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Perez Zagorin

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*Provincial rebellion*

## I

Provincial rebellion, the revolts of provinces, regions, and entire subject kingdoms against their monarchical center, were endemic in early modern Europe, evidence of the fierce resistance provoked by the aggressions of royal state builders. To be sure, it might be said that much of the political history of medieval Europe was related to the growth and expanding functions of the state – or, if one prefers, to the emergence and consolidation of the state out of conditions of feudal independence and fragmentation of authority. Nonetheless, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the transition to a new political order in the monarchies of Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> Step by step, late feudal kingships evolved into much more centralized governments of an absolutist character, wielding ever larger bureaucratic resources to perform the tasks of national and imperial rule. Royal power steadily extended its reach in breadth and depth, equipping itself in the process with new administrative means to achieve the political integration of kingdoms, to govern dependent realms and imperial possessions, and to make polity, social order, and economy instrumental to its supreme will and interests. Understandably, contemporary legal and political thought was much preoccupied with rationalizing and facilitating these developments; or else, contrariwise, it set itself to formulate a case against the absolute power of kings. In 1576, in his encyclopedic treatise of comparative politics, *Six books of the commonweal*, Jean Bodin provided one of the most influential justifications for royal absolutism through his examination of the nature and necessity of sovereignty. Seventy-five years later, Thomas Hobbes undertook the same task, when he devised with remorseless logic and none of Bodin's reservations the formidable image of Leviathan as the personification of absolute sovereign power to which

<sup>1</sup> See Ch. 4 in this book.

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subjects and corporate groups were obliged to render unconditional obedience.

To speak of state building is to cite a fact that loomed large nearly everywhere upon the scene of revolutions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We have already noticed its importance within the causal background of both agrarian and urban revolt. Whether in its general operation or in its particular effects, no other single factor was of wider significance in contributing directly or indirectly to the preconditions from which the different revolutions of the time arose.

Viewed as a type, however, provincial rebellion represented a specific response to the state-building process. This is easily understood when we call to mind the tenacious localisms and recurring tendencies toward autonomy or separation that preserved a vigorous life in the nations of Western Europe despite the centralizing thrust of early modern absolutisms. It has recently been shown with rich illustration how, even until the mid-nineteenth century, the peasants of France remained differentiated and set apart by their parochial ways and tradition-bound attachments; not until after the establishment of the Third Republic did peasants finally become Frenchmen.<sup>2</sup> We are aware as well of the enduring opposition of peoples like the Basques and Catalans to political and cultural absorption in a monolithic Spanish state. Lately, moreover, we have seen even in a long united country such as Great Britain a revival of Scottish and Welsh nationalism issuing in demands for devolution, autonomy, and even independence. Other similar examples could easily be mentioned. If this is true of the present and recent past, what must have been the strength of provincialism and regionalism within states three and four hundred years ago?

In acknowledging the latter's reality, there is no need to deny the importance of national patriotism coupled with loyalty to kings. England, France, and Spain entered the early modern era with a strong and growing consciousness and pride of nationality among their peoples that attached itself to rulers as its supreme expression. But national consciousness coexisted with and was modified by other sentiments and loyalties. These were planted in the soil of provincial and regional societies and their communities.<sup>3</sup> They reflected the influence of common traditions or religion. They belonged perhaps to older ways of life slow to change. They might be associated with a distinctive political identity and with prescriptive rights and privileges sanctioned by the past. They could be embodied in vertical structures of patronage and deference allying territorial aristocracies and common folk.

Consider one or two terms that illuminate the situation. In France, al-

<sup>2</sup>E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, Stanford, 1976.   <sup>3</sup>See Chapter 4 in this book.

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though men could and did speak of the *patrie* in the large, unrestricted meaning of country or fatherland, more commonly it signified one's province or native place, also called the *pays*. Thus, it was the province, rather than France or the kingdom, that was likely to be thought of as one's *patrie*. Similarly, in England, the word *country* referred either to the county and its community or to the country as a whole. Both senses were current and familiar. So again, one's "country" was the county, the local place of one's home or birth, no less than it was the land or kingdom in which one was a subject.<sup>4</sup>

Thus far I have been referring mainly to provincialism in its internal aspect as it manifested itself within a particular state or kingdom. Here, as related to revolution, it was not a question of opposition to a foreign or external dominion but of resistance to the prince and his government by a province or region politically incorporated within the realm.

There was a further aspect to provincialism, however, reflecting the consequences of dynastic unions. When disparate and independent states, countries, and nations were affiliated through royal marriages, inheritance, or conquest, they usually had no political tie save the same prince. In theory, each was to be ruled separately in accord with its own indigenous institutions. As pointed out in an earlier chapter, however, these dynastic associations caused serious strains and frictions.<sup>5</sup> Absentee kingship itself bred special problems of government and provoked the discontent of subjects who felt themselves neglected or mistreated. On the other hand, the presence of a stranger prince with his entourage aroused fears of undue foreign influence or exploitation. Thus, an English adviser cautioned the future Philip II of Spain upon his marriage in 1554 to Queen Mary Tudor, "It is an extreme grief to men of any nation or province to see other men, foreigners, possess those honors, offices, and dignities which in past times their fathers or predecessors enjoyed."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the entire burden of this writer's political counsel was the question of how a foreign prince could rule England.

It was inevitable, moreover, that one of the states in a union of crowns should predominate over the rest, despite their formal equality and independence. Under English rule, the kingdom of Ireland practically became a colony, while Scotland, if continuing essentially independent, was nonetheless reduced to an inferior position after its king inherited the English throne in 1603 and removed his seat of government to London. A similar situation developed in the Spanish monarchy, which built supraterritorial

<sup>4</sup>See G. Dupont-Ferrier, "Le Sens des mots 'patria' et 'patrie' en France au moyen age et jusq'au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue historique* 188 (1940); P. Zagorin, "The court and the country: A note on political terminology in the earlier seventeenth century," *English historical review* 77, 303 (1962).

<sup>5</sup>See Chapter 4 in this book.

<sup>6</sup>P. Donaldson (ed.), *A Machiavellian treatise by Stephen Gardiner*, Cambridge, 1975, 133.

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institutions to administer an empire dominated by Castilians and Castile, where the king of Spain reigned over his many possessions.

Amid the ambiguous, complicated relationships resulting from an amalgam of kingdoms under the same ruler, diverse patterns were possible. Yet in some measure, at any rate, the less-favored states and countries would resemble provincial dependencies subject to a metropolitan power. At worst, they would be like inferior subject realms under a foreign sovereignty, exploited for its dynastic and imperial needs, as were Spain's Italian states. At best, they would retain their independence and privileges, yet tend to view themselves at times as victims of an external and intrusive government pursuing interests inimical and distant to their own. The same English adviser previously cited took note of the harshness of Spain's rule of Naples and Milan; someday, he opined, the natives might rise and exterminate the Spaniards, as the English once did their Danish masters.<sup>7</sup> If their prince made unaccustomed demands upon such provincial subjects or tried to bind them with a heavier yoke, he risked inciting opposition all the more probable in proportion to the vitality of national patriotism and autonomous liberties. The possible difficulties were described in a nutshell by a Spanish commentator apropos of Catalonia in 1640. There were only three ways, he thought, that a prince could deal with a province of uncertain loyalty: go and live in it, put down its liberties and independence, or leave it with its laws and customs to be governed in its own fashion.<sup>8</sup> Philip IV and his minister, Olivares, precipitated a rebellion in Catalonia because they felt compelled to adopt the second of these alternatives.

Hence, provincialism in this aspect signified primarily a resistance directed against external rule, where a separate state or people opposed itself to alien domination or oppression by another.

## II

So ubiquitous and entrenched were localisms and provincialisms in the life of early modern Europe that no revolutionary conflict of the time was ever entirely free of their influence. Even the biggest revolutions, which engulfed entire states and peoples, were crucially affected by them. Tudor and Stuart England, the most politically unified of kingdoms, has nonetheless been pictured (if with some exaggeration) by local historians as a sort of federation of semi-independent county communities;<sup>9</sup> and, certainly, county insularities and loyalties had a considerable effect upon the English revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. In France, where pro-

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 133. <sup>8</sup> J. H. Elliott, *The revolt of the Catalans*, Cambridge, 1963, 491.

<sup>9</sup> See A. Everitt, *The community of Kent and the Great rebellion, 1640-1660*, Leicester, 1966, 13.

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vincialism retained exceptional strength, it ran right through such great internal struggles as the later sixteenth-century civil war and the Fronde. The revolt of the Netherlands was also interwoven with a marked provincialism, which stemmed from the vigor of provincial institutions and the comparatively modest level of political integration that Habsburg sovereignty had achieved in the Low Countries before resistance to its rule began.

We have also seen how much both localism and provincialism entered into the structure of agrarian and urban revolts. The bond between peasant or urban rebels and their particular locale, the inability of nearly all such movements to transcend territorial limits or unite with similar movements elsewhere, and their connection in some instances with the defense of provincial privileges all serve to illustrate this fact. We have seen, too, how in the case of the urban revolution in Naples in 1647 provincialism manifested itself in a short-lived attempt at actual separation and independence from Spanish rule.

Despite the appearance of localism and provincialism in all sorts of revolutions, provincial rebellion must be distinguished nonetheless as a separate type. Here the basic determinant was the presence of provincialism in its fullest, least deflected form so that resistance by the provincial society constituted the core of the revolutionary event. Even from a political standpoint, provincial rebellion was apt to represent not only a polarization against the monarchical center over particular grievances but an elemental affirmation or self-defense of a people's beliefs, liberties, or way of life. Therefore, its social participation tended to be broad and, besides masses, in most cases to include aristocracies in directing roles. Geographically, it centered upon the political space from whose griefs it arose. Its aims and targets of violence reflected the protest of the provincial or dependent society against the encroachments and pressures of central or external authority. The organization of revolt utilized communal structures and indigenous solidarities and institutions. Finally, provincial rebels looked to religion, laws, and custom to justify their demands and their defiance of innovative and oppressive state builders.

These may be considered the constellation of typological traits to which provincial rebellions approximated although, needless to say, also qualified in different ways in particular cases.

The Spanish, French, and English monarchies all knew provincial rebellions in these years of the sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries, when royal central power set forth on new conquests over the obstacles that continued to bar its way. Spain's Habsburg sovereigns had to contend with it mainly in its external aspect, which meant the resistance to Madrid's rule by subject realms bent either on preserving autonomy or else on separation. The revolts of Aragon in 1591 and of Catalonia and Portu-

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gal in 1640 were all three of this kind. Of provincial revolt of the internal sort, the only significant occurrence was the Morisco insurrection of 1568 in Granada, the once Muslim principality that was part of the kingdom of Castile.<sup>10</sup>

The revolution in the Netherlands, another subject possession of imperial Spain, presents a special case. Although we could liken it in several respects to a provincial rebellion, fundamentally it transcended the latter in its scope, issues, activated forces, and international ramifications. On this account, it is more closely related to the biggest and least common struggles of the age, those I have called revolutionary civil wars.

The French monarchy reigned over a unitary kingdom, a collection of provinces, not of disparate realms. Therefore, its provincial rebellions were all of the internal sort, mirroring the particularist resistance of provincial society to the centralizing and leveling aims of the French crown. Nowhere did provincialism have stronger foundations than in France. The existence of provinces with a distinctive political status and privileges formally recognized by earlier kings, the connection between autonomist tendencies and the possession of hereditary governorships of provinces by members of the high nobility, and the upsurge of a disruptive particularism at every period of royal weakness all hindered the advance of political centralism and were a perennial problem to the royal state.

With provincial protest so easily provoked and widely diffused in France, the line of demarcation between provincial rebellion and other types of revolution is sometimes difficult to establish. In the first half of the sixteenth century, provincial resentment of royal fiscality was occasionally an ingredient of both agrarian and urban revolts like those of 1548 in Guienne. Then, with the advent of the civil war of the later century, the energies of a centrifugal provincialism were taken up in it along with all the other violent differences rending France. Again, in the second decade of the seventeenth century, we should probably recognize an element of provincial discontent behind the intrigues and conspiracies of the prince of Condé, the dukes of Bouillon, Vendôme, and others of the high nobility against the regency of the Queen Mother Marie de Médicis during the minority of Louis XIII. Such *grands*, governors of provinces, where they commanded followings and power, could exploit provincial com-

<sup>10</sup>There was an earlier Morisco insurrection in Valencia in 1526, provoked by the mass conversions that the rebels of the Germania attempted to impose on the Moorish population of the region; see J. Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs*, 2 v., Oxford, 1965–9, v. 1, 207–8. Of this tragic conflict a historian has remarked, “Religious and popular hatreds found their most authentic manifestations in these forced conversions . . . in the same blow the Germania rebels punished the infidels and the too loyal subjects of the territorial seigneurs” (T. Halperin Donghi, “Les Morisques du royaume de Valence au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Annales E. S. C.* 11, 2 [1956], 154).

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plaints for their own self-interested ends.<sup>11</sup> Also in the earlier seventeenth century, we see peasant and urban insurrections serving at times as a vehicle for provincial antifiscal grievances, a fact that helps to explain why these popular seditions received elite approval or support.

Besides these cases, however, certain revolts bore a predominantly provincialist character. The Huguenot rebellions of the 1620s belonged to this category. French Protestantism, now reduced in extent and numbers, survived in its political-military form only as a regional-provincial power. It waged its losing battle against the crown to preserve its political immunities from bastions in the southwest. The revolt of the Huguenot fortress city, La Rochelle, was the culminating incident of this conflict. Another manifestation of provincial resistance was the revolt in Languedoc in 1632 by the duke of Montmorency. Lastly, before the Fronde supervened, there was the Nu-pieds rebellion of Normandy in 1639. Although resembling in some ways other *soulevements populaires* of antifiscal motif such as we have seen in France, this movement contained traits that stamped it primarily as a provincial protest.

All three kingdoms of the English monarchy – England, Ireland, and Scotland after the union of crowns – were alike the scene of provincial rebellions. England itself was immune to the extreme forms of provincialism prevalent in France, but the weight of Tudor government and regime-imposed change upon outlying regions touched off several provincial revolts in the sixteenth century. The most threatening was the Pilgrimage of Grace against Henry VIII in 1536, the biggest English insurrection between the Tudor accession and the revolution of 1640. Another provincial revolt occurred in 1549 under Edward VI, the Prayer Book or Western rebellion in Devon and Cornwall. A third, smaller and more easily suppressed than the others, was the rising in the north in 1569 led by the earls of Westmorland and Northumberland. Along with these, we must also reckon Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion in 1554, the result of Mary Tudor's Spanish marriage and English fears of Spanish domination.

Ireland in the sixteenth century passed through perhaps ten insurrections against English rule. All were limited to a particular area or province; all likewise showed the effects of both the traditional division of Irish society between old Irish and old English and of the disunity of a subject population fragmented into rivalrous feudal and tribal units under England's paramountcy. These revolts began with the Kildare rebellion of 1534 under Silken Thomas Fitzgerald, son and heir of the earl of Kildare; they included the insurrection of Shane O'Neill in the 1560s and subsequent outbreaks in this and the following decade; they ended with the

<sup>11</sup> See V. Tapié, *La France de Louis XIII et de Richelieu*, Paris, 1967, 92–100.

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rebellion of 1595–1603 in Ulster led by the great native nobleman and clan chief Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone.<sup>12</sup> The latter was Gaelic Ireland's final and strongest stand against the expansion of English power. Its defeat completed England's conquest and exposed the country to total domination and intensified colonization by English Protestant interests. In 1641 a subjugated Ireland rose once more. This attempt at freedom was the nearest approach to a united national resistance the Irish had ever achieved. Although it, too, foundered on internal quarrels, it was among the biggest provincial rebellions of the age.

Finally, in Scotland, English interference and other differences led to the rebellion of 1638, the first in the violent cycle of mid-century revolutions in the possessions of Charles I. It was an irresistible assertion of Scottish independence animated by flaming zeal for religious and political reforms. The Scottish rebellion may be compared with some of the biggest revolutionary movements of the era. Scotland, however, could no longer escape the connection with a more powerful, dominant England, with whose destinies its own were now permanently interlocked. It was, moreover, an ironic consequence of the English revolution that its victory led to the temporary conquest of Scotland and a coerced political union with England. Thus, in view of this overshadowing relationship, the revolt of Scotland is best understood within the context of provincial rebellion.

### III

#### FRANCE: THE LANGUEDOC REVOLT OF 1632 AND THE NU-PIEDS REVOLT IN NORMANDY OF 1639

To achieve a closer understanding of these several provincial rebellions, we shall consider them partly as a whole and partly as they group themselves into those largely of an internal and those largely of an external aspect. Empirically, to be sure, they present many peculiarities and differences. Nonetheless, a comparative view may make it possible to recognize some parallel and common features that relate them similarly to their world.

It is revelatory of provincial rebellion that conjunctural factors ordinarily played a negligible role in its genesis. This was in contrast to peasant and urban revolts, where such factors were in most cases essential. Provincial rebellions were not usually economic conflicts, nor were they outbreaks of a population afflicted beyond endurance by the adversities of

<sup>12</sup>For sixteenth-century Irish revolts, which are hard to count because of their diffuseness, see G. Morton, *Elizabethan Ireland*, London, 1971; N. Canny, *The Elizabethan conquest of Ireland*, London, 1976; and R. D. Edwards, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, London, 1977.



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*conjoncture*. An exception may be made for the antifiscalism of the Nu-pieds revolt in Normandy, which was preceded by the ravages of plague, the quartering of troops upon the province, and similar burdens.<sup>13</sup> As a rule, however, short-term economic reverses, slump, harvest failure, dearth, and social misery had little to do with the eruption of provincial revolt.

What principally engendered it, rather, was the enmity aroused in the provincial society by commands and rule in contradiction to its privileges, political assumptions, local structures, and basic values. It was a product of the confrontation between an obdurate provincialism in unitary kingdoms or inferior realms and the architects of sovereign power set on achieving a more efficient exploitation of subjects, a tighter religiopolitical unity, and a stronger concentration of governmental authority in royal hands.

In France, we see this confrontation in perhaps its clearest form. So ridden was France with irresponsible localisms and a variety of privileges limiting government action that only an aggressive absolutism seemed able to master them. The challenge they posed to central authority became even more acute with the advent of the war years from the later 1620s on: a time when the crown had to mobilize the kingdom's resources for costly combat against France's main European adversaries, the Spanish monarchy and the Austrian Habsburgs. War has always been a major factor, probably more important in the long run than any other, in extending and fortifying the powers of the state. Under its iron necessities, Louis XIII and Richelieu made a gigantic effort to strengthen royal command over the lives and goods of subjects. To effect this end, a historian has commented, the minister "inevitably rode roughshod over many rights, privileges, and immunities that bore the sanction of tradition and, in certain instances, of accepted law." But to Richelieu there seemed to be no other way to achieve control over an insubordinate kingdom except by doing battle with the entrenched interests and collective prerogatives of subjects.<sup>14</sup>

Richelieu's opponents accused him of transforming the French monarchy into an outright tyranny based on sheer coercion. The author of a *Remonstrance* addressed to Louis XIII in 1631 declared that the pretext of the preservation of the state and *lèse-majesté* was used to justify grave injustices.

If the sovereign courts remonstrate against edicts that oppress the people, if frontier provinces point to their privileges . . . if they oppose the introduction of changes

<sup>13</sup> See M. Foisil, *La Révolte des Nu-pieds et les révoltes normandes de 1639*, Paris, 1970, pt. 1.

<sup>14</sup> W. F. Church, *Richelieu and reason of state*, Princeton, 1972, 303.

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that will ruin them, all are reduced to questions of authority. Petitions are called rebellion; no mention is made of kindness, clemency, or justice, only severity, rigor, and force.<sup>15</sup>

Such statements expose some of the reasons for provincial rebellion. A case in point was Languedoc's revolt in the summer of 1632, incited by the crown's attempt, begun three years earlier, to establish *élus* and by other assorted severities. Its leader was the duke of Montmorency, governor of Languedoc, a dignity hereditary in his family for a century. Montmorency was at once a figurehead of both provincial and aristocratic disaffection. In one of its aspects, his rebellion was connected with the incessant conspiracies and intrigues by the *grands* against Richelieu, of which the focal point was the king's mother and brother, Gaston, duke of Orléans, known as Monsieur. Montmorency allied himself with Monsieur, who claimed to wish to deliver France from Richelieu's tyranny. The rising was nonetheless an authentic expression of Languedoc's grievances. The governor had behind him a clientele of noblemen, clergy, officials, and other followers in the province. "The character of the house of Montmorency is so impressed in Languedoc," Richelieu was informed, "that the people regard the name of the king as imaginary."<sup>16</sup> The assembled Estates of Languedoc, opposed to *élus*, called on Montmorency to unite with them in defense of provincial liberties. Four or five bishops also endorsed the movement. The Parlement of Toulouse, however, condemned it. All the dissidents, of course, denied that they were rebels.

Montmorency took the field with an army of about five thousand men that was defeated in September by royal troops at Castelnaudary. Captured in battle, he was tried by the Parlement of Toulouse and beheaded on October 30, despite many petitions to the king and cardinal to spare his life. Having come to Languedoc to pacify the province, Louis XIII abolished some of the *élections* whose introduction had ignited resistance. But the prompt suppression of the revolt and the ruthless punishment of Montmorency declared the crown's intention to have its will. The conflict was an opposition of right against right, province against crown, local liberties against imperatives of the state.<sup>17</sup>

A similar affirmation of provincialism dominated the Nu-pieds rebellion in Normandy between July and November 1639. The Nu-pieds, or "barefeet," who gave it its name were not so called on account of poverty or wretchedness; they were the saltmakers who worked barefoot on the

<sup>15</sup>M. de Morgues, *Très-humble, très-véritable, et très-importante remontrance au roy* (1631), cited in *ibid.*, 213.

<sup>16</sup>*Lettres de Richelieu*, v. 4, 365, cited in J. B. Perkins, *France under Mazarin with a review of the administration of Richelieu*, 2 v., New York, 1886, v. 1, 139n.

<sup>17</sup>This account is based on Tapié, *La France de Louis XIII*, 367–75; J. Mariéjol, "Henri IV et Louis XIII, 1598–1643," in *Histoire de France depuis les origines jusqu'à la Révolution*, ed. E. Lavisse, Paris, 1903, v. 1, pt. 2, 286–7; and Church, *Richelieu and reason of state*, 234–5.