and on the slavish repetition of his father's pet notions and nostrums. The tone of this work may be gauged from the fact that Isaac lauded Henry IV as the source of all that is good in France. Addressing his Majesty, young Isaac wrote that heaven 'has favored my father in having let him live during your reign'.

With the fall of his father from grace and his subsequent death, Isaac's career as a political economist came to an untimely end, and he ended his days as a minor but faithful lieutenant of the chief minister, Cardinal Richelieu.

8.3 The first 'Colbert': the duc de Sully

What Jean-Baptiste Colbert would be in the last half of the seventeenth century to Louis XIV, Maximilien de Béthune, Baron de Rosny, the duc de Sully (1560–1641) was to Henry IV. The young Béthune was born a Huguenot aristocrat, Baron de Rosny. Naturally, he too gravitated to the court of Henry of Navarre, and fought and was wounded during the religious wars. It is characteristic of Rosny that he urged Henry IV to turn Catholic in order to save his throne, although he himself refused to do so.

The arrogant and ruthless Rosny quickly became Henry IV's leading minister as superintendent of finance, and for his services was made by his master the duc de Sully. Sully's own views stem from his *Memoirs* (1638), written in old age as a glowing apologia for his own term in office, for Sully had been forcibly retired to private life after the assassination of his royal patron. In his *Memoirs*, Sully claims to have opposed the more crackpot schemes of his fellow top bureaucrat Laffemas. Thus, he writes at length of his opposition to Laffemas's silk fiasco. Silk could not readily grow in the French climate, he had warned, and also it would lead Frenchmen into undue luxury.

It is not, of course, that Sully was not a mercantilist. It is just that, instead of proceeding with the folly of force-feeding domestic luxury industries, such as silk, he would have passed laws directly against luxurious consumption. He was eager to ban the export of gold and silver directly, paying fees to himself and others for ferreting out evaders of the law. Some of his specific views, of course, such as on the silk scheme, might be a rewriting of history to make himself look good to contemporaries; after all, neither Laffemas nor King Henry were then alive to verify his recollections. Others might be simply the product of bureaucratic infighting with his fellow economic czar.

A dedicated absolutist, who indeed did much to entrench centralized absolutism in France, the Duc de Sully was basically as much a protectionist as his colleague Laffemas, despite the claim of some historians that Sully (and his monarch) was some sort of 'free-trader'. The one significant case where Sully opposed a Laffemas protection scheme was the latter's proposal to ban all imports of textiles. But here the basic reason was his loyalty to the city of

Lyons, the leading Protestant stronghold in south-eastern France, which would have suffered greatly from the prohibition of such trade. Throughout his career, Sully fought to uphold the fortunes and privileges of Lyons.

8.4 The eccentric poet: Antoine de Montchrétien

One of the most bizarre characters in the history of economic thought was the poet and dramatist Antoine de Montchrétien (c.1575–1621). Born in Falaise, in Normandy, Montchrétian grew up in a middle-class household, his father probably having been an apothecary. He went to a fashionable school at Caen, and at the age of 20 began to write poetry and tragic plays, some of which, including *Hector* and *L'Écossaise*, are still considered classics of French literature. At 30 Montchrétien became involved in a scandalous duel, and fled to England. After travelling in Holland, he returned to France around 1610 and married a rich Norman widow, who financed his start in the hardware business. He thereupon set up a factory at Ousonne-sur-Loire, where he produced knives and scythes.

In 1615, at the age of 40, Antoine de Montchrétien published his one and only work on economics, the *Traicté de l'Oeconomie Politique* (*Treatise on Political Economy*). The only distinction of this book was its title, for it was the first time in history that the phrase 'political economy' had ever appeared. The *Treatise* is a rambling, disorganized account of the economic resources of the country, and a plea to the twin rulers of France (the young King Louis XIII and his Regent and Queen Mother, Marie de Medici) to impose order, rule with an iron hand, and advance the greatness of their nation-state, France. As Charles Cole puts it, the book 'is based in large part on the tacit assumption that control and direction of the economic life of the country is one of the chief functions of government, and it is a plea for greater activity in economic matters on the part of the rulers'.[1] One sentence from the work will convey its essential spirit: 'Your Majesties possess a great state, agreeable in geographic situation, abounding in wealth, flourishing in peoples, powerful in good and strong cities, invincible in arms, triumphant in glory'. All France needs, Montchrétien opined, is 'order': 'Order is the entelechy of states'.

The alleged need for a state-imposed order was linked neatly with Montchrétien's conscious echoing of the Montaigne fallacy: 'It is said that no one ever loses without another gaining. This is true and is borne out in the realm of commerce more than anywhere else'.

For Montchrétien, the French Crown in particular was supposed to regulate and foster production and trade, and especially manufactures, so that France could become self-sufficient. Foreign goods and foreign manufacturers should be driven out of France. Thus Dutch linen manufacturers were at the time allowed to operate in France; that must be ended. English textiles should be banned. France must be made self-sufficient in silk, Montchrétien asserted, and

he claimed that the fiasco of silk subsidy in the reign of Henry IV had come about only because of faithlessness on the part of the monarch's aides. Furthermore, since 'whatever is foreign corrupts us', foreign books should be prohibited, since they 'poison our spirits' and 'corrupt our manners'.

Nor did Montchrétien neglect his own scythe business. It was a national tragedy, he warned, that German scythes were outcompeting French products, even though French scythes were superior. One wonders, then, why French consumers were perverse enough to prefer the German product – unless, of course, its price was lower.

Idleness, according to Montchrétien, was evil and had to be stamped out, by force if necessary. Man, to Montchrétien, is born to live in continual labour; the policy of the state should therefore be to make sure that no part of the population ever remains idle. Idle hands are the devil's hands; idleness corrupts the strength of men and the chastity of women. Idleness, in short, is the mother of all sins. The criminals and the unruly should, therefore, be made to work. As for so many other mercantilists, full employment for Montchrétien meant at bottom coerced employment.

The most pervasive motif in Montchrétien's work was his deep and abiding hatred and revulsion towards foreigners, towards their imported products and towards their persons. Foreigners, he fulminated, 'are leeches who attach themselves to this great [French] body, suck out its best blood, and gorge themselves with it, then leave the skin and detach themselves'. All in all, France, 'once so pure, so clean', had been turned into 'a bilge, a sewer, a cesspool for other countries'.

It is impossible to know if Montchrétien was hoping for great things from the French monarch, but in any case nothing happened, and so he began to ordain himself into the nobility, by simply calling himself the 'sieur de Vateville'. And even though he implied in several spots in his *Treatise* that he was Catholic, and declared his adoration for the absolute monarchy often enough, yet he took part in a Huguenot uprising in Normandy in 1621, and was killed in battle. Four days later, a judicial tribunal condemned the dead man posthumously, dragged, broke and burned his body, and then scattered his ashes to the winds. Such was the punishment handed out to Antoine de Montchrétien by his much vaunted absolute rulers.

8.5 The grandiose failure of François du Noyer

François du Noyer, sieur de Saint-Martin, had a dream. It was a grandiose vision of the future. All around him, in the early seventeenth century, and in all major nations of the West, the state was creating monopoly companies. Then why not, du Noyer reasoned, go all the way? If monopoly companies for specific products or specific areas of trade were good, why not go one better? Why not one big company, one gigantic monopoly for virtually everything?

King Henry IV listened to du Noyer's schemes with interest. They were, after all, only logical conclusions of doctrines and notions that were everywhere in the air. But it was not until 1613 that du Noyer worked out his plan in detail, and set it before the council of state. It was to be an enormous, virtually all-inclusive company, to be called the French Royal Company of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. The company, to be headed of course by du Noyer himself, was to have either a privileged monopoly, or the right to regulate all other firms, in virtually every trade. Thus, the Royal Company was to make cloth, and regulate all other manufacture and preparation of all types of cloth; control all aspects of wine making, and all merchants and hotels buying wine would have to invest certain sums in the company, at a low fixed return; hold four privileged fairs a year in Paris; have a monopoly of all public coaches; control all mines in France; obtain gratis various unoccupied Crown lands and abandoned quarries; dig canals, erect mills; have a monopoly on sale of playing cards; make munitions; borrow and lend money; and numerous other activities. Furthermore, du Noyer would have the Royal Company obtain extraordinary powers from the Crown:

- it would have the right to seize beggars and vagabonds and take them to the French colonies, which it would presumably run;
- all convicted criminals would be sentenced to forced labor for the company in the colonies;
- all bankrupts who had managed to save some money from their wreckage would be forced to invest that amount in the company;
- all people exiled from France could be let back into the country by serving or paying money to the company;
- all who conducted trade higher than their rank or privileges would be forced to join the company;
- all business documents whatsoever would have to use stamped paper sold to them by the company.

The council of state was impressed by du Noyer's vision and ordered an investigation of the project. The following year, 1614, the Royal Company plan was approved by the states-general of France, and various generals, admirals, and other high-level officials joined in the praise. Du Noyer reached the peak of his influence, being given the old Laffemas post of controller-general of commerce. It seemed as if the grandiloquent Royal Company plan was actually going to be adopted. Du Noyer elaborated on his plan in a pamphlet which he presented to the king in 1615.

The king, or rather the regent, Marie de Medici, was impressed, and in 1616 recreated the old Commission of Commerce, formerly headed by

Laffemas, with instructions to study the du Noyer project in detail. The commission met, and the following year approved the plan of the Royal Company, and urged that all persons carrying on trade be forced to invest their money exclusively in it. In short, the Royal Company would be the monopoly company to end all companies. The delighted du Noyer, in the meanwhile, seeing his cherished scheme close to fruition, published a longer pamphlet on the plan, urging his one big company upon France. Like the king himself, the Royal Company would be unique and universal, and its capital would come from both private and royal sources.

The Royal Company project seemed to keep barrelling along, the council of state granting its approval in 1618, and again in 1620, when King Louis XIII himself gave it his warm endorsement. In early 1621, public criers throughout Paris announced the glad tidings that the Royal Company had been formed, and was open to receive funds for investment.

The problem, however, was money. No one seemed to want to provide actual cash or even pledges to the new enterprise, however grandiloquent and privileged it appeared to be. The king urged every city in France to join, but the cities kept hanging back, pleading that they had no funds. In desperation, controller-general of commerce du Noyer scaled down the Royal Company to concentrate only on commerce and trade with the Indies and other overseas areas. Finally, du Noyer narrowed the scope of his beloved company's capital still further to just Paris and Brittany. But even the Bretons proved not to be interested.

The coming to power as prime minister of Cardinal Richelieu in 1624 put the du Noyer scheme into abeyance. But four years later, the project had its final fling. The king urged the commission of Commerce to act, and in the spring of 1629, it again approved the plan, this time adding to its original grandiose powers the right to make treaties with foreign countries, and to establish colonial islands for entrepôt trade.

After nearly three decades of planning and lobbying, du Noyer now needed only the simple signature of King Louis to put his hypertrophied vision into effect. But for some reason, the royal signature never came. No one knows quite why. Perhaps the powerful Richelieu didn't want a rival's scheme to be approved. Or perhaps the king was getting weary of the aging monomaniac and his untiring enthusiasm. Repeated entreaties and importuning, however, fell only on deaf ears. The Royal Company was at last dead, stillborn, and old du Noyer's loss was the French public's gain.

8.6 Under the rule of the cardinals, 1624–61

The 1620s to the 1650s were decades of rule in France by two very secular cardinals. The first was the stern, implacable, cunning, and charismatic Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal de Richelieu (1585–1642). A scion of an old family

of lesser nobility in Poitou, Richelieu's father, François, had been a particular favourite of Henry III and Henry IV. As a result, young Armand was made bishop of Luçon by Henry IV in 1606. Eight years later, Richelieu attracted the attention of the Queen Mother, Marie de Medici, and became chief adviser in her exile. He was made a cardinal in 1622, and became prime minister in 1624, to remain so until his death 20 years later.

Richelieu's main interest was his participation in the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), which devastated Germany for decades to come. This war symbolized a fundamental shift in European wars from the strictly religious conflicts of the previous century to the political nation-state ambitions of the seventeenth century. Thus Richelieu, the at least nominally Catholic (albeit *politique*) cardinal of a Catholic country, found himself heading a largely Protestant European coalition against the Catholic Habsburgs of Austria and Spain.

The cardinal's theoretical views were set forth in two books written near the end of his life, his *Memoirs on the Reign of Louis XIII* and his *Political Testament.* While his major practical interest had not been domestic or economic affairs, he had helped build up the absolutism of the French state. In his works, he repeated the usual absolutist mercantilist views of the France of his era. France should be self-sufficient in all things, the navy and merchant marine built up, monopolies granted, the idle put to work or locked up in institutions, and luxurious consumption prohibited.

An interesting new variant was Richelieu's candid attitude towards the mass of Frenchmen as simply animals to be prodded or coerced in ways that were optimal for the French state. Thus taxes should not be so high that commerce and industry are discouraged, but neither should they be so low as to leave the public too well off. For if the people were too comfortable and complacent, it would be impossible to 'contain them in the rules of their duty'. Richelieu added the revealing comment that 'It is necessary to compare them [the people] to mules, who, being accustomed to burdens, are spoiled by a long rest more than by work'.

It is clear that in the course of promoting the interests of the nation-state and of his monarch, Richelieu did not neglect his own concerns. A receiver of a modest annual income of 25 000 *livres* upon his entry into the post of prime minister, by the end of his career in office Cardinal Richelieu was earning some 3 million *livres* per annum. Apparently, the cardinal had no problem in serving the enrichment of his sovereign and of himself at the same time.

Richelieu's successor was a fascinating character, a Sicilian whose father was a high official attached to the powerful Colonna family. Jules Mazarin (1602–61) was educated in Rome by the Jesuits, and then became a Church official at the University of Alcalá in Spain. Returning to Rome to earn his doctorate in law, Mazarin was a captain of infantry, and then a papal diplomat

of note. He was made a church canon without ever having been a priest. While serving as papal nuncio to France, he gained the favour of the great Richelieu, who offered Mazarin a high official post if he should become a naturalized French citizen.

It is not many men who emigrate, become a citizen of another land (as Mazarin did in 1639), and then become prime minister of that country only three years later. Mazarin, however, achieved that feat, becoming cardinal (still without being a priest) in 1641, and succeeding Richelieu when the latter died a year later. Mazarin was shrewd enough to court the favour of the queen, so that when Louis XIII died the next year, and the queen became regent, Mazarin could continue in his powerful post. Except for a year or two's hiatus, Mazarin continued as prime minister until his death in 1661.

Mazarin had far less interest in economic affairs than his predecessor, and was no theoretician, devoting himself largely to diplomacy and war. He didn't need much theoretical insight, however, to amass a fortune in high office that put even his predecessor to shame. By the end of his rule, he had accumulated an immense personal fortune of approximately 50 million *livres*.

One noteworthy work written during Mazarin's term was by a Carmelite monk, Jean Éon, whose religious name was Mathias de Saint-Jean (c.1600–81). Éon was born in Saint-Malo, in Brittany, and became a friend and adviser of the governor of Brittany, a relative of Richelieu's, Marshal de la Meilleraye. Éon eventually became Carmelite provincial in Touraine, and refused the opportunity to become attorney-general of that province.

During Éon's life in Brittany, the Breton merchants became interested in founding a privileged commercial company, and in 1641 a group of merchants, consulting with de la Meilleraye, worked out plans for a large company, centred at Nantes, to be called the Société de la Bourse Commune de Nantes. The company was approved by the council of state in 1646, but it provoked an anonymous pamphlet in opposition. Éon was hired by the city of Nantes, and encouraged by la Meilleraye to write a book in defence of the company. The result was the lengthy *Honourable Commerce or Political Considerations* (*Le Commerce honorable ou considérations politiques*) (Nantes, 1647). The book was dedicated to Éon's friend and patron la Meilleraye, whom he extolled as inheriting the mantle of economic leadership of the nation from Richelieu.

Éon's book was a compilation of standard mercantilist doctrines and need not be examined in detail here. He almost rivalled Montchrétien in his hatred for foreigners, and in his wish to drastically curtail their activities in or selling to France. Two of his personal and original contributions were his paean to the sea, shipping, and the seafaring life, and his eulogy to the city of Nantes, its glory and its unique suitability for locating a privileged company.

8.7 Colbert and Louis XIV

Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–83) was no scholar or theorist, but he knew with firm conviction what ideas he liked, and these were the mercantilist notions that had filled the air in France and the rest of Europe for generations. Colbert's accomplishment, while functioning as the Sun King's economic czar, was to put this compendium of mercantilist ideas into effect on a grand scale. Colbert was convinced that the ideas were good, just and correct, and he fervently believed that any opponent was completely wrong, either ignorant or biased by personal motives and special pleading. His opponents, such as businessmen who preferred competition or free exchange, were narrow, short-sighted, and selfish; only he, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, had the long-run interests of the nation and the nation-state at heart. Merchants, he repeatedly declared, were little men with only 'little private interests'. For example, they often preferred liberty to compete with each other, whereas it is in the 'public interest' and the 'good of the state' to see to it that all products are uniform in make-up and quality. Colbert was speaking here, of course, of the joint interests of the state, its rulers and bureaucracy, and of cartellists, all of whose private interests were in fact at stake. But although the myth of the 'public' was, as usual, a mask for particular individuals and groups, their interests were indeed far grander than those of 'little' individual merchants.

The mercantilist ideas of Colbert were familiar: encouraging and keeping bullion in the country so that it can flow into the coffers of the state; prohibiting the export of bullion; cartellizing through compulsory high standards of quality; subsidizing of exports; and restriction on imports until France became self-sufficient. Colbert's ideas on taxation were those of almost every minister of finance everywhere, except they were more clearly and far more candidly expressed: 'The art of taxation', he said, 'consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest amount of feathers with the least amount of hissing'. There is no more dramatic encapsulation of the inherently conflicting interests of the people *vs* the state. From the point of view of the state and its rulers, the people are but a giant goose to be plucked as efficaciously as possible.

Furthermore, that swelling the coffers of the king and the state was the simple reason for the otherwise silly 'bullionist' doctrines of the mercantilists can be seen in this revealing statement of Colbert's to the king: 'The universal rule of finances should be always to watch, and use every care, and all the authority of Your Majesty, to attract money into the kingdom, to spread it out into all the provinces so as to pay their taxes'.

Like other mercantilists, Colbert warmly embraced the 'Montaigne fallacy' about trade. Trade was war and conflict. The total amount of trade in the world, the total number of ships, the total production of manufacturing, was fixed. One nation could only improve its trade, or shipping or manufactures,

by depriving some other country of this fixed quantum. One nation's gain must be another's loss. Colbert gloried in the fact that French trade was growing, allegedly at the expense of misery inflicted on other nations. As Colbert wrote to King Louis XIV in 1669, 'This state is flourishing not only in itself, but also by the want which it has inflicted upon all the neighbouring states'.

In reality, trade and conquest are not akin, but are diametric opposites. Each party to every exchange benefits, whether the exchange is between nationals of the same country or of different countries. Political boundaries have nothing to do with the economic gain from trade and markets. In exchange, one man's gain is only accomplished by contributing to the gain of someone else; just as both 'nation' (i.e. people living in certain countries or any other geographical area) mutually benefit from trade between them. Colbert's theories, however, fitted in with deep hostility toward all foreigners, particularly such prosperous nations as England and Holland.

Like other mercantilists, Colbert detested the idleness of others, and sought to force them into working for the nation and state. All vagabonds must be driven out of the country or put to forced labour as galley-slaves. Holidays should be reduced, so that people would work harder.

Colbert was unusual among mercantilists in giving especial care to bringing the intellectual and artistic life of the nation under state control. The object was to make sure that art and intellect served to glorify the king and his works. An enormous amount of money was poured into palaces and *chateaux* for the king, the mightiest of which was approximately 40 million *livres* on the great, isolated palace at Versailles. During Colbert's term, some 80 million *livres* were spent on royal edifices. Moreover, Colbert mobilized artists and intellectuals into academies, and supported them by grants and government projects. The French Academy, created shortly before as an uninfluential semi-private group, was nationalized by Colbert and put in charge of the French language. The Academy of Painting and Sculpture, founded under Mazarin and given a legal monopoly of art instruction, was reinforced by Colbert, who imposed strict regulations on these artists so that their work would be proper and orderly and always in service to the king. Colbert founded an academy of architecture to work on royal buildings and to inculcate the proper architectural principles.

Neither were music nor the theatre safe from the all-encompassing rule of Colbert. Colbert preferred the Italian opera form to the French ballet, and so doomed the latter to the benefit of the Italian import. In 1659, the Abbé Perrin produced the first French opera, and so a decade later, Colbert conferred upon the abbé a monopoly of all rights to present musical performances. Perrin, however, was a poor manager, and he went bankrupt. While in a debtor's prison, Perrin sold his monopoly right to Jean Batiste Lulli, an Italian musi-

cian and composer. Lulli was given the right to form the Royal Academy of Music, and Lulli's permission was necessary for any further musical performance with more than two instruments.

Similarly, Colbert created a theatrical monopoly. In 1673, he forced two existing theatres to unite: when a third troupe was later forced to join them, the *Comédie française* was thereby formed in 1680. The *Comédie française* was given a monopoly of all dramatic performances in Paris, was subjected to tight state regulation and control, and aided by state funds.

With regulation and monopoly came subsidy and subvention. Pensions, grants, no-show appointments as valets of the king, lucrative appointments as artists to the king, exemptions from taxes or from the wrath of creditors, all poured out into the arts. Similarly, for the theatre, writers, scientists, historians, philosophers, mathematicians and essayists. All manner of largesse poured out to them from the state trough. It was subvention that put to shame any contemporary national endowment for the humanities or national science foundation. The outpouring truly subverted any sort of spirit of independence that French intellectuals might have attained. The mind of a whole nation had been corrupted into the service of the state.

What manner of man was this, then, this grand bureaucrat who scorned the interests of mere individuals and merchants as petty and narrow, who presumed always to speak and act for the 'national' and even 'public' interest? Jean-Baptiste Colbert was born in Reims, into a merchant family. His father, Nicolas, purchased a minor government office in Paris; his more influential uncle, Odart Colbert, was a successful merchant-banker. Jean-Baptiste was an uneducated young man, but his uncle knew a banker for Cardinal Mazarin. More importantly, one of Odart's sons married the sister of an important government official, Michel Le Tellier. Uncle Odart got young Colbert a job working for Le Tellier, who had just been appointed to the post of secretary of state for military affairs. Jean-Baptiste's lifelong service in the top French bureaucracy had begun. After seven years in this post, Colbert married Marie Charon, after obtaining for her father, a wealthy financial official, an important tax exemption.

Soon Colbert became a counsellor of state, and then one of the top aides of Cardinal Mazarin. Soon after Mazarin's death, Colbert rose to become virtual economic czar of Louis XIV, keeping this status until his death.

Cold, humourless, hard and implacable, 'a man of marble' as he was called by a contemporary, Jean-Baptiste Colbert yet had the wit to engage in boundless flattery and demeaning personal service to his royal patron. Thus Colbert wrote to Louis on the occasion of a military victory: 'One must, Sire, remain in silent wonder, and thank God every day for having caused us to be born in the reign of a king like Your Majesty'. And no service to the Sun King was too demeaning. Colbert searched for the king's missing swans, supplied

Louis with his favourite oranges, arranged for the birth of the king's illegitimate children, and bought jewels for mistresses on the king's behalf. Colbert's personal philosophy was best summed up in his advice to his beloved son, Seignelay, on how to get ahead in the world. He told his son that 'the chief end that he should set himself is to make himself agreeable to the king, he should work with great industry, during his whole life to know well what might be agreeable to His Majesty'.

Colbert was well rewarded for his life of hard work and abject sycophancy in the service of the king. Apparently only the interests of individual merchants and citizens were narrow and 'petty'. Colbert had little difficulty in identifying the lucrative feathering of his own nest with the 'public interest', national glory, and the common weal. A stream of offices, benefices, pensions and grants streamed into his coffers from the ever grateful king. In addition, Colbert received special bonuses or 'gratifications' from the king; thus, in one order, in February 1679, Colbert received a gratification of no less than 400 000 *livres*. The overall sum poured into Colbert's coffers was immense, including lands, and bribes for subsidies and exemptions from grateful lobbyists and economic interests. All in all, he amassed at least 10 million *livres*, notable to be sure, but not the enormous extent of Cardinal Mazarin's boodle as prime minister.

Colbert also did extremely well by his extensive family. Brothers, cousins, sons and daughters of Colbert were showered with favours, and became bishops, ambassadors, military commanders, *intendants*, and abbesses of leading convents. The Colbert family certainly did well by doing 'good' on behalf of the sovereign and the 'public interest' of France.

After Colbert's death in 1683, his successors under Louis XIV developed and strengthened the policy of *Colbertisme*. Protective tariffs were greatly increased, imports of various goods limited to specific ports, quality regulations strengthened, and innovations hobbled for the protection of the industrial and occupational status quo. *Colbertisme* was frozen into the French political economy.

8.8 Louis XIV: apogee of absolutism (1638–1714)

For his part, Louis XIV had no trouble fitting the absolutist role. Even more than Colbert, he totally identified his own private interest as monarch with the interests of the state and with the 'public good'. Whether or not Louis uttered the famous words often attributed to him, 'I am the state', he certainly believed and acted upon them, as did his father Louis XIII before him, who had said, 'It is not I who speak, it is my state'. Statism logically implies that the state owns all the property in the land, and that all who live on or use such property do so only by the sufferance of the 'true' owner. And Louis certainly believed that he was the true owner of all property in France. Hence justice

was '*my* justice', and hence he claimed the inherent right to tax all his subjects at will. And why not indeed, if they were all truly existing in his realm only at his, the owner's pleasure?

Furthermore, virtually everyone, even the king's opponents, believed that he ruled by divine grace and divine right. Previously, Cardinal Richelieu had called kings the images of God. Early in the Sun King's reign, court propagandist Daniel de Priézac, in his *Political Discourses* (1652, 1666), called monarchical sovereignty a 'great light that never sets'. Furthermore, that light is a great divine Mystery hidden from mere mortals. As de Priézac put it:

> the source of the majesty of kings is so high, its essence so hidden and its force so divine that it should not seem strange that it should make men reverent without their being permitted to understand it, just as is true with celestial things.[2]

In contrast to the adulatory worshippers at the shrine of the king's quasi-divinity were the Montaigne-type sceptics and pessimists about human nature who fed the stream of panegyrics to Louis XIV in their own way. In a set of three *Sceptical Discourses* (1664), the cynical Samuel Sorbière, admirer and translator of Thomas Hobbes, decried the tendencies of bestial and corrupt modern man in grabbing from the public trough and having no sense of the common good. But there is, opined Sorbière, a way out: absolute submission to the commands of the (presumably superhuman) king, so that order is established out of perpetual conflict. In that total submission, the people will find their way back to the instinctual child-like simplicity of the state of nature preceding their entry into civil society. As Professor Keohane writes of Sorbière: 'as the subjects of an absolute despot, they would live much the same way, he argues, in serene simplicity, totally dependent on the sovereign for their lives and fortunes, protected against the encroachments of their fellows, happy in their slavery'[3]

King Louis XIV was able to combine both strands into a worshipful blend of absolutist thought. On the one hand, as he makes clear in his private *Memoirs*, written for the instruction of his son, his view of human nature (at least of the nature of ordinary mortals) was pessimistic and Machiavellian. Individuals are by nature limited, striving always for their own personal ends, and heedless of the reasons why they should be subordinated to the commands of others. The king, on the other hand, is superhuman, a man who is above all and sees all and is the only one working for the 'public' good, which is identical with his own. And the Sun King also took unto himself quasi-divine status; for he, Louis XIV, is like the sun,

> the noblest of all...which, by virtue of its uniqueness, by the brilliance that surrounds it, by the light it imparts to the other heavenly bodies that seem to pay it

> court, by its equal and just distribution of this same light to all the various parts of the world, by the good that it does everywhere, constantly producing life, joy, and activity everywhere, by its perpetual yet always imperceptible movement, by never departing or deviating from its steady and invariable course, assuredly makes a most vivid and a most beautiful image for a great monarch.

Professor Keohane justly comments that Louis XIV 'is not content to compare himself to God; he compares in such a manner that it is clear that it is God who is the copy'.[4]

The acme of absolutist thought was provided by Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), bishop of Meaux, court theologian and political theorist under Louis XIV. The whole state, opined the bishop, 'is in the person of the prince...In him is the will of the whole people'. The kings identify with the public good, because 'God has raised them to a condition where they no longer have anything to desire for themselves'. Absolutism is necessary, asserted Bossuet, because any constitutional limits on the prince raise the dread spectre of 'anarchy', than which nothing can be worse. The only limits on the power of the sovereign should be those he imposes on himself in his own interest, which must be identical to the public interest whenever the prince 'regards the state as his possession, to be cultivated and passed on to his descendants'.

Finally, Bossuet conflates the king and God as follows:

> Majesty is the image of the grandeur of God in the prince. God is infinite, God is all. The prince, as prince, is not to be considered an individual man: he is the public person, the whole state is included in him...Just as all perfection and all virtue are united in God, so all the power of the individuals is brought together in the person of the prince. What grandeur, that a single man can contain so much.[5]

Catholic political thought had come a long way from the Spanish scholastics.

8.9 Notes

1. Charles Woolsey Cole, *Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism* (1939, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1964), vol. I, p. 85.
2. Quoted in Nannerl O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 241.
3. Ibid., p. 244.
4. Passage from the *Memoirs* quoted in Keohane, op. cit., note 2, p. 251.
5. Quoted in Keohane, op. cit., note 2, p. 252.

9 The liberal reaction against mercantilism in seventeenth century France

9.1 The *croquants'* rebellion

The kings and their minions did not impose an accelerating burden of absolutism without provoking grave, deep and continuing opposition. Indeed, there were repeated rebellions by groups of peasants and nobles in France from the 1630s to the 1670s. Generally, the focus of discontent and uprising was rising taxes, as well as the losses of rights and privileges. There were also similar rebellions in Spain, in mid-century, and in autocratic Russia, throughout the seventeenth century.

Consider, for example, the remonstrances of the peasants in the first great French rebellion of the seventeenth century, the *croquants'* (literally, 'crunchers') revolt in 1636 in south-western France. The *croquants'* rebellion was precipitated by a sudden near-doubling of direct taxes upon the peasantry to raise funds for the war against Spain. The *intendant* La Force, sent to investigate the disturbances, reported on the peasants' grievances and demands. The peasants focused on the eternal and acclerating increases of taxation. They pointed out that in the reign of Henry IV more taxes had been collected than in all previous reigns of the monarchy taken together; and that in but two years of the reign of Louis XIII they had paid more than in all the years of Henry IV. The peasants also protested that the royal tax-collectors carried off their cattle, clothes and tools, merely to cover the costs of enforcement, so that the principal of the tax debt could never be reduced. The result was ruin. Deprived of their means of labour, the peasants had been forced to leave their fields untilled, and even to leave their ancient lands and beg for bread. In a letter to his superior, La Force feels compelled to endorse their complaints: 'It is not, Monseigneur, that I am not, by natural feeling, touched with very great compassion when I see the extraordinary poverty in which these people live'.

The peasants protested that they were not subversives; they were willing to pay the old customary taxes, provided the recent increases were repealed. New taxes should only be imposed in extreme emergencies, and then only by the states-general (which hadn't met since 1615, and was not to meet again until the eve of the French Revolution). Like deluded subjects at all times and places, the peasants placed the blame for their ills not on the king himself but on his evil and tyrannical ministers, who had led the sovereign astray. The peasants insisted that they had had to revolt in order that 'their cries may reach the ears of the King himself and no longer just those of his Ministers, who advise him so badly'. Whether a ruler be king or president, it is convenient for him to preserve his popularity by deflecting protest and hostility to advisers or prime ministers who surround him.

But despite this unfortunate limitation, the *croquants* had the insight and the wit to zero in on the 'public interest' myth propounded by the royal ministers. The 'needs of the state', the peasants declared, were only a 'pretext

for enriching a few private persons' – the hated tax farmers, who had bought the privilege from the Crown of collecting taxes which then went into their pockets; and the 'creatures of the man who rules the state', i.e. Richelieu and his entourage. The peasants called for the abolition of courtiers' pensions, as well as the salaries of all the newly created officials.

The following year, 1637, the *croquants* of the neighbouring region of Périgord rose in rebellion. Addressing King Louis XIII, the commune of Périgord set forth its reasons for the revolt: 'Sire..., we have taken an unusual step in the way we have expressed our grievances, but this is so that we may be listened to by Your Majesty....' Their overriding grievance was against the tax farmers and tax officials, who 'have sent among us a thousand thieves who eat up the flesh of the poor husbandmen to the very bones, and it is they who have forced them to take up arms, changing their ploughshares for swords, in order to ask Your Majesty for justice or else to die like men'.

Shaken by the rebellion, the Crown organized its faithful servitors. The royal printer, F. Mettayer, published a statement by the 'inhabitants of the town of Poitiers', denouncing the 'seditious' commune of Périgord. The Poitiers men declared that 'We know, as Christians and loyal Frenchmen, that the glory of Kings is to command, while the glory of subjects, whoever they may be, is to obey in all humility and willing submission...following God's express commandment'. All the people of France know that the king is the life and soul of the state. The king is directly guided by the Holy Spirit, and further, 'by the superhuman decisions of your royal mind and the miracles accomplished in your happy reign, we perceive plainly that God holds your heart in his hand'. There is therefore only one explanation for the rebellion, concluded the Poitiers loyalists: the rebels must be tools of Satan.

Not all the Catholics agreed, nor even the Catholic clergy of France. In 1639, an armed rebellion broke out in Normandy, resting on two demands: an opposition to oppressive taxation, and a call for Norman autonomy as against the centralized Parisian regime. It was a multi-class movement of the relatively poor, grouped together in an 'army of suffering', and calling themselves the *Nu-Pieds* – the barefoot ones – after the salt-makers in the south-western Norman region of Avranches, who walked barefoot on the sand. The general of the army was a mythical figure named Jean Nu-Pieds; the actual directorate of the army consisted of four priests from the Avranches area, of whom the leader was Father Jean Morel, parish priest of Saint-Gervais. Morel called himself 'Colonel Sandhills', but he was a poet–propagandist as well as army commander. In his 'manifesto of the High Unconquerable Captain Jean Nu-Pieds, General of the Army of Suffering', directed against the 'men made rich by their taxes', Father Morel wrote:

> And I, shall I leave a people languishing