics of a progressive finance minister like Turgot or Calonne. By nationalizing the monarchy, they would complete the project of Richelieu, Mazarin and Choiseul of eradicating feudal obstruction, but at the same time substitute the national assembly for the royal court, so that the dreams of the provincial nobles to become grand statesmen would now be fulfilled.

The most tragically stupid of these men was probably the comte d'Antraigues, who actually was not quite part of the *monarchiens* specifically, but was in fact a more radical provincial noble who would shift to the right in part because of the threat to his economic interests by the abolition of feudal dues.

In December 1788, a public memoir (<http://alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/the-memoir-of-the-princes-of-the-blood-1788/>), from the princes of the blood to the king expressed their disturbance regarding the “revolution brewing in the principles of government, which is brought on by the ferment of opinion,” however they also stated that in principle they would be willing to strike a deal regarding fiscal equality:

May the Third Estate therefore cease to attack the rights of the first two orders; rights which, no less ancient than the monarchy, must be as unchanging as its constitution; that it limit itself to seeking the reduction in taxes with which it might be burdened; the first two orders, recognising in the Third Estate citizens who are dear to them, will, by the generosity of their sentiments, be able to renounce those prerogatives which have a financial dimension, and consent to bear public charges in the most perfect equality.

(Note the emphasis on “public,” though.)

The comte d'Antraigues could not afford that. His escapades would go on to include serving as a spy to Louis XVIII, travel across Switzerland, Germany and Britain, pamphleteering against Napoleon, before ultimately being murdered along with his wife in 1812 for unclear but almost certainly politically related motivations.

Before that, however, he was immensely drunk on the gospel of progress, having met Rousseau personally, and later exceeding Mirabeau and Sieyes in his optimism.

The Third Estate, to the comte d'Antraigues, in his *Memoire sur les Etats Generaux* (1788), was "this most respectable of all bodies, this body in which all the power really resides, this body which upholds the state, which is really the nation, while the others are merely dependencies of it."

He stuck it to the great nobles, describing them as "[those] who seem to form around the king a new nation, an enemy of the people."

Earning some 40,000 livres yearly from feudal dues, however, he had to find a way to include that in popular government also. The people, in all their good wisdom, would undoubtedly consent to pay the maintenance they owe as vassals.

That they did. In 1792, his favorite chateau, the Bastide, was pillaged and burned by a mob of 500 people. That's certainly one way of providing welfare and social insurance, I'll say.

Still, he tried to defend a very innovative political theory, indeed: Rousseauist Voluntaryist Neofeudalism. [MPC username available] In the *Memoire sur le rachat des droits feodaux*, he defends seignioral dues as a mutually beneficial relationship: the lord exploits the produce of his land, and the peasant is given independent initiative within the predefined limits of the incidents he owes.

To prevent the people from infringing this obviously optimal outcome, he shrewdly loads the definition of popular sovereignty to be restricted by higher law rather than reign absolute: "But by what sign can one recognize the will of the people? That is where we differ with the opinion of the representatives of that portion of the people which constitutes the Third Estate. *The people do not really will what they are made to will when they are misled; the people never will anything unjust; and when they demand an injustice, to resist them is to obey them.*"

(So ~~deluded~~ enlightened was D'Antraigues that he initially never even thought the Third Estate would want to get rid of vote-by-order in favor of the more democratic vote-by-head. When they did, he appealed to the sanctity of property rights. How would a unitary national assembly that counts its votes by head protect them, he wondered? Beats me.)

That was that, then. When the "most respectable of all bodies in which all the power really resides," the same body "which is really the nation" started to take his stuff, it was time to go full ultra-trad counterrevolutionary and club some sansculottist heads in. To no avail.

Another constitutional debate that took place in the summer and fall of 1789 concerned the so-called "absolute royal veto," which was to be contrasted with the merely suspensive veto, the latter capable of being overridden by the legislature. It was traditionally assumed that the advocates of the absolute veto were trying to preserve traditional royal prerogative, as opposed to the newly emerging "national representation."

But in fact, the monarchien argument for the veto was based on the notion of the *volonte generale*. Their de facto leader Jean Joseph Mounier said that the king was but the “first delegate” of the people, and that the king and the National Assembly together jointly expressed the general will. The Baron Malouet was even more explicit, describing the veto as “a right and a national prerogative, conferred on the head of the nation by the nation itself, in order to proclaim and guarantee that any resolution of its representatives is or is not the expression of the general will.” Absolutism is nothing else but the predecessor stage of liberalism, and here it is most clearly.

And so, the monarchien deputy Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre could entertain the preposterous belief (<https://books.google.com/books?id=i8JBAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA27&output=text>) that “the freedom of the press, or the free communication of thoughts” would calm public licentiousness, and that the “natural effect” of said liberty would be “the return of order, decency, and respect for objects of public veneration.”

(Years later, in 1801, Mounier would try to debunk the claims of the abbé Barruel and others about Masonic influence in the French Revolution. He would resort to an argument that in retrospect is quite humorous in its lack of prescience. He questioned how the principles of anarchy could prevail in Masonic lodges when kings, princes, priests and magistrates attended them, and that no major revolutionary change on the scale of France had by then occurred outside of it despite Freemasonry’s wide diffusion. If only he had lived to see the fruits. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alta_Vendita))

In the end, if you want to know what a middle-low alliance looks like, here’s an example:

On the morning of 14 December 1790, an angry crowd surrounded the royal prison in Aix en-Provence and forced the release of the marquis de la Roquette and the avocat au parlement Jean Joseph Pascalis. Led by militant members of the Club des anti-politiques, a radical club in Aix composed largely of artisans, the crowd escorted the two men through the streets of Aix to the elegant Cours Mirabeau, where each was hanged by a rope from a street lantern. Later that day the same fate befell Andre-Raymond Guiramand, an elderly chevalier of St. Louis who in recent days had ardently and vocally defended the royalist cause from the steps of the cafe Guion. Thus abruptly ended the brief existence of the Club des amis de la paix in Aix, whose gala opening had been scheduled to occur two days earlier.

Or is that a high-middle-low-middle alliance?

The primary reason why such vigorous acts on part of the working classes have dwindled is because the men of letters have successfully taught them that they’re all “middle class.” But that illusion is quickly bursting. Nevertheless, hard-hat rioters are easy to misdirect. Fire them up against clueless college students and you’re good to go. National Guard: 1, Kent State: 0. Surely our guy Nixon wouldn’t start anything stupid like the EPA or something.

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9 thoughts on “Old school cuckservatism”

1. Pingback: [Old school cuckservatism | Reaction Times](#)

2. Michael Rothblatt says:

October 6, 2017 at 3:16 pm

>Absolutism is nothing else but the predecessor stage of liberalism, and here it is most clearly.

Of course, every successful example of Oriental Despotism was based on some form of popular sovereignty. In China it was implicit, through Mandate of Heaven. In Constantinople it was explicit, shouting mobs would raise and depose the emperors. As Western Absolutism was carved out of Feudalism on shaky foundations it had a terminal weakness — dynastic claims. One could rebel against the emperor in China, or Constantinople, without rebelling against the whole system. Furthermore, elites being able to win the throne for themselves had no incentive to undermine the entire monarchic system, they only need depose the reigning dynasty — whereas d'Antraigues, for example, never could become the king, his only option was to push ideology which would grant some political space for himself. Due to dynastic claims, Western Absolutism could be undermined by pointing out how dynastic claims make it insufficiently public. And since dynastic claims were justified by Divine Right, there was then also a need to do away with the influence of faith in society, thereby scheming Machiavellian monarchs in the end brought down Christianity together with themselves.

Reply.◦ Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:October 8, 2017 at 10:17 pm

My next piece is going to be a criticism of Sir Robert Filmer and Anglican royal supremacy, so it is prescient of you to bring up this contractualist angle.

Reply.

3. marcusmontisursinensis says:

October 8, 2017 at 9:37 pm

China and Constantinople differ from Western Europe, since the level of civilization never achieved a degradation that would end trade and collecting taxes, becoming agricultural autarky. Court, bureaucracy, minting golden coins, keeping at least certain level of professional/mercenary army or militia.

A large empire with the competing factions of generals, courtiers/mandarins, eunuchs, harem concubines/mistresses and queen-mothers. In China, foreign invaders would fill some top positions, leaving the bureaucratic mandarin system intact. Constantinople was not so lucky, being pressured by the Muslims from the east and any moderate force from the West (first Robert Guiscard, contemporaneously with Seljuks at Manzikert, later maritime states such as Venice). It took an ambitious city-state and a moderate number of Franks to decide the fate of the (Eastern) Roman Empire and turn it into a number of petty states. Maybe the Chinese and Constantinopolitan model are good from the perspective of preserving the system while deposing an emperor. But not so much against foreign invaders.

Certainly, France was fatally obsessed by the Capetians as the only legitimate dynasty already by the end of the Hundred Years' War. Louis XII ascended without difficulties. No one questioned the legitimacy of Henry IV Bourbon (whose common ancestor with Henry III was St. Louis, more than 300 dead by that moment), only his Protestant faith. The Catholic League had no better proposal than an aged Catholic cardinal, close relative of Henry Bourbon, in the same fashion James II/VII was replaced by his Protestant daughters, and later by the Welfs of Hannover, who were less proximate to the main line (through James I/VI) than the Savoyards (through Charles I, including, yes, even Louis XV of France).

On the other hand, the Iberian Peninsula was quite famous for usurpations before the Habsburg

period. Henry of Trastamara, King of Castile, was a bastard son of a king and a fratricide. The beginning of rule of the famous Isabella I of Castile succeeded after her late brother's daughter was declared a bastard (which she indeed might have been). Isabella's husband Ferdinand stole a large portion of Navarre from his older step-sister.

In England, four usurpations happened within a hundred years (by Henry IV, Edward IV although this would undo the former usurpation, Richard III, Henry VII). Moreover, the ascendance of Elisabeth I and James I were not unquestioned, and, contrary to France, empowered the aristocracy. Finally, when Charles II of Spain died, his heir, according to male primogeniture, was indeed the son of his half-sister, Louis the Great Dauphin (and his second son, the future Philip V). But Charles had a full sister, who married Emperor Leopold and had a daughter before dying. Now, Leopold would marry again and father Joseph I and Charles VI, but the aforementioned daughter married the Elector of Bavaria (one of the generals at the siege of Vienna). There was a strong initiative, not only by Leopold, to support this line (full sister of Charles II, in contrast to Queen of France, the eldest daughter of Philip IV of Spain, but only a step-sister to Charles II), which died out months before the very death of Charles II. Dynastic principle, surely. But not as established as in France.

The ascension of Maria Theresa was another precedent, not undisputed. Leopold, while still alive, made a private contract between himself and his sons, which gave the daughters of Joseph I (born at that moment) precedence over those of Charles VI (childless at the time). The younger of those two was the wife of Charles VII, the Wittelsbach Holy Roman Emperor installed in an anti-Viennese election conspiracy.

Reply.

4. [marcusmontisursinensis](#) says:

[October 8, 2017 at 9:52 pm](#)

Considering the memoir of 1788, the Count of Artois, the future Charles X is a signatory, together with the three generations of the Conde house (the Duke of Enghien is the one whose death would trigger the War of the Third Coalition). Notably, Louis-Stanislas, the Count of Provence, future Louis XVIII is absent!

Reply.

5. Pingback: [Royalist and Rousseauist all the same | Carlsbad 1819](#)

6. Pingback: [Comte de Ferrand on the factions of the Estates-General | Carlsbad 1819](#)

7. Pingback: [Vaublanc's specula principum for the post-Restoration age | Carlsbad 1819](#)

8. Pingback: [The left-right spectrum put in its proper meaning and context | Carlsbad 1819](#)

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