

Chapter 16: Absolutism and Constitutionalism in Western Europe

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1. Absolutism

a. Absolutism defined

- i. In the absolutist state, sovereignty resided in kings--not the nobility or the parliament--who considered themselves responsible to God alone.
 1. Compare: medieval kings who were governed "by the grace of God," who were still under the law's influence.
- ii. Absolute kings created new state bureaucracies and standing armies, regulated all the institutions of government, and secured the cooperation of the nobility.

	Medieval rulers	Absolute Rulers
Control over country	Restrained by the church, the feudal nobility, and their own financial limitations, medieval rulers were able to do none of the right.	Absolute rulers regulated religious sects and abolished special liberties for certain areas, groups, or provinces.
Financial problem solving	Found temporary financial support through bargains with the nobility: nobility agreed to give a bit of money in return for future tax exemption.	Created new state bureaucracies that directed the economic life of the country in the interests of the king, either forcing taxes ever higher or devising alternative methods of raising revenue.
Royal agents	Royal agents used their public offices and positions to benefit themselves and their families. Examples: Thomas Becket and Thomas Wolsey	Bureaucrats recognized that the offices they held were public, or state, positions. Were not supposed to use their positions for personal gain.
Armies	Feudal lords for particular wars or campaigns, after which the troops were disbanded.	Recruited standing armies, deployed troops both inside and outside the country in the interests of the country. Also spied on potentially troublesome subjects.

- iii. The absolutist state foreshadowed the modern totalitarian state but lacked its total control over all aspects of its citizens' lives.

1. Foreshadowed the totalitarian regimes in two ways:

- a. glorification of state over all other aspects of culture and the use of war
- b. expansionist foreign policy to divert attention from domestic ills.

2. Instead, absolutists just wanted to embody the state.

"L'état, c'est moi!" (I am the state!) Louis XIV of France.

- b. The foundations of French absolutism: Henry IV, Sully, and Richelieu

- i. **Henry IV** cared for his people, lowered taxes, achieved peace, and curtailed the power of the nobility.

1. To compensate for the revenue lost when Henry IV lowered taxes on the peasants, he introduced the **pauvette**, an annual fee paid by royal officials to allow them to transfer their offices at will.
2. In order to create peace despite the feuding Huguenots and Catholics, Henry

- IV passed the Edict of Nantes, appointed Protestant Maximilien de Béthune, duke of **Sully**, as chief minister, and converted to Catholicism.
- ii. His minister, Sully, brought about financial stability and economic growth.
 1. Sully combined the indirect taxes on salt, sales and transit and leased their collection to financiers.
 2. Sully also subsidized the Company for Trade with the Indies. As a result, despite the number of taxes being reduced, tax revenues increased due to trade.
 - iii. Cardinal **Richelieu**, the ruler of France under **King Louis XIII**, broke the power of the French nobility.
 1. His policy was total subordination of all groups and institutions to the French monarchy.
 2. He changed the royal council, leveled castles, and crushed aristocratic conspiracies.
 3. He established an efficient administrative system using **intendants**, who further weakened the local nobility.
 - a. Each intendant ruled a généralité. They could not be natives of the districts where they held authority. They were also usually from the newer judicial nobility. Intendants were responsible directly to the monarch.
 - b. They delivered royal orders, recruited men for the army, collected taxes, and more.
 - c. Intendants were to enforce royal orders in the généralités of their jurisdiction and to weaken the power and influence of the regional nobility.
 - iv. Through the Edict of Nantes, Henry IV had given religious freedom to Protestants (Huguenots) in 150 towns, but Louis XIII decided otherwise.
 1. Louis XIII, with the unanimous approval of the royal council, decided to **end the Edict of Nantes**, because it constituted "a state within a state." Further, he believed that Huguenots were disobeying politically, by demanding religious freedom while prohibiting Catholics from worshipping in their cities.
 2. He defeated the city of **La Rochelle** in 1628 and re-instituted the Catholic mass.
 3. Richelieu and the French kings faced many urban protests over high taxes and food shortages. These protests were also often fueled by the perspective that the royal officials were outsiders.
 4. Local authorities usually let local riots "burn themselves out," rather than create martyrs by firing on crowds or waste money by having a full-scale military occupation of a city.
 5. As a result, the municipal governments became integrated into the national structure, creating a more centralized government.
 - v. Under Richelieu, France sought to break Habsburg power.
 1. He supported the struggle of the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, against the Habsburgs during the Thirty Years' War.
 2. He acquired land and influence in Germany.
 - vi. Richelieu supported the new French Academy, which created a dictionary to standardize the French language.
 - vii. The French government's ability to tax was severely limited by local rights to vote on taxes and the tax exempt status of much of the nobility and the middle class.

- viii. In order to solve their financial problems, they cooperated with local elites, sharing the proceeds of tax revenue.
 - ix. Richelieu coined the term **raison d'état**. "Where the interests of the state are concerned, God absolves actions which, if privately committed, would be a crime." In other words, Richelieu advanced the Machiavellian cause of national interest as a valid justification for entering into the Thirty Years' War on the Protestant side.
 - x. **Mazarin**, ruling after Richelieu and before Louis XIV, continued Richelieu's centralizing policies, but these policies gave rise to a period of civil wars known as the **Fronde**.
 - 1. *Fronde* meant anyone who opposed the policies of the government.
 - 2. Government workers felt that they were being manipulated by the Crown and their interests ignored.
 - 3. After the French defeat of Spanish armies at Rocroi, the French people believed that taxes were unnecessary.
 - 4. Many people of the aristocracy and the middle classes opposed government centralization and new taxes; rebellion was widespread.
 - 5. The conflicts hurt the economy and convinced the new king, Louis XIV, that civil war was destructive of social order and that absolute monarchy was the only alternative to anarchy. Further it showed that the government would have to compromise with the bureaucrats and social elites that controlled local institutions and constituted the state bureaucracy.
2. The absolute monarchy of **Louis XIV** (1643-1715) (France)
 Also called the "Grand Century," "Age of Magnificence," and the "Age of Louis XIV."
- a. Louis XIV, the "Sun King," was a devout Catholic who believed that God had established kings as his rulers on earth.
 - b. Louis also spied on his people to prevent an uprising.
 - c. He feared the nobility and was successful in collaboration with them to enhance both aristocratic prestige and royal power.
 - i. Example: Louis persuaded the nobles to support the construction of the **Canal des Deux Mers**. The nobles agreed, because their provincial business people became tied to national goals.
 - ii. **Example: The repression of the Huguenots**
 - d. He made the **court at Versailles** a fixed institution and used it as a means of preserving royal power and as the center of French absolutism.
 - i. The architecture and art of Versailles were a means of carrying out state policy--a way to overawe his subjects and foreign powers.
 - ii. The French language and culture became the international style.
 - 1. The royal courts of Sweden, Russia, Poland, and Germany all spoke French.
 - iii. The court at Versailles was a device to undermine the power of the aristocracy by separating power from status.
 - 1. He excluded the nobles from his councils, instead entertaining them with trite operas, fetes, balls, gossip, and trivia.
 - iv. A centralized state, administered by a professional class taken from the bourgeoisie, was formed.
 - 1. Although the bourgeoisie worked with the king, they did not share power with him. Louis wanted "people to know by the rank of the men who served him that he had no intention of sharing power with them."
 - e. Financial and economic management under Louis XIV's minister, **Colbert**
 - i. Taxes under Louis XIV failed, because they largely only affected the poor (nobility

were exempt and middle class secured tax exemptions) and because of **tax farmers**.

1. Tax farmers were agents who purchased from the Crown the right to collect taxes in a particular district, pocketed the difference between what they raked in and what they handed over to the state.
2. Since the nobles were tax exempt, they had no say in how taxes were spent.
- ii. Mercantilism is a collection of governmental policies for the regulation of economic activities by and for the state.
 1. Mercantilism was based on the two ideas: 1)gold was power 2)gold was limited.
 2. Thus, in order to keep its gold, or power, France had to sell abroad and buy nothing back.
 3. To make this possible, France had to be self-sufficient by producing everything it needed within its borders.
- iii. Louis XIV's finance minister, Colbert, tried to achieve a favorable balance of trade and make France self sufficient so the flow of gold to other countries would be halted.
 1. Colbert encouraged French industry and enacted high foreign tariffs.
 - a. To ensure quality products, Colbert set up a system of state inspection and regulation.
 - b. To ensure order, he encouraged the formation of guilds.
 - c. To improve communication he built roads and canals. (**The Canal des Deux Mers.**)
 - d. He encouraged skilled foreign craftsmen and manufacturers to immigrate to France.
 2. Colbert also promoted the merchant marines, by giving bonuses to French shipowners and shipbuilders and established a method of maritime conscription, arsenals, and academies for the training of sailors.
 3. He hoped to make Canada part of a French empire.
 - a. Canada was rich in resources and agricultural land.
 - b. He sent French peasants to Canada to populate present day Quebec.
 - c. **Jacques Marquette, Louis Joliet and Robert La Salle** all sailed down the Mississippi to claim land for France.
 4. Though France's industries grew and the commercial classes prospered, its agricultural economy suffered under the burdens of heavy taxation, population decline, and poor harvests.
 - a. As a result of their poor quality of life, many peasants emigrated, preventing the realization of Colbert's goals.
- f. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes
 - i. In 1685, Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes--then destroyed Protestant churches and schools; many Protestants fled the country.
 - ii. Why? Because Louis XIV, as was typical of his time, hated division within France--and because most people supported this policy.
- g. French classicism in art and literature
 - i. French classicism imitated and resembled the arts of the ancients and the Renaissance.
 1. Classicism displayed discipline, balance, and restraint.
 2. Absolutism's effects on classicism were clear: individualism was not allowed and artists' efforts were directed to the glorification of the state as personified

by the king.

- ii. **Poussin** best illustrates classical idealism in painting. (***The Rape of the Sabine Women***)
- iii. Louis XIV was a patron of the composers **Lully, Couperin, and Charpentier**.
- iv. The comedies of **Molière** and the tragedies of **Racine** best illustrate the classicism in French theater.

3. Louis XIV's wars

- a. "I have gone to war too lightly and pursued it for vanity's sake."
"The character of a conqueror is regarded as the noblest and highest of titles."
- b. Louis kept France at war for 33 of the 54 years of his personal rule; the **Marquis de Louvois** created a professional army for Louis.
 - i. The French army under Louis XIV was modern because the state, rather than the nobles, employed the soldiers.
 1. Louis himself took personal command of the army.
 2. Martinet created a rigid but effective system of training.
 - a. Organized corps allowed for an efficient army.
 - ii. France's new military allowed it to dominate Europe for the first time.
- c. Louis continued Richelieu's expansionist policy.
 - i. In 1667, he invaded Flanders and gained twelve towns, including the commercial centers of Lille and Tournai.
 - ii. By the treaty of Nijmegen (1678) he gained some Flemish towns and all of FrancheComté from the Dutch.
 - iii. Strasbourg was taken in 1681 and Lorraine in 1684, but the limits of his expansion had been met; his later wars brought him no additional territory.
 - iv. Louis fought the new Dutch king of England, William III, and the League of Augsburg in a war.
 1. The Banks of Amsterdam and England financed his enemies.
 2. Louis's new minister of finance **Claude Le Peletier** made a few failures at raising revenue:
 - a. Sold offices, tax exemption and titles of nobility and collected the nation's silverware.
 - b. However, in the end, the burden fell to the peasants, who later revolted.
 - v. This led to the **War of the Spanish Succession** (1701-1713), which was over the issue of the succession to the Spanish throne: Louis claimed Spain but was opposed by the Dutch, English, Austrians, and Prussians.
 1. Charles II of Spain left the Spanish crown and Spanish empire to Philip of Anjou, Louis XIV's grandson. However, behind his back, Charles II's brother-in-law's made a treaty to partition Spain's territory between Louis and the Holy Roman Emperor, despite the will specifically prohibiting the union of the French and Spanish crowns.
 2. The war was also an attempt to preserve the balance of power in Europe and to check France's commercial power overseas.
 3. A Grand Alliance of the English, Dutch, Austrians, and Prussians was formed in 1701 to fight the French.
 4. **Eugene of Savoy** and **Churchill of England** led the alliance to victory over Louis.
 5. The war was concluded by the **Peace of Utrecht** in 1713, which forbade the union of France and Spain.

- a. Represented balance of power in the works as well as gave European countries experience in international cooperation.
 6. The war ended French expansionism and left France on the brink of bankruptcy, with widespread misery and revolts.
4. The decline of absolutist Spain in the seventeenth century
 - a. Spain had developed an absolutist monarchy but by the 1590s it was in decline.
 - i. Fiscal disorder, political incompetence, the lack of a strong middle class, population decline, intellectual isolation, exorbitant taxes called **servicios** on poor, debt cancellations and psychological malaise contributed to its decline.
 - ii. The Dutch and English began to cut into Spain's trade monopolies.
 - iii. Spain's supply of silver began to decline, leading to de-evaluation and bankruptcy.
 1. Spain had only a tiny middle class--which had to face many obstacles to their businesses.
 2. Aristocrats were extravagant and their high rents drove the peasants from the land.
 3. Inflation destroyed textile industries.
 - iv. Spanish kings lacked force of character and could not deal with all these problems.
 - b. **Philip IV's** minister **Olivares** mistakenly thought that revival of war with the Dutch would solve Spain's problems; war with France followed--all bringing disaster for Spain.
 - c. The **Treaty of the Pyrenees** of 1659, which ended the French-Spanish wars, marked the end of Spain as a great power.
 - i. Too much of Spain's past had been built on slavery and gold and silver.
 - ii. Cervantes's novel **Don Quixote** characterizes the impractical dreams of Spain.
5. Constitutionalism evolved in England and the Netherlands in the seventeenth century
 - a. Constitutionalism defined
 - i. It is the limitation of the state by law; under constitutionalism, the state must be governed according to law, not royal decree.
 1. It refers to a balance between the power of the government and the rights of the subjects.
 2. A constitution may be written or unwritten, but the government must respect it.
 3. Constitutional governments may be either republics or monarchies.
 - ii. Constitutional government is not the same as full democracy because not all of the people have the right to participate; only the electorates have power.
 1. franchise- the vote
 - b. The decline of royal absolutism in England (1603-1649)
 - i. The Stuart kings of England lacked the political wisdom of **Elizabeth I of Tudor**.
 - ii. Her cousin **James I** was not popular among the people.
 1. His absolutism ran counter to English belief.
 - a. Wrote "**The Trew Law of Free Monarchy**"
 - b. "There are no privileges and immunities which can stand against a divinely appointed King."
 2. He had a Scottish accent and lacked the common touch that Elizabeth I displayed so well
 - a. Threatened to drop his breeches "so they can cheer at my arse."
 - iii. The House of Commons wanted a greater say in the government of the state.
 1. James I had squandered much money on his friends, rather than managing the debt Elizabeth left behind.
 2. A new class of ambitious and rich **country gentry** and businessmen had

emerged in the Commons.

- a. They emerged because of:
 - i. Reformation legislature (dissolution of the monasteries and the sale of monastic land)
 - ii. Agricultural techniques (draining of wasteland and the application of fertilizers)
 - iii. Investiture in commercial ventures
 - iv. Prudent marriages
3. Bitter squabbles erupted between King and the Commons--the Commons wanted political power equal to its economic strength and wanted to have representation in their taxation.
4. **Charles I** ruled without Parliament from 1629-1640, leading to crisis.
- c. Religious issues made relations between King and Commons even worse.
 - i. Many English people, called Puritans, were attracted by the values of hard work, thrift, and selfdenial implied by Calvinism. They also wanted to “purify” the Anglican Church of Roman Catholic elements.
 - ii. The Puritans, who were dissatisfied with the Church of England, saw James I as an enemy.
 - iii. Charles I and his archbishop, **Laud**, appeared to be proCatholic.
 1. Laud wanted to impose elaborate ritual and rich ceremonials on all churches.
 2. He also wanted to enforce the uniformity through the “**Court of High Commission.**”
- d. The English Civil War (1642-1649)
 - i. Members of Parliament believed that taxation without consent was despotism, hence they attempted to limit royal power.
 - ii. A revolt in Scotland over the religious issue forced Charles I, after 11 years of ruling without Parliament, to call a new Parliament into session to finance an army.
 1. The Commons passed an act compelling the king to summon Parliament every three years.
 2. It also impeached Archbishop Laud and abolished the House of Lords.
 3. Religious differences in Ireland led to a revolt there, but Parliament would not trust Charles with an army.
 - a. Religious differences (Irish remained Catholic) as well as economic and political bullying in the past fueled this revolt.
 - iii. Charles initiated military action against Parliament.
 1. The civil war (1642-1649) revolved around the issue of whether sovereignty should reside in the king or in Parliament.
 2. The problem was not resolved, but Charles was beheaded in 1649 on the charge of high treason.
 - iv. The period between 1649 and 1660 was called the “**Interregnum.**” During this time, England experienced military dictatorship.
- e. Puritanical absolutism in England: Cromwell and the Protectorate
 - i. With the execution of Charles I, kingship was abolished in 1649 and a commonwealth proclaimed.
 1. A **commonwealth** is a government without a king whose power rests in Parliament and a council of state.
 2. In fact, the army controlled the government; it wrote a constitution called the **Instrument of Government**, which gave power to Cromwell.
 - ii. **Oliver Cromwell**, leader of the "New Model Army" that defeated the royalists, came

from the gentry class that dominated the House of Commons.

- iii. Cromwell's Protectorate became a military dictatorship, absolutist and puritanical.
 - 1. Cromwell allowed religious toleration for all, except Catholics, and savagely crushed the revolt in Ireland.
 - 2. He censored the press and closed the theaters.
 - 3. He regulated the economy according to mercantilist principles.
 - 4. The mercantilist Navigation Act that required English goods to be transported on English ships was a boon to the economy but led to a commercial (and successful) war with the Dutch.
- f. The restoration of the English monarchy
 - i. The restoration of the Stuart kings in 1660 after the death of Cromwell failed to solve the problems of religion and the relationship between King and Parliament.
 - 1. The **Test Act of 1673** stipulated that only Church of England members could vote, hold office, preach, teach, attend the universities, or assemble, but juries refused to enforce them.
 - 2. **Charles II** appointed a council of five men (the "**Cabal**") to serve as both his major advisers and as members of Parliament.
 - 3. The Cabal was the forerunner of the cabinet system, and it helped create good relations with the Parliament.
 - a. The agreement was that Charles II would summon frequent parliaments and that parliament would vote him sufficient revenues, which they didn't.
 - ii. Since Charles II needed more revenues, he started a **secret pact** with Louis XIV of France.
 - 1. Louis XIV gave him 200,000 pounds annually. In exchange, Charles II was to relax the laws against Catholics, gradually re-Catholicize England, support French policy against the Dutch and convert to Catholicism himself.
 - iii. Catholic **James II** violated the Test Act by giving government and university jobs to Catholics.
 - 1. James II appointed the judges who judged his actions; giving the appearance of controlling the law.
 - 2. He also declared religious freedom to all.
 - iv. Fear of a Catholic monarchy led to the expulsion of James II and the Glorious Revolution.
- g. The triumph of England's Parliament: constitutional monarchy and cabinet government
 - i. The "**Glorious Revolution**" (1688-1699) expelled James II, installed William and Mary on the throne, and ended the divine right monarchy.
 - 1. It was "glorious" in that there was no bloodshed.
 - 2. It established the principle that power was divided between king and Parliament and that the king ruled with the consent of the governed.
 - ii. The **Bill of Rights of 1689** established the principle that law was made in Parliament, that Parliament had to meet at least every three years, that elections were to be free of Crown interference, and the judiciary was to be independent of the Crown.
 - 1. In conclusion, it limited the monarchy and granted civil liberties to the privileged people.
 - 2. The political philosophy behind this revolution was **John Locke's** claim that the people invented government to protect life, liberty, and property. **Second Treatise of Civil Government**

3. Locke also claimed that there are natural, or universal, rights. For example, people had the natural right to overthrow tyrannical governments.
- iii. In the cabinet system, which developed in the eighteenth century, both legislative and executive power are held by the **leading ministers**, who form the government.
 1. **Robert Walpole** came up with the idea that the cabinet was responsible to the House of Commons.
 2. The cabinet system decreased the power of the monarchy.
- h. The Dutch republic in the seventeenth century
 - i. The Dutch republic (the United Provinces of the Netherlands) won its independence from Spain--as confirmed by the **Peace of Westphalia** (Thirty Years War) in 1648.
 1. Dutch achievements in science, art, and literature were exceptional--a "golden age" during the mid 17th century.
 - ii. Power in the republic resided in the local Estates.
 1. The republic was a confederation: a weak union of strong provinces. (A federation is a strong union of weak states.)
 - a. The **stadtholder** was a representative from each province.
 - b. The **States General** was a federal assembly for foreign affairs that had little power.
 2. The republic was based on values of thrift, frugality, and religious toleration, including that for Jews. Some of these values came from Calvinism.
 3. Religious toleration fostered economic growth, encouraging immigration and bank investments.
 - iii. The fishing industry was the cornerstone of the Dutch economy-- stimulating shipbuilding, a huge merchant marine, and other industries.
 - iv. The **Dutch East India Company** was formed in 1602; it cut heavily into Portuguese trading in East Asia.
 1. The company was a **joint stock** company, meaning that investors receive money proportional to their investments.
 2. The Dutch West India Company, founded in 1621, traded extensively in Latin America and Africa.
 - v. Wages were high for all and most people ate well.
 1. The Dutch government invested in granaries, which prevented the famines that ravaged the rest of Europe.
 - vi. War with France and England in the 1670s hurt the United Provinces.
 1. France and England wanted to maintain economic balance of power. Also, France had an expansionist foreign policy.

Countries in Power

Spain- French-Spanish War ended
1600

Netherlands- France and England teamed up against them
1650

France- War of Spanish Succession ended
1700

England