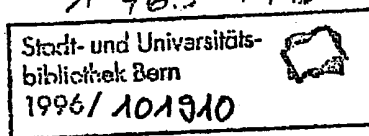


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Power Elites and State Building

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Power Elites, State Servants, Ruling Classes, and the Growth of State Power

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1.1 *The Growth of State Power: The Facts and the Problem*

During the past thousand years, from the high Middle Ages until the present day, the power and the institutions of certain central governments in Europe have been growing continuously at the expense of other autonomous holders of political power and at the expense of the subjects. The final outcome is the modern European power state, defined by a continuous territory with a distinct borderline and by complete external sovereignty, by the monopoly of every kind of legitimate use of force, and by a homogeneous mass of subjects each of whom has the same rights and duties.

At the beginning of this process things were different. In the beginning the rulers of states were but first among equals, among hundreds of competing and more or less autonomous power-holders—in the end some twenty or thirty kings or states had become monopolists of power, everybody else being reduced to the status of subject. In the beginning the authority of the ruler was sacred and received its external legitimacy through religion—in the end the state no longer needs the mythical figure of a ruler by the grace of God, because it now derives legitimacy from the fictitious identity of the state with its subjects. In the beginning the ruler's task was limited to the maintenance of justice and peace and he was not even the only one engaged in this—in the end the state claims competence over the whole reach of human existence and in addition is able to extend this at its convenience, because the state in the meantime has acquired the competence to decide the limits of its own competence. In the beginning the ruler had only personal servants and followers and no professionals to execute his will—in the end a large share of the total population have become professional servants of the state, as much as 14.6 per cent of the labour force in West Germany in 1984.¹ In

¹ Informationsdienst der deutschen Wirtschaft, 10, no. 19 (1984), 4.

the beginning the state held no exclusive command of armed men—in the end states maintain gigantic armed forces and in the event of war are able to mobilize their entire populations. In the beginning a prince had to live and finance his activities 'of his own', that is from the demesne—in the end the state disposes of the lion's share of the national product, up to about 50 per cent of it in our own time. In the beginning a subject did not expect much of his ruler, be it for good or for evil—in the end the administrative annihilation of the subject by the state has become not a possibility, but a reality.²

When contemporaries began to take notice of this development, the history of political ideas from the Middle Ages down to the nineteenth century became mainly a series of intellectual reactions to this political change. Trying to understand these new developments could result in attempts to legitimize them. But it could also lead to theoretical alternatives which more often than not corresponded to the interests of the antagonists of the growing state power, whether churches or estates, bourgeoisie or proletariat. In the Middle Ages the autonomy of princely authority had to be defended against Pope and Emperor. Later on, when even contemporaries could observe the convergence of different ways of state building,³ since the times of Machiavelli the state's 'right to growth', in contemporary terms 'reason of state', became the key problem, at first its internal, then its external aspects. It was analysed and legitimized, but also criticized and opposed for religious reasons and by organized assemblies of estates. When state power had grown further, the theoretical foundations of the state itself became the central objective. Since the time of Thomas Hobbes 'modern' science has been used to justify state power. The subsequent promotion of rationality by the Enlightenment certainly promoted human liberty and self-determination but, by a kind of dialectical somersault, it also produced further growth of state power, in theory through Rousseau's philosophy of identity, in practice by the policy of the so-called 'Enlightened absolutism'. Even the French Revolution gave further impetus to the growth of state power when it released the forces of modern nationalism, to say nothing of Hegel and Fichte, who changed the Revolution's ideas into a state philosophy for authoritarian Prussia.⁴

Traditionally, the existence of this kind of state has been accepted as a matter of course by French, German, Italian, and probably some other historiographies until recently. Its development was treated as a kind of natural growth with a self-evident teleology, which was never questioned. To ask about the 'invention of the state' would have been regarded as ridiculous a question as one about the 'invention of sleep'—only to be asked by a man as stupid as Sancho Panza.⁵ 'Sleep' and

'state' did not have to be invented, because they have always been there—statelessness was as abnormal as sleeplessness. As far as I know, the origins of the modern state began to be seriously questioned only after World War II, on the one hand because experiences with 'total' states had shaken confidence in the traditional national power state and, on the other, because the creation of innumerable new states inevitably led to the conclusion that the modern, European, national state was not necessarily the final outcome of all world history but, rather, a unique product of Europe's world-wide success, the consequence of its world-wide domination; and finally because, at the very moment of this ultimate success, the modern state started to lose parts of its sovereignty to new supranational organizations and alliances. Briefly, the growth of state power during the medieval and modern periods of European history which led to the modern state was now no longer seen to be the self-evidently normal case, but a special instance requiring explanation.

1.2 The Growth of State Power: A New Explanatory Model

There is no lack of contemporary political theories to explain this growth of state power in Europe. Recently, Charles Tilly has arranged them in four groups according to the respective weight of internal political development, foreign policy, and economy. Some think that specific historical events and institutional developments are decisive, for example, the growth and change of the armed forces according to W. H. McNeill.⁶ Paul Kennedy's great-power theory⁷ has become extremely popular for obvious political reasons. He combines economic development with foreign policy. Unequal economic growth produces favourable conditions for political growth until the priorities of great-power policy lead to economically detrimental spending on armaments, initiating economic and political decline. The purely geopolitical approach of a second group has become slightly outmoded, whereas a third group of explanations, which considers the mode of production as the outstanding factor, is still popular. This is the basis of Perry Anderson's differential analysis of European absolutism,⁸ whereas Barrington Moore explains the varied natures of twentieth-century regimes by the different development of the agrarian sector in the respective countries.⁹ World-system theorists, a fourth group, in particular Immanuel Wallerstein,¹⁰ believe that the development of the state is determined by that country's position in the capitalist world-system originating in the sixteenth century. The standard objection of historians, that these are oversimplifications and therefore without much

² Dilcher (1990), 638.

³ Tilly (1990),

⁴ Fenske (1987).

⁵ Schieder (1973), 26.

⁶ McNeill (1962).

⁷ MoL (1966).

⁸ Kennedy (1987).

⁹ Wallerstein (1974–88).

¹⁰ Anderson (1974).

explanatory value, is met by Stein Rokkan's multifactorial paradigm.¹¹ Tilly himself completes his former concept of a cyclical escalation of coercive force and resource extraction propelled by warfare, insisting upon state coercion and urban capitalism as a basic alternative. But varying combinations of both produce different modes of state building in history.¹²

However, the abundance of theories leaves the process of state formation still underdetermined, otherwise their number would not continue to grow! In my opinion this dilemma can be solved by the simple means of an eclectic synthesis. Several hypotheses can be combined and then arranged in a systematic order. Essentially, this methodological strategy appears self-evident, because a closer look at several theories of state formation shows that they operate on different levels of abstraction and therefore do not try to explain the same aspects of the general process of political growth. On the other hand, it is well known that historical syntheses should combine explanations on different levels, in terms of general laws of human behaviour, social and cultural arrangements, statements of singular causation, or simply of fact.¹³ For both reasons I feel encouraged to propose a distinction with three theoretical levels, thereby proceeding from the particular to the general:

I start from the micro-level of individuals and their groups and the respective presentation of anthropological theories, of theories of interaction and elite theories. To a large extent, we have to deal with intentional actions on this micro-level. Therefore, many variables at this level are not measurable and have for that reason been described as 'not observable'.¹⁴

Then I shall proceed to the meso-level of the political system, considered as a section of the society as a whole, with the preferential participation of certain groups, which therefore have to be studied particularly carefully on the micro-level. Here, on the meso-level, we come across so-called 'autonomous processes', defined as sequences of actions which have not been organized intentionally, but are governed by a certain amount of determinism. In original configurations of a more-or-less contingent character, motives arise and actions are performed which, as a result of their unintentional consequences, reproduce the original configurations and therefore sustain the process. We were unable to identify such non-linear circular processes before the invention of cybernetics. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to expect continuous self-reconstitution of a system as the regular effect of such processes. Quite the opposite: they are the most important agents of change.¹⁵

¹¹ Rokkan (1975); Flora (1981).

¹² Tilly (1990).

¹³ Berkhofer (1969), 293-4.

¹⁴ Wentu 978), 87.

¹⁵ Hoyningen-Huene (1983).

Finally, at the macro-level I prefer to speak of society and not 'the social system', because in my opinion society is not a closed and homeostatic unit, but a large network of heterogeneous interaction. But because this network is less dense at its margins, we can still suppose that change in society is possible without input from outside. However, this leaves us with the problem of where to draw the borderlines of society or, perhaps, of 'societies'.¹⁶ In the beginning probably the whole of Europe, in the sense of the sphere of influence of Latin Christianity, can be considered one single society; in the end European societies correspond to national states. Segmentation of society coincides with state and nation building.

Success or failure of my working concept depends on its ability to integrate separate theories of three different levels into a single coherent three-level theory. This, however, would for the first time create an interdependent pattern of a plurality of operating factors instead of a mere addition of them, as happens in other cases where historians approach complex problems.

1.3 The Micro-Level: Dynasties and Power Elites

Starting from the micro-level, we have first to assume that human beings act according to their interest—be it by rational, pseudo-rational, or irrational choice—and that this interest has an elementary character and therefore needs no substantiation because it is self-explanatory. It is directed towards the acquisition of a larger share of scarce goods. Scarce goods, however, should not be misinterpreted in a narrow materialistic sense. They need not consist of material wealth alone, but may include meaningful work—something which has become scarce in our society—or things like prestige or the pleasures of sex and power. Often, material wealth can be used as a means to achieve these additional ends.

From such a point of view the origins of state building look different, as Charles Tilly observed some years ago:

At least for the European experience of the past few centuries, a portrait of war makers and state makers as coercive and self-seeking entrepreneurs bears a far greater resemblance to the facts than do its chief alternatives: the idea of a social contract, the idea of an open market in which operators of armies and states offer services to willing consumers, the idea of a society whose shared norms and expectations call forth a certain kind of government.¹⁷

Using a biological metaphor, W. H. McNeill has found an even more caustic expression for these facts: as in biology micro- and macro-parasites exist at the expense of other living beings, lice on the one hand, beasts of prey on the other, so mankind too has always been harassed by micro- and macro-parasites—macro-parasites being human minorities who live on the work of others. As we all know,

¹⁶ Lentin (1986), 13; Blockmans (1990).

¹⁷ Tilly (1985), 169.

this metaphor had been horribly abused by racists long before McNeill wrote. Nevertheless, it remains basically ambiguous and can therefore be used not only to discriminate but also to expose the regular exploitation by government. In the course of cultural evolution the primitive human parasitism of irregular plunder has been replaced by the organized parasitism of man's rule over man.¹⁸ This symbiosis between parasite and host might even produce benevolent effects for the latter, quite contrary to the actors' intentions.

The individual's lust for power, however, cannot be realized in isolation but only by interaction. Even under today's conditions, when isolated individuals and their personal interests are considered to be the basic components of society and politics, communication and interaction according to the laws of the market are necessary for success. Those who want to be successful have to enjoy publicity and to know the right people. In other words, whoever wants to sell her- or himself, has to 'advertise' to interest potential demand.

During those centuries of European history which were decisive for state formation, society was not so much composed of basic units of isolated individuals, but rather of social groups and networks, which integrated individuals for good or ill, especially in politics. In spite (or perhaps because) of his philosophy of political identity, Rousseau already observed that the holders of power in a state did not only develop their own interests, but also a specific group-consciousness based on these common interests.¹⁹ Therefore, they are inclined to use this power of the state which they hold in the interests of their own group first of all. The same collective egoism drives them to promote the growth of state power and the development of state institutions. Of course, services are rendered for the common good, but only because this gives the holding of power by the ruling syndicate an air of legitimacy.²⁰

These groups who, in their own interest, promoted the growth of state power more-or-less continuously for so many centuries, and had the means to do so successfully, are called 'power elites' in this book. In other words, we have to identify and study those individuals among the agents or servants of the state and among society's ruling classes, who were the really important promoters of state power by using their position—formal or informal—in the service of the state.

But since the abstract, 'transpersonal' notion of 'the state' originally had very limited currency, 'service of the state' in reality often meant 'service of a dynasty'. In most cases indeed the hard core of successful promoters of state power consisted of a family, that is a dynasty. Dynasties created continuity of interest, even if their individual members were unimportant figures. If the opposite was the

case—so much the better. This can be proved by a counter-factual test, because a dynastic crisis often resulted in a crisis of the state, which interrupted or even inverted the growth of state power—as for example in France during the Wars of Religion. States without dynasties, such as republics or elective ecclesiastical principalities, were likely to lose the fight for power when competing with dynasties. If dynasties such as the Bourbons, the Hohenzollern, or the Tudors wanted to increase their control over the resources of their respective countries, they had to eliminate, or at least to force back, the rival holders of autonomous power dating from the pre-state phase of history, in order to establish their own monopoly of power. This is the origin of the state. Their rivals were first of all other dynasties, that is, the families of the higher nobility, and the Church.

On the other hand, the leading servants of these dynasties in conflict constituted the new 'power elites'. They too made the growth of state power their own cause, because this policy best advanced the interests of their own group. Obviously, this has nothing to do with the acceptance or representation of the central values of society by those individuals. Power elites are not value-oriented in any other than a political sense. Neither are they functional in the sense of filling established official positions in a political system. Their functions and their values grow with them. They may have their origins in the upper strata of the hierarchy of wealth or prestige, or both. But often they come from neither group, and it is their very service to the ruler and the state which lays the foundations of their wealth and prestige. They are certainly not the only elite in a society. Even if some members of the economic, intellectual, religious, or other elites join them for particular reasons, these other elites still maintain their separate existence. Power elites are the people who really matter in the political system, especially in the process of state building, and nothing more. In brief, they are a dynamic and variable group not to be defined in terms of any elite theory but by their interconnection with the growth of state power and by their actual social interaction in the field of politics.²¹

During the sixteenth century, a decisive period of German history, everywhere in the Empire councillors of bourgeois origin with legal training played a strategic role.²² But in contrast to the clergy and nobility they were not traditional rivals of the growing state power. As they owed all their status and power to the service of princes, it was in their own interest to take a strong line in favour of the further growth of state power.

The growing importance of Roman law fits well into the social strategy of this group. When law becomes a systematized discipline²³ it also becomes

¹⁸ McNeill (1980).

¹⁹ Rousseau, *Du contrat* k III, chs I, 10.

²⁰ Jouvenel (1945).

²¹ Bottomore (1976), 1-18; Reinhard (1979); Batori and Weyrauch (1982), 210; Herzog (1982).

²² Press (198

²³ Kroeschell (1983).

professionalized, that is, a technique of government comes into existence which an individual has either to know or to learn on pain of exclusion from political power. Those members of the nobility who wanted to remain within the inner circle of power-holders could do nothing better than study law. Knowledge of law became a guarantee of the monopoly of power, because even 'today's laws are produced by a self-sustaining caste of experts, who prove their right to exist by creating such complicated arrangements of legal matter that only they themselves are able to understand, apply and comment upon what they have created'. This is a German law professor's view of the situation at the end of the twentieth century.²⁴

Professionalization, however, is only one of the strategies which power elites used to establish their coherence and continuity, and perhaps not even the most important. It was not only in sixteenth-century Germany that true family networks were the strongest source of support of the new system of government. Pierre Goubert once said of the leading circle of the French *noblesse de robe*: 'At the highest level, everybody is a relative'.²⁵ But consanguinity and affinity with sixty or more families of the group is only the basis of the system. More importantly, these networks operate in such a way that members of certain families are automatically preferred when top positions are to be filled. From 1680 to 1700 the closest circle of ministers around Louis XIV of France consisted, with one exception, exclusively of members of the family clans of Colbert and LeTellier-Louvois. However, for safety's sake, even these rival clans were connected by affinity. After all, the great Jean-Baptiste Colbert obtained his first position in the central administration because an uncle of his had married a sister of the secretary of state, Michel LeTellier.²⁶

Besides natural consanguinity the artificial relationship of affinity was of central importance for these informal networks; in addition the 'group patriotism' of people of common origin and in particular the omnipresent patron-client relationship. Transformations were possible: a fellow countryman could become first a client and then a son-in-law. Informal networks of this kind were, and still are, always important where power elites recruit new members, because they make a remarkable contribution to their coherence. Not only do blood relations owe loyalty to each other, but patrons can expect the same allegiance from those

²⁴ 'Die heutigen Gesetze sind Produkte eines sich selbst nährenden Expertenstandes, der seine Existenzberechtigung dadurch beweist, daß er komplizierte Gebilde erzeugt, die dann nur er selbst verstehen, anwenden und kommentieren kann': F. Haft, 'Der Dschungel um uns: Müssen Gesetze so kompliziert sein?', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4-5 Feb. 1984.

²⁵ 'Au plus haut niveau, tout le monde est parent': Goubert 373, 52.

²⁶ Weis (1968), 180.

clients who have been co-opted into the power elite through the patron's intervention.²⁷

During the early modern period, especially in the seventeenth century, the still largely informal structure of power elites produced the extraordinary phenomenon of the 'favourite first minister' with Richelieu in France and Olivares in Spain as particularly remarkable cases, but found almost everywhere in Europe at one time or the other. Based on a personal, sometimes even sentimental, relationship of confidence with the ruler, one member of the power elite monopolized power to the extent of almost becoming the alter ego of the prince. But the enormous amount of patronage accumulated in this outstanding position had to be used in the service of the ruler. The 'favourite first minister' usually held high office, but this was not the source of his power; 'first minister' should still be translated as 'first servant of the king' and not as 'head of the government'.

1.4 The Meso-Level: War and State Servants

Obviously the growth of state power started from the micro-level, where dynasties and power elites worked in their own interest for an expansion of the state and of its institutions. But how could such far-reaching change be enforced on the meso-level of the political system? Even when this aim was pursued with all possible determination, both partners not only had to cope with the well-known inertia of established institutions, but also with the active resistance of opposing interests. The ability of power elites to exploit war, religion, and patriotism for the purpose of expanding their power then becomes decisive.

Once more, war was the father of all things. In its decisive phase of growth the modern state is a war state, which expands its administration and taxation mainly in order to be able to wage war. This fact is closely connected with the enforcement of an internal and external monopoly of violence. Ultimately, only states wage war. Private wars, such as vendettas or feuds, noble or popular revolts (which had only limited legal justification, but for a long time were nevertheless considered legitimate) were no longer possible under the new overmighty war and police state. But the obvious decrease of everyday small-scale violence thanks to the state had to be paid for by an increase of violence in the service of the state, especially of wars. Sorokin's index of war intensity rises from the fifteenth to the sixteenth to the seventeenth century from 311 to 732 to 5,193;²⁸ the number of soldiers grew tenfold between 1500 and 1800, whereas population numbers just doubled.²⁹

²⁷ Rein. (1979).

²⁸ Aho (1981), 195.

²⁹ Parker (1988), 24.

The pre-existing rivalry of European princes inevitably grew with their power, because it became essential for them to outstrip their neighbours, or better, to grow at their expense, and to protect themselves against comparable objectives on the part of their neighbours. For all this, they needed money, in ever-increasing quantities. Costs rose because of the ambitions of rivals to outdo each other with larger and larger armed forces on the one hand, and because of expensive military innovations on the other. We do not know whether the improvements in the late medieval and early modern art of war were produced in response to political demand, or whether they had exogenous causes such as social change. We do know that they were extremely expensive.

The beginning was not a consequence of the development of firearms but of the new Swiss infantry tactics of the massive square of pikemen. These new soldiers were much cheaper individually, compared to armoured knights, but many more of them were necessary and as mercenaries they had to be paid regularly. When, in the early seventeenth century, firearms finally became essential, more flexible tactics were required, for which, however, careful training and improved discipline were preconditions. Thus, the permanent soldiers of the standing army of the state eventually replaced the mercenaries hired *ad hoc* by a military enterpriser for a limited purpose and time. Costs rose still further as a result.

At first, however, firearms had been less important in battle than in siege warfare. As early as c.1500 the comparatively high and thin walls of medieval fortresses could no longer resist the new artillery. They had to be replaced by massive, deep structures with semicircular or triangular bastions instead of towers, once again a very expensive affair. In addition, because these fortresses were harder to storm, siege warfare became technically more sophisticated and lasted longer, as did wars in general. A prince now needed a deep purse to wage war at all.³⁰

In theory, the efficient defence of a very large territory enjoyed the optimal proportion of frontier length to surface area, population, and resources. But since early modern communications and administrative structures were inadequate, the optimal size of an early modern state was much smaller at that period than later.³¹

The relation between peacetime expenditure and the costs of war was almost ridiculous, especially in the beginning. In the middle of the fourteenth century the annual ordinary expenses of the republic of Florence amounted to about 40,000 *fiorini*. By contrast, the war against the Pope in 1378 cost 2.5 million, the three wars against the Visconti of Milan 7.5 million, the conquest of Pisa 4.5 million.³² It

became a fundamental problem of European history that rival powers started ambitious modern policies with an inadequate and old-fashioned financial infrastructure. In consequence, peace sometimes became inevitable during the sixteenth century because both sides were financially exhausted. Normally, war was financed by credit, because only in this way could large amounts of money be mobilized quickly. Thus a symbiosis of state and capital became necessary. But ultimately everything depended on the regular levy of higher and higher taxes. Originally, this was not possible without the consent of the taxpayer. Therefore, the financial needs of modern monarchies at least temporarily strengthened the position of the assemblies of estates, their strongest rivals. On the other hand, the new 'tax state' needed an apparatus of extraction and enforcement, which also became larger and more expensive. Thus, a circular development was set in motion: rising extraction of resources and growing apparatus of enforcement escalated until the growth of state power, which had been initiated by war, became an irreversible autonomous process.³³

Whether the state's expenses, which had to be paid for by its subjects, and therefore the levying of taxes, can simply be interpreted as a kind of 'protection money' to be evaluated by cost-benefit analysis, as Frederic Lane, the historian of the mercantile republic of Venice, once suggested, appears doubtful. According to Charles Tilly, more often than not growing states, like modern protection racketeers, enforced 'protection' and payments for it without demand on the part of the 'buyers'.³⁴

As a consequence, the additional legitimacy of state power became necessary, or at least useful, when there was political growth. At this point, religion and ideology have a part to play. The absolutist state was far from neutral in religious matters, in contrast to what was formerly claimed by historians. It was overtly intolerant and quite correctly considered this intolerance one of the foundations of its strength. This was a result of the Protestant Reformation, for until then the Church had tended to be an important autonomous rival of growing state power. But with Martin Luther the traditional apparatus of professional mediators of salvation and the religious foundations as a means to salvation became superfluous. Both the ecclesiastical estate itself and Church property along with it lost their right to exist autonomously. In addition, the new 'confessional' Churches, which were competing strongly with each other and often had to fight for their very existence, needed the protection of secular powers. In this respect, as in others, the Catholic Church differed little from the Protestant ones. As a result, the respective Churches were subdued and governed by the state. In the extreme case of some German principalities the Church finally looked just like any other branch of state

³⁰ Redlich (1964-5); Parker (1988).

³² Molho (1971), 9-21.

³¹ Bean (1977), 1 (1986), 138.

³³ Tilly (1975).

³⁴ Tilly (1985).

administration. Theological differences were much less important than political circumstances.

For the growth of state power the acquisition of control over Church government implied three comparative advantages. First, the extension of the political monopoly of the state over the field of one of its strongest former rivals, and in particular over that rival's property. In Hesse, during the 1530s, secularized Church property provided 20 to 30 per cent of the prince's income, the sum total of taxes only 20 per cent.³⁵

Next, there was the question of the reinforcement of national or territorial identity. When society was still not split up completely into autonomous subsystems such as 'religion', 'politics', 'economy', 'private life', and so on, as is the case today, a fundamental agreement about religion was essential for every community. This became particularly obvious when defence against rival neighbours was necessary. Such was the case of Sweden, when in the late sixteenth century Swedish political identity was in danger because of the impending succession of the Catholic king of Poland. In defence, the Swedes stressed their Lutheran identity. Similarly, England became the pre-eminently Protestant and Spain the pre-eminently Catholic nation, while in Germany Bavaria was the supremely Catholic and Brandenburg-Prussia the supremely Protestant *Land*.

Finally, religious unification and discipline made a contribution to the general political levelling of subjects, towards a modern equality not so much of rights as of their loss. Religion could set the pace for politics. Where purely political expansion of state power had to reckon with stubborn resistance, measures which were legitimate from the viewpoint of the subjects' eternal salvation could more easily be enforced. Thus by establishing control indirectly, the 'confessional' state occupied the very consciences of the subjects to make them the agents of their own submission.³⁶

This 'confessional' period of European history, which lasted from about 1530 until about 1730, was followed by a more secularized phase. 'Enlightened absolutism' used the ideology of public welfare to legitimate the expansion of its power. But this argument was not universally self-evident. With the French Revolution things became different, when once again mass emotions (which had greater appeal to the masses than did public welfare) could be mobilized. Contrary to expectations, the Revolution gave a further impetus to the growing power of the state by releasing the forces of nationalism. The revolutionary wars were to prove to what extent men were willing to die for their nation. For the holders of state power this amounted to an additional opportunity for resource extraction. Looking back, Alexis de Tocqueville drew a parallel with the confessional age

when he stated that two forces only can co-ordinate human actions emotionally: religion and patriotism.³⁷

An expansion of personnel and institutions was simultaneously instrument and effect of this process, in brief the growth of bureaucracy, defined as administration by full-time salaried and professional officials, organized hierarchically, with regular procedures and formalized record-keeping.³⁸ The establishment of large numbers of state servants below the level of power elites was, however, not only a question of warfare and resource extraction. This was impossible in an illiterate society; the servants of the Church, where literacy had been preserved, were therefore the first bureaucrats of Europe and produced remarkable members of the early power elites too. In addition, the political unit had to be stable and above a minimum size, and an urban sector with a developed middle class was probably also indispensable.

Nowhere in Europe, not even in Prussia, did a fully developed professional civil service exist before the end of the eighteenth century. Many administrators were still considered the personal servants of their monarch and in a sense the same was true of many subordinate officials who were appointed by their superiors and not the state, entering and leaving state service with them. Many offices were still a species of property, to be acquired, exploited, and disposed of like other kinds, and with hereditary or semi-hereditary tenure. Total remuneration by fixed salaries from the state was as exceptional as adequate provision for pensioned retirement. Many officials depended on a combination of payments from the public purse, perquisites in money or in kind, fees and gratuities from members of the public who needed their services, and, finally the plunder of public resources and the acceptance of bribes over and above gratuities and presents. Technical qualification and ability were less important for appointment, promotion, and dismissal than birth, wealth, and above all family connections and patronage. Where entrance examinations existed, they entailed only minimum requirements; open competitive examinations were not introduced before the eighteenth century. Here some countries, notably Bavaria and Prussia, were ahead of others, but developments were also uneven between different branches of administration, revenue and military departments tending to be more advanced than royal households and law courts.

France had a larger number of officials employed by the Crown, whereas in England part-time service without central remuneration was more widespread. The rigidity of the French system was closely connected with the venality of office

³⁷ De Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, ed. B. Nolla (Paris, 1990), i, 77.

³⁸ Max Weber's definition in the words of Aylmer (1979); the next six paragraphs follow Aylmer, sometimes literally.

which reached its most extreme form in France, the Papal States, and Castile, but was present in most countries of Europe. Like the widespread practice of tax-farming, venality of office depended on the remuneration of state officials by the public via fees and was a part of a regressive redistribution system which as a rule made the rich richer and the poor poorer. In this context it could be used by the state as an additional source of revenue or even as a part of the system of public credit.³⁹

From the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century many institutions were organized on the collegiate principle with a group of officials sharing responsibilities, remuneration, and privileges. But during the early modern period a parallel hierarchy of individual commissions developed, the commissary first being temporary and extraordinary, and later becoming a regular official, but without any appropriation of office. The French intendant of the seventeenth century in this respect became a model for other countries, Spanish America included, as did the Prussian administration of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Perhaps the clearest long-term change between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries was the going 'out of court' of the central institutions of government which became distinct from the personal household of the monarch. However, very often this process included the creation of new, and initially informal, inner rings to replace those which had become too large and impersonal to allow effective policy-making and the quick carrying out of decisions. Right from the beginning up to the present day, political and administrative institutions grow according to the principle of concentric waves moving away from the centre of power.

From the viewpoint of social history, this growth of administrative institutions and their personnel created a distinct bureaucratic class below the power elite but with its own characteristic relation to the ruling classes of society.

1.5 The Macro-Level: Societies and Ruling Classes

'Ruling classes' can be defined in Karl Marx's sense as the owners of the means of production or at least the holders of economic power in a given society. In medieval and early modern Europe, however, this position was to a large extent based on socio-political status and not vice versa. Feudal lordship over land, especially when combined with noble birth, was an even better qualification for membership of the ruling class than wealth of bourgeois origin. Therefore, Gaetano Mosca's theory of general antagonism between rulers and ruled, which is present in any society, appears to be more appropriate in our case.⁴⁰ With a certain over-

simplification we might claim that earlier European ruling classes did not rule because they were rich, but were rich because they ruled. They decided what was the common good, and their consent was necessary for the successful political action of power elites.

Obviously, power elites used certain societal situations to start and maintain political growth and to find widespread social consent for it. Such action in their own interest had only to look as if it were initiated for the sake of the common good. This might, or might not, have been the case, but it was sufficient that both elites and people were predisposed to believe it. Political cynicism was less common in earlier periods of history than it is today, in our post-modern period.

Modern experience makes us suspect that the growth of state power by extension of state activities was a kind of crisis management during long-lasting phases of economic depression. Roland Mousnier has suggested this for the period of the so-called 'crisis of the seventeenth century'.⁴¹ For obvious reasons political theories of 'absolutism' tended to be pessimistic.⁴² There was also already a connection between accelerated state activity and the explosion of poverty in some countries in the sixteenth century.⁴³ However, additional symptoms of political growth are to be found in the 1500s, although it is generally considered a boom period. Obviously, prosperity does at least not block the growth of state power.

But is it reasonable, therefore, to connect the growth of state power with the rise of capitalism? Perhaps war alone was not the father of capitalism, as Werner Sombart believed,⁴⁴ but rather the state waging war? Or did the rise of the modern state occur in the interest of the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie? According to Perry Anderson, however, the absolutist state served to defend the rule of the nobility against the expansion of capitalism. When money and market economies began to destroy pre-market socio-economic relations, the concentration of power and exploitation at the higher level of the state became necessary to protect feudalism. Some sections of the nobility might suffer, but on the whole the new state became a kind of aggregate feudal lord serving the interests of the nobility as the class that still ruled.⁴⁵

But the group interest of power elites, which was essential on the micro-level, need not necessarily be identified with the class interests of either nobility or bourgeoisie. Even for Immanuel Wallerstein, the managers of state power and the bureaucracy became arbiters between the conflicting class interests of aristocrats and capitalists.⁴⁶ On the other hand, as early as the sixteenth century capitalism was

⁴¹ Mousnier (1954). ⁴² Bireley (1990).

⁴³ Boj 75; Uppendahl (1978). ⁴⁴ Sombart (1917), 342.

⁴⁵ Anderson (1974). ⁴⁶ Wallerstein (1974-88).

indeed allied with the state by common interests, such as the capitalists' roles as suppliers and creditors, especially for war, or their need for external and internal protection for their business. But this European capitalism, already operating internationally, and the state were all but identical, for the simple reason that there was more than just one state in Europe. Therefore, the holders of political power in this part of the world were never able to establish complete control over the economy. According to E. L. Jones, this quasi-natural restriction of predatory appropriation by power elites became the essential precondition for continuous economic growth in the West.⁴⁷ In addition, political plurality corresponds to that division of labour which has become the key concept in Wallerstein's European 'world-system', where the centre, the periphery, and the semiperiphery have different economic functions and adopt specific social and political organizational patterns accordingly.⁴⁸

Geographical and historical plurality is indeed the distinctive characteristic of western Europe. According to Stein Rokkan, there are seven basic geohistorical conditions which influenced the development of political entities in Europe.⁴⁹ However, the fact that they are important for the growth of state power does not imply that they are all and always in favour of it; sometimes the opposite was the case.

Viewed from the perspective of the entire Eurasian land mass the European 'peninsula' is rather remote and has, compared with other parts, an extremely varied surface and coastline. Europe was therefore less exposed to continental expansion from Asia. On the other hand, the preconditions for expansion overseas were extremely favourable in some parts of Europe. For all these reasons large land empires did not succeed in this part of the world, whereas competition between several medium-sized powers seemed quite natural. This became the origin of that continuous power rivalry, which made political growth necessary or at least attractive.

All participants, however, could always fall back on the common institutional heritage of Latin Christianity.⁵⁰ The phrase 'common political culture' could also be used because the behaviour of western power elites was indeed formed by this political and cultural tradition.

The widespread Germanic tradition of autonomous noble rule tended to be opposed to state building. In contrast, many achievements of the former Roman empire were ready to be taken up by the growing state power. From the high Middle Ages, when transpersonal concepts of the state were applied to other potentates besides the Pope and the Emperor, legal arguments could be used to

⁴⁷ Jones (1981).

⁴⁸ Wallerstein (1974-88).

⁴⁹ Rokkan (1975).

⁵⁰ Hassinger (1959), pp. xiv-xv.

legitimate the absolute power of the prince, which was to play such a crucial role in state building.

Roman law, however, could be employed in power politics almost at will. In Germany it served the Empire and the Church, as well as the purposes of territorial principalities or even cities.⁵¹ Equally ambiguous for the growth of the state was the Roman doctrine of unlimited private property, because it not only favoured economic growth, but also checked fiscal expansion.

Since antiquity the autonomous city has been a special feature of western history, but one which has also had ambiguous consequences for the process of state building. The densely populated central urban belt of Europe which developed at an early period and extended from the Netherlands to northern Italy did not become the starting-point of the modern power state — quite the opposite. In the Netherlands, the German imperial cities, Switzerland, and northern Italy republican alternatives flourished, and were not to lose the contest with the principalities until the sixteenth or even the seventeenth century. In addition, as we have already observed, rising capitalism and the rising state had some, but by no means all interests in common. But it would be a mistake to suppose that there was a clear-cut contrast between nobility, feudalism, expanding monarchies, and authoritarian regimes on the one hand, and bourgeoisie, capitalism, peaceful republics, and civil liberties on the other. In some countries, such as France and some German principalities, cities played an important role in state building. And the state builders knew how to use the urban economy of independent cities too, as the cases of Augsburg or Genova demonstrate. In their domestic policies urban republics were far from democratic and egalitarian, quite the opposite. In the disciplining of its subjects the city could serve as a model for the state.

In the long run, however, most of the resources necessary for the growth of the state had to be extracted from rural production. This applies even to the income from indirect taxation and customs. Therefore, the relationship of the state with the ruling class, that is the feudal lords as the first recipients of land rent, became politically as essential as the extent to which the rural economy had been integrated into the market. Some landlords might live on a subsistence economy but a state power could not, because it had continually to raise its share of the resources extracted. This rising share provoked resistance, not only from peasants but also from feudal lords. Consequently, the rise of state power was for a long time accompanied by popular revolts, more often than not with the participation of the nobility.

As already mentioned, the Church changed its political role over time. For centuries, it had been the teacher of the state, not only in ideology, but especially

⁵¹ Kroeschell (1983), 288.

where institutions were concerned. Papal power served as a model for 'absolutism'. But after the Reformation it changed into an obedient instrument of control and resource extraction.

But long before that the Church had provided western Europe with the heritage of antiquity. Latin became the common medium of European culture and deeply influenced the thinking and the languages of Europe. Europe became permanently bilingual. The intellectual and political consequences of this development have only recently become an object of research.⁵²

1.6 Conclusion: The Rules of European Political Growth

Historically, in spite of recent imitations elsewhere, the modern state is a uniquely European phenomenon, originating in the geohistorical plurality of rival powers in Europe. Dynasties allied with power elites used this conjuncture to increase their power, mainly in their own interest. The particular conditions of the cultural and political tradition of Europe on the one hand, and of the developing rural and urban economy on the other, provided the necessary means, but they also created specific obstacles. The continuous increase of resource extraction by the state, which became possible and necessary because of wars between the competing powers, was decisive for its success. This process of growth was twice assisted by an ideological impetus, first by confessionalism, later by nationalism. Only recently the identity of rulers and ruled, created by state ideology and culminating in the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, has been unmasked as a fiction and questioned. We are less sure than our fathers that the interest of the power elites is also the interest of the people as a whole.

⁵² Reinhard (1987b).

CHAPTER 2

The Impact of Central Institutions

Pere Molas Ribalta

The early modern period in Europe has been labelled by the French historian Yves Durand 'the age of monarchies',¹ because monarchy was then the prevailing form of government. Of course, there were important exceptions: the Italian republics (Venice, Genoa) from the Middle Ages onwards, the Swiss cantons from the fourteenth century, and the United Provinces of the Netherlands from the second half of the sixteenth century. These exceptions stemmed to a large extent from the development of autonomous municipal government, but none the less they had all originally formed parts of some medieval monarchy, from which they had later separated in exceptional circumstances. But as a rule it was the monarchy which—to use a biological metaphor—became the growth-point of the modern state. On the whole, the development of the state was the consequence of the expansion of monocratic power. The chief instruments of this expansion were new central institutions created to serve the prince, but which quite often became detached from his person and attached themselves to some transpersonal concept of the commonwealth. Thus most central institutions originated in the households or courts of medieval princes, but later became independent by going 'out of court'. More often than not this going 'out of court' looks like a sequence of concentric waves proceeding from some central point. When one institution became too independent or too unwieldy to be controlled by the ruler, it was allowed to lead an autonomous existence, but its original function and position close to the ruler were taken over by a new institution. This might happen several times in succession. One case in point is the development of a series of three royal seals (Great Seal, Privy Seal, Signet) in England, another case is the repeated creation of a more exclusive circle of royal advisers every time the council grew too large.

¹ Durand (1973).