

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE QUEEN'S CHAIN FROM A COMPASSIONATE OBSERVER

"The Queen's Chain is a polity on the Northern Coast of Arsenne. It is bordered on its inland margin by the Grand Duchies of Porlonne and High Forest, and upon its Northwestern Sea Border by La Rhenc, its fellow electory and great opponent. The Eastern coast of the Queen's chain straggles around the peninsula of Onchats, which encloses the Inner Sea of Cais.

The country's present capital is Lemon's Hill, a sprawling metropolis of mercantile trade and learning, which occupies the greater part of the Cope's Water Delta and is the seat of all the great companies and foundations of the federation. Lemon's Hill is home to supreme legislative and judicial authority, as well as the vestigial royal court who stand in notional executive precedence over the nine divisional chancellors within whom practical authority in diplomatic and military matters actually resides.

This present constitutional arrangement of federation among the diverse peoples and lands of the Queen's Chain rests on a historical compromise arrived at after the close of hostilities in the War of 218.

The Treaty of Virgana, under which armistice was reached between the forces of exhausted royal party and the ascendant chanceries of their former vassal states, established a form of graduated sovereignty, wherein each duchy hitherto answerable by the House of Baywide would become an equal and independent division of the newly formed Queen's Chain, wherein each region would elect its own chancel to govern all local regulation save that of common education, preferments to noble office, taxation and military appropriation.

These matters were left to the newly formed body named the Royal Chancel, which determines these vexed questions through debate and voting to consensus. The Royal Chancel takes owes its royal appellation and its nominal allegiance to the senior inheritor of the Seat of Baywide, though this deference consists merely in ritual. In practice, the present monarch of the

Queen's Chain, Queen Marjorie III, holds a seat within the Royal Chancel but takes no greater part in proceedings and presents no greater rights of decision than any of the nine divisional chancellors who are her fellows in this office. The same practice was maintained in the reigns of her mothers, Queen Precedent Baillie II, and Queen Ordinary Tyra IV, both of whom died of barrel fever during the great famine which coincided with the collapse of the Hilliers Regency and the loss of the War of 218.

Public opinion amongst the common people towards this compromise between elected democrats and the forces of the ancien regime tends more towards the magnanimous than the resentful, with most diarists and paperhangers maintaining that the present situation reflects a capitulation and humiliation of the rump of the royal party which did not flee to Porlonne at the close of hostilities, and that the presence of a royal figure in the machinery of government represents a form of inoculation, whereby more dangerous royalist sentiment can be distracted and redirected from the channels of insurrection and terrorism which are still today so frequently advocated in the secret meetings of monastic and sinequary conspirators.

The transitional body which negotiated these arrangements, the Estates Entire, is today entirely in retirement. It officially consists of representatives from all the elected bodies of law and education, taking in the Beadlerie, members of labouring combinations, and the Fellows and Mothers of the Academic Foundations. In practice, the Estates remains invisible and silent behind all the present superstructure of government, having, at least on paper, the authority to supersede the decisions of the High Court of Contest, and the Royal Chancel itself. The principle of government by consent that underlies this body is, at least in theory, present in the elevated delegatory bodies of the chanceries and Royal Chancel, but these qualities are so frequently indiscernible in the technocratic and bureaucrathic governance practiced by their principals that advocates for the common law still today call incessantly for the reassembly of the body, to remove the present order in root and branch and collapse the federation by divisions into a localised system of

governance by commune. These communards are better represented in the fractious parliaments of Hithley and Dietemont than the well-fed and complacent courts of Chanchette, Estoc and the other divisions, but their voices are heard wherever elected authority appears to prefer select interest to the will of the people.

The devolution to individual divisions of all matters of regulation not touching on education, foreign diplomacy, military mobilisation, tax and interdivisional trade, has led to a great divergence in the manners and laws of the various parts of the chain. There is commonly held to be a distinction between the Western Divisions of Hithley, Estilling, and Deeswich, and all of their Easterly fellows. This conflict of thought and tendency is often explained away by those Westerly Divisions' enthusiasm for the invasion of Doppe which began the War of 218, as well as the naked hunger with which their wealthiest citizens have taken up the legally dubious practice of forced and sweated labour undertaken by prisoners for private profits. Numerous scandals involving the transport of indebted citizens of La Rhenc into Northern Hithley, and their exploitation under cover of legally preposterous claims of vagrancy, have been the cause of near schismatic confrontation in the Royal Chancel, along with persistent threats by the various Easterly Factions to enact laws of boycott over goods produced in the areas where this practice is connived with by chancery officials.

Whatever the difficulties caused by the process of reconstruction and federation, the most enduring conflict in the politics of The Queen's Chain long predates its formation. It is the opposition of those who make their living by the sale of labour and those who live upon the profits of that labour, those who have in times past been granted rights of coercion by royal decree under which all forms of communal and labouring organisation were outlawed and free citizens were often reduced to a condition of near serfdom. It is universally acknowledged that the present trading and mercantile leadership of the Queen's Chain are, as near as is possible, a body descended from the holders of noble titles and royal sinecures under the old regime. Though many now profess a creed of

liberalism, it is no accident that legal attempts to restrict the franchise and to limit communal organisation among the labouring classes are commonly advanced by those who once expected those selfsame citizens to lie in the street as their boxes and carriages went by."

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