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Discussion of H. R. Trevor-Roper:
“THE GENERAL CRISIS OF THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.”

Past and Present *invited short Comments from six historians on Professor Trevor-Roper's article which appeared in our issue of November 1959. We print their Comments below, with concluding observations by the author.*

I

PROFESSOR TREVOR-ROPER'S STUDY WILL, NO DOUBT, STIMULATE SOME historians to elaborate his interpretation, or to advance a new one or to defend an old. But in my mind, it provokes particular questions rather than a systematic challenge. There is, in the first place, the question of dates¹: when, approximately, did the general crisis begin? At one moment (p. 33) Trevor-Roper suggests that about 1600 Europe was still full of confident optimism, despite the upheavals of the preceding years. At another (p. 31) he finds that since at least 1618 there was everywhere talk of the dissolution of society or of the world. Again, there was (p. 34) from 1500 to 1650 “one climate [in Europe], the climate of the Renaissance”, characterised by expansion and extension; and yet (p. 61) the depression of 1620 (why 1620, by the way?) is reckoned (by a wildly implausible analogy) as important a turning point as the depression of 1929, and (p. 50) Europe is said to have entered the Baroque age, a tight, contracted age, decades before the middle of the seventeenth century.

Secondly, is not Trevor-Roper's argument highly paradoxical? It seems to me that he first tries to prove, with an impressive array of facts and words, that there was a “general crisis” and then in effect proves, with an equally impressive display of learning and insight, that there was not. For, is the term “general crisis of the seventeenth century” justifiable if we are to believe that the abuses which are supposed to have engendered it, had already been redressed, partly in France, wholly in the Netherlands, half a century before, whereas in Spain there was not even an attempt at redress? What weight has the enumeration of revolts on p. 31 if it is allowed that those in France and the Netherlands were only of very slight importance? In the Dutch Republic nothing very much happened at all. In France Trevor-Roper sees something of his general crisis; but it is little enough, with the *Frondes* reckoned as “a relatively small revolution” (p. 56) — albeit more profound (p. 33) than that of the French

religious wars of the preceding century, which lasted six times as long. And so we are left — where surely Trevor-Roper began — with England which, in the last paragraphs of the essay, seems alone to suffer from that crisis which had first been proclaimed general to the whole continent.

Moreover, does not Trevor-Roper's argument demand much more precision than he gives it? Which groups or which persons rose in opposition against the "courts" and their reckless luxury and waste? For instance, is the terminology applicable to France? What is the French "court"? If the bureaucracy belongs to the "court", do the *Parlements* belong to the bureaucracy? If so, how is it then to be explained that the *Frondes*, which Trevor-Roper seems to define as a revolt against the court (be it only a superficial revolt, since the abuses of the court were slight) are partly — and there is nothing in his article to challenge this — a conflict between the *Parlements* (part of the "court") and the actual government (equally a part of the "court")? And does the author deny that it was the *Parlements* more than any other body which tried to force the French Crown to be more frugal and to re-organize the chaotic financial system? Did not Mazarin indignantly reject those very demands and attempts, and risk a civil war defending his own fantastic financial expedients and the financiers who made them possible? The conflict of the *Frondes* is, so it seems, among other things — for it is an extremely complicated series of events — a conflict between parts of the bureaucracy and the court; it is not a conflict between the court and the bureaucracy on the one hand and the "country" — whatever that may be — on the other. Moreover, it seems unduly optimistic to regard the French "court" as "reformed". Contemporaries thought differently when they saw the enormous fortunes gathered by such reputedly honest administrators as Sully, Richelieu and Colbert — not to speak of the most remarkable profiteer of them all, Mazarin. They thought differently when they saw both the price of offices and the amount and level of taxation rise during the first half of the century, with (so they supposed) the proceeds going into the pockets of the financiers. They were horrified at seeing revolts everywhere, year after year, in town and country. In fact, was the social, the economic, the political situation in France better than in England? Was not the contrary true? And was it not precisely this extremely unstable and threatening situation which made it impossible for the opposition to risk a real revolution?²

There is, finally, a fourth set of questions which I should like to

put. They concern the Dutch Republic. Probably nobody will disagree with Trevor-Roper's view that the political upheavals in the Republic during the seventeenth century were of only minor importance compared with those in England and France. Trevor-Roper thinks that this can be explained by the fact that the Northern Netherlands had already in the sixteenth century abolished the "court", with the result that in the Republic the factors which gave rise to revolts in the rest of Western Europe were non-existent. If this is so, it incidentally makes the Revolt of the Netherlands, first regarded by Trevor-Roper as far less profound than the conflicts of the next century, really crucial in forestalling a seventeenth-century Dutch "crisis". Now it is, of course, true that there was in The Hague no court comparable to the court of Paris or London; it is equally true that there was no parasitic bureaucracy as in some other continental countries. But is this explanation of the relatively harmonious development of Dutch history in the seventeenth century really adequate? If so, why, in the first place, did the Southern Netherlands, where the Burgundian court was not abolished, suffer no greater crises than the Northern Netherlands where it was? And, in the second place, how was it that, precisely after the death of Stadholder William II, when for over twenty years (1650-72) the court of the princes of Orange exercised hardly any influence, the Dutch regents, who were the advocates of an almost unmitigated republicanism, manifested attitudes similar to those seen in France? The semi-closed caste of regents began to regard their offices as their personal property and were not ashamed of making their profits out of them at the cost of the "country". Obviously the economic, social and political basis of the patriciate in the Republic was in many ways different from that of the *robe* in France. But on the other hand it is impossible to deny that the oligarchic and, in a way, parasitic character of both castes made them adopt very similar attitudes. Thus the "abuses" which were perpetrated in France by those who in Trevor-Roper's view belonged to the "court", must in the Republic be attributed to an oligarchy which can never have been part of a court, and which, in fact, developed its most typical idiosyncracies thanks to its successful resistance to the "court" of the Stadholders.

I have put questions. Having put them, I wonder if they do not suggest an answer, which will probably not satisfy Trevor-Roper, but which I may perhaps mention without pretending to give, in a single page, an explanation of such extremely complicated phenomena.

In general terms, both in France (in 1649) and in the Republic (in 1650) it was the prince (or his minister) who opened an attack on the oligarchy of the office holders. Why? The answer may be that they suspected the oligarchy of wishing to undermine what it viewed as the abnormal wartime extension of the princely power. For this power had developed, of course, in the face of some resistance from the office holders. Sixteenth-century rulers had, it is true, attempted to neutralise the aristocratic tendencies of society by embedding them in a new bureaucracy, but about 1650 it became clear that this attempt had failed. The new peace rendered insupportable that degree of princely power which had been acceptable as an extraordinary wartime measure. Faced with this challenge, the princes could only nervously resort to a *coup d'état* or civil war. And although both in France (after the siege of Paris in 1649) and in the Republic (after the attack on Amsterdam in 1650) the patricians accepted a compromise, it is obvious that the princes had for the moment lost the battle. But they soon resumed their attack on the oligarchies — Louis XIV in the 1660s, William III in the 1670s — and could then succeed more easily because once again there was a great foreign war. Yet after their deaths, the two great tendencies of the *ancien régime* merged; the princes resigned themselves to playing the role the aristocratic office holders wanted them to play: they became upper-oligarchs. There is, therefore, in France and the Netherlands, no real break in the middle of the seventeenth century as far as government is concerned. There is nothing but an abortive attempt made by a few nervous, frustrated and angry autocrats to subdue the most important castes in the government. These attempts failed. There is here no conflict between "court" and "country". There is a conflict between small ruling groups — which, in France, precipitated a long and exhausting civil war caused by entirely different factors.

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E. H. Kossmann

NOTES

¹ The "palace revolution" of 1649 in the Dutch Republic (pp. 31, 55) is presumably the attack of Stadholder William II on Amsterdam in 1650.

² This point was made by Mr. J. P. Cooper in his excellent paper "Differences between English and Continental Governments in the early Seventeenth Century" in *Britain and the Netherlands*, ed. J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossmann (London, 1960), p. 88. See also my article "Engelse en Franse opstandigheid in de 17de eeuw", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* (1956), pp. 7-8.

II

PROFESSOR TREVOR-ROPER'S STIMULATING ARTICLE TAKES AS ITS STARTING point a critique of Marxist interpretations of the seventeenth century, and notably my own articles on the subject in *Past and Present* Nos. 4 and 5 (1954-5). It is difficult to comment on this critique, for although Trevor-Roper and I deal with the same phenomenon, we do so with different objects in view. He sets out to explain the occurrence of the contemporaneous revolutions of the mid-seventeenth century (though in fact dealing only with the English, French and Spanish ones, omitting for instance the important Ukrainian upheaval). His object, if I understand him rightly, is to show that they were not historically inevitable — perhaps that no revolutions ever are — and that in any case they were irrelevant to the development of capitalism. I, on the other hand, was concerned with economic history, merely drawing attention *en passant* to certain political, social and cultural aspects of a major, and hitherto unexplained, economic phenomenon. If there is any revolution with which my articles were concerned, it is the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century, on whose genesis I wished them to throw some light. Consequently, while Trevor-Roper merely notes the change from secular boom to secular crisis in the 1620s as a factor precipitating the political crisis which is his subject, my articles are almost wholly devoted to that change and its economic consequences. Conversely, while Trevor-Roper devotes almost the whole of a long and brilliant discussion to the crisis of the Renaissance state, my own references to politics were cursory. In fact, our articles are complementary rather than competitive. At all events, I would not wish to quarrel with his concept of a "crisis of the *ancien régime*" which produced the western revolutions of the seventeenth century. I welcome it.

Our lines of argument join only at one point: in the evaluation of the English Revolution. Here I take it that we both agree — it is hardly possible not to — that what happened in England was crucial for the subsequent development of an industrialised world economy. Britain was, after all, the basis from which the world was subsequently revolutionised, and the changes it underwent in the seventeenth century were far more profound than those which took place among its rivals. A greater distance separates Defoe's England from Shakespeare's than separates Sully's France from Vauban's, or the United Provinces which Maurice of Orange took over from those which William of Orange left. I think we might also agree that the

crucial change in the economic position of Britain had taken place after the Revolution. In the 1630s we did not look like the obvious contenders for economic supremacy and the power to transform the world; by the time of Queen Anne we did, at any rate very nearly. The question is whether this change was "due to" the Revolution.

I do not regard this question as vital to the argument of my articles. This, as it happens, requires merely that there should exist "countries capable of wholeheartedly adopting the new — and as it turned out revolutionary and economically progressive — economic systems". In other words, the argument requires the existence of "bourgeois" countries, or at least one "bourgeois" economy large enough for the purpose required. How they or it became "bourgeois" is not relevant. In fact there was one such country at the end of the seventeenth century but not at the beginning, namely England. However, while it does not greatly matter for the purposes of my argument precisely how England became a "bourgeois" or "capitalist" economy, I can see no reason for abandoning the obvious view that the Revolution had a great deal to do with it.

Indeed, I suspect that Trevor-Roper and I disagree about labels rather than facts. For much of his article is devoted to the proof that, while plenty of people (for whatever reasons) advocated the "right" economic policies in Jacobean and Caroline England, the nature of the *ancien régime* prevented their policies from being applied effectively or at all. In other words, such policies required the overthrow of the *ancien régime*; and indeed after the Revolution we find a very different situation. Admittedly Trevor-Roper attempts to show that an internal reform of the *anciens régimes* could have led to the same results, but in fact he does not prove that it did so. The Netherlands, for reasons which I not only admit but which are crucial to my argument, was a "feudal business economy". Though prosperous and adapting itself to the new economic conditions in due course, it did not in fact produce the Industrial Revolution. French mercantilism, the efficiency of which Trevor-Roper seems to me to overrate, proved no economic match for Britain, as M. Mousnier showed in his study of French and British finances during the wars at the end of the century (*Revue Historique*, ccix, 1951). The reason, I suggest, is that French governments did not singlemindedly pursue profit, while British ones came much closer to doing so. In other words, our argument is a little like some famous literary debates: Trevor-Roper denies the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, and I do not; but we both agree that they exist.

This is not to deny the importance of Trevor-Roper's question in

the context of his argument and of general history. What precisely happened in 1640-60, and how far the economic and social consequences of this (or any other) revolution were foreseen or intended by those who made it — if “made” is the right word — are not negligible problems. Whether this or any other revolution “could have been avoided” is a more metaphysical problem, since in fact it was not; but it is also worth discussion. Such discussion I would prefer to leave to those claiming greater expertise in seventeenth-century British politics than I can. I would merely note in passing that those who believe the Revolution to be “bourgeois” are not as Trevor-Roper says called upon to show that “the men who made [it] aimed at [capitalism] . . . or that those who wished for capitalism forwarded the revolution”. The gap between men’s intentions and the social consequences of their actions is wide enough to make this proposition avoidable; even if we suppose — what is doubtful — that many of them had a sufficiently clear conception of capitalism to allow us to use such phrases as “wishing for it” or “aiming at it”. Nor are those who believe the Revolution to be “bourgeois” called upon, unless they feel so impelled, to show that the only fundamental social transformations possible are in all circumstances violent revolutions of the classical type. Least of all are they called upon to identify “the seventeenth-century revolutions with ‘bourgeois’, ‘capitalist’ revolutions, successful in England, unsuccessful elsewhere”. I doubt whether any Marxist has ever held so implausible a view.

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E. J. Hobsbawm

III

PROFESSOR TREVOR-ROPER’S STUDY ON “THE GENERAL CRISIS OF THE Seventeenth Century” does not merit wholly unqualified praise: how many exploratory essays ever have? Here let us first qualify, and praise later.

On his rather narrow canvas of thirty pages, Trevor-Roper paints his picture of Europe between 1500 and 1650 with such bold strokes and so broad a brush that he occasionally obscures rather than clarifies what went on then. Moreover, he tends to disregard or prescind from objections which must have occurred to him rather than to counter them or to rectify his line of argument. For example: is it *really* the case that between 1500 and 1650, the court was the primary drain on the fiscal resources of the Western monarchies, and the

economic resources of their subjects? My own candidate would certainly have been war — foreign and civil — rather than the court. Whichever it was, the argument requires not categorical pronouncements but hard fiscal data, even though such data be difficult to come by.

Again, is it really adequate to dismiss Europe's religious civil war that culminated in the decade between 1588 and 1598 in the following brief sentences?

"The religious revolutions of Reformation and Counter-Reformation . . . however spectacular had in fact been far less profound than the revolutions of the next century . . . Beneath the dramatic changes of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, the sixteenth century goes on, a continuous, unitary century, and society is much the same at its end as it is in the beginning".

Two assumptions seem to underly this peculiar pronouncement: (1) that no major social change ensued as a consequence of the religious earthquake of the sixteenth century, and (2) that a revolution which is not social (whatever, precisely, "social" may mean) is necessarily "less profound" than one that is. Both these assumptions provoke doubt. Perhaps the religious revolution of the sixteenth century was not social in the intent of most of those who brought it about; but this is to a considerable extent true also of the crisis of the seventeenth century, as sketched by Trevor-Roper. And a revolution which in northern Europe resulted in the total disappearance of monks and monasteries, in the distribution of their lands among lay landlords, and the general downgrading of the clerisy in the social hierarchy might be deemed a process of considerable social significance. So too might Europe's religious civil war that began in the 1560s; it ruined a large segment of the French nobility and drove that remnant of the great Burgundian nobility which stood firm in its opposition to Philip II into a position of relative political obscurity in the northern Netherlands. Moreover in a century that has witnessed the impact of Darwinian biology, Freudian psychology, and nuclear physics on Western and indeed world civilization, the assumption that all important revolutions are social seems a little strange. Whether or not we describe them as social, we cannot casually dismiss the series of events that finally and decisively destroyed the old unity of Western Christendom.

Trevor-Roper is able so to dismiss these events because perhaps unconsciously he has reversed his perspective in the course of his essay. Starting out to account for the crisis of the seventeenth century by means of a survey of the relevant historical changes in the preceding century and a half, he ends by evaluating those changes

solely from the point of their impact on the crisis which concerns him. This reversal is both undesirable and unnecessary. Much that occurred between 1500 and 1650, for example, was important then and later, although not closely related to Trevor-Roper's crisis. There was much, too, that was scarcely disturbed by that crisis: the rise of modern science; or the persistence of the patriarchal family; or that more than secular, almost millennial adjustment of a hierarchical society to alterations in economy and ideology, which went on, as before, with its curious pattern of shifts within a stable framework.

So much for qualification.

What sincere praise Trevor-Roper has fully earned by his study can only be understood if we put it in its proper place in the development of the writing of history by British academic historians during the past fifty years or more. That writing might well have chosen as its shibboleths two great statements by two remarkable men:

"The bourgeoisie historically has played a most revolutionary part . . . The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production . . . It creates a world after its own image".

Karl Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Section 1.

"Abroad is unutterably bloody . . .".

Matthew, Lord Alconleigh, in *The Pursuit of Love*, p. 113.

The insularity of many British historians and their propensity to pass off all problems of explanation by incantations about "the rise of the middle class" has for years been notorious. It may be worth documenting briefly from the most renowned work of the greatest and most penetrating scholar of the age that is Trevor-Roper's subject. Professor Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926) starts on the Continent; in view both of the place of origin of the religious transformation and of the economic development with which it deals, it has to start there. But about one-third of the way through, the scene shifts to England, and at the end of the book we are on comfortably familiar ground. The general fact of the rise of the capitalistic middle class is being demonstrated from the sermons of London preachers of the later 1600s, assuring their grubby mercantile congregations of the singular sanctity of the high yield of commercial greed. This propensity to stay near home was very conspicuous in many British historians, who deserted English history only for the more bucolic delights of Scottish history, Welsh history or the history of Weston-super-Mare.

Attitudes now are, of course, not quite what they were in 1926. Some venturesome historians have cast their eyes towards the

Continent, and have begun to see Britain as bound to Europe by something more than a series of naval victories, advantageous peace treaties, and exhibitions of moral superiority. Yet to a historian from the United States, the concerns of most English historians still seem perplexingly parochial.

There has also been some questioning of the concept of the rise of the middle class as a device of historical explanation, to the point where the concept has lost a little of the credence and credulity it used to enjoy. But salutary though the attack has been, it has not yet penetrated deeply into those subconscious depths where historians defend their old habits of thought. Moreover, the work has been primarily destructive, and few academic historians seem ready to erect new structures over the hole left by the demolition of a cherished idea.

In his essay Trevor-Roper has made a decisive break with the historians who still seek to tie the crisis of the mid-seventeenth century to the rise of the bourgeoisie. He performs this task in a very few pages with cold economy and crisp dispatch. Even more remarkable is his insistence on looking not merely at England but at the whole of western civilization in his investigation of the crisis of the seventeenth century. For example, he finds the form of the opposition to the Court-centred civilization of the Renaissance in "Puritanism":

"In England, we naturally think of our own form of Puritanism *But let us not be deceived by mere local forms.* This reaction against the Renaissance courts and their whole culture and morality was not confined to any one country or religion". *(italics mine)*

Thus briefly is the English Channel reduced from a moat surrounding a keep of intellectual isolation to its true geographical proportions — a narrow maritime barrier.

So with easy grace and a degree of intellectual courage for which he may not receive due credit, Trevor-Roper has soared over the two most stultifying inhibitions of British historiography. He has done more than that, however. For with the collapse of the inhibitions we find ourselves in an odd situation. During the past century historians accumulated vast masses of data. Mainly by excluding the data that dealt with other lands and by using the class concept to organize the evidence that dealt with England, many English historians have provided themselves with an apparently usable vocabulary. The trouble is that when one persists in that exclusion and adheres consistently to that vocabulary, one ends up by talking historical nonsense. The problem is to begin to talk historical sense.

Trevor-Roper goes the right way about coping with this problem. In the first place he uses with new vigour and emphasis historical terms, which because of the dominance of the myth of the middle class, long lay on the periphery of historical thinking — mercantilism, puritanism, court and country — and seeks to give them a fuller content. To the extent that he succeeds we can begin to employ them as structural elements in reorganizing the history of the first century and a half of the modern era. We will need more such terms; but in this matter Trevor-Roper is moving boldly in the right direction. It is refreshing, moreover, to find a historian who can conceptualize without becoming the slave of his concepts. All too often historians sacrifice all that is human, personal, and fallible in history to impersonal abstractions. But after Trevor-Roper has made full use of his conceptual apparatus to explain the seventeenth-century crisis in England, he still finds room in that explanation for the bottomless stupidity and duplicity of Charles I.

It is not to be expected that, in a brief and challenging essay of this kind, the author will command — or even deserve — general acceptance on all his points. It is, however, never remarkable when a pioneer gets something wrong; it is astonishing when he gets anything right.

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J. H. Hexter

IV

IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE TO READ PROFESSOR H. R. TREVOR-ROPER'S brilliant essay, so sparkling with intelligence. To reduce his rich and luxuriant elaborations to a few dry propositions is to run the risk of distorting his ideas. But in a brief comment, the risk must be taken. According to Trevor-Roper, between 1640 and 1660 Europe witnessed a series of political revolutions. Whether successful or not, they mark a watershed: on the one side is the Renaissance and on the other the Age of Enlightenment. Indeed these revolutions are themselves the apogee of a prolonged crisis in the structure of society. The Renaissance State, with its Court and its bureaucratic apparatus of officials remunerated in part by their own hands, laid too heavy a burden on society. This burden became unbearable during the economic recession of the seventeenth century, when different social groups tried to throw it off through revolt and revolution. The *Stände* rose against the Court. The Court not only tried to quell the rebellions, but also to suppress their cause

by adjusting through mercantilism the levies of the bureaucrats to the resources of the country.

Let us examine the validity of these suggestions in the case of France.

Now Trevor-Roper has grasped a vital point: that there was a general crisis in the seventeenth century. I have discussed this crisis in various books and articles published since 1945. Trevor-Roper does not quote them; and since many readers of *Past and Present* probably do not know them either, I may perhaps be forgiven for quoting a few in the footnotes; as far back as 1953, I devoted the second part (208 pages) of the fourth volume of the *Histoire Générale des Civilisations* (3rd edn. in the press) to the European crisis of the seventeenth century.

How far is it true that the revolts of the seventeenth century and the revolution of the Fronde can be interpreted in France as a rising of the country against the Court and against the bureaucratic apparatus of the State? It is clear that the office-holders provoked discontent. Throughout the troubles, nobles and bourgeois complained of the pullulation of office-holders and of the way they drained the public revenues. But they complained just as loudly of the excessive price of offices and the difficulty of acquiring them. They regarded offices as an evil, but strove to lay hands on one. However it must be pointed out that the office-holders helped to provoke the revolts and also played an outstanding part in the attempted revolution of the Fronde. And this seems to me to go directly against the theory of Trevor-Roper.

The part played in the Fronde by the *Parlements* and by certain groups of office-holders is already well known.¹ In a recent article² and more lately I have analysed the movements of peasant revolt, so numerous in France, from about 1625 until the Fronde and beyond. Broadly speaking, this is what seems to have happened in most cases: the landlords, whether gentry or royal officials or municipal magistrates, incited the peasants not to pay the *tailles* or the numerous new taxes imposed by the government, because if the peasants paid these royal taxes they would be unable to pay their feudal dues or their rents, and also because it was a lord's duty to protect his peasants; the peasants then violently drove off the bailiffs with their warrants or the agents of the tax farmers; the government sent *commissaires* to obtain payment; officials and gentry stirred up the peasantry; gentry joined together to help their peasants to resist; in the towns, the royal officials and the *échevins* provoked risings among the urban population to help the peasants by paralysing the

movements of the royal *commissaires*; then, as happened with the *Croquants* of Villefranche-de-Rouergue in 1643 and with other movements, the peasants sent some of their men into the towns; or the royal officials made the peasants come from their *seigneuries* and make up bands or companies of insurgents, as in Paris during the Fronde, in Aix and elsewhere; or sometimes the peasants themselves seized a town. Thus in most cases we do not find a revolt of the country against an oppressive public service, but the revolt of a public service which considered itself oppressed and which dragged in its wake those social groups over which the structure of society gave it influence. Is not this exactly the opposite of what Trevor-Roper thinks?

What did the office-holders complain of? *That they contributed too much to the expenses of the State*; that they were being deprived of their power. It is a theoretical concept to think of this bureaucratic structure of office-holders in terms of pure gain. Sometimes the King made new offices so that existing office-holders would have to buy them up in order to keep away eventual competitors, or would have to pay for their suppression. Sometimes the King decreed an increase in the salaries and fees of officials, but only in return for a cash sum which constituted the capital of which these benefits were merely the interest. The officials often had to borrow the money at interest from others, in which case the whole operation merely turned them into intermediaries in the movement of money, without any personal benefit accruing.³ Moreover after 1640 the King gradually reduced the salaries and many of the fees of his officials, who now were only getting a minute interest or none at all, in return for a capital investment which was immobilised, or lost. The *Elus*, who were finance officers, alleged in 1648 that they had paid over 200 million *livres* since 1624, including 60 million paid since 1640 "for confirmation of an imaginary right or grant of a fictitious increment"⁴. The officials considered themselves robbed.

On the other hand, in the throes of the Thirty Years' War the government found their administrative routine too slow. It accused them of favouring in the assessment of taxes their lessees and sharecroppers and those of their relatives, associates and friends, and of causing deficiencies by shifting the burden on to others. The government farmed out to *traitants* or *partisans*, not only the *aides*, but also the direct taxes such as the *tailles*. It handed over to *commissaires*, of whom the most important were the *intendants*, not only the supervision of officials, but also often the execution of their duties⁵. At the same time, when dealing with corporate bodies

of officials the royal government increasingly ignored the *remonstrances* which traditionally they were in duty bound to present to the king for the better ordering of the service. Wounded in their honour, their prestige and their interests, the officials revolted. Are Trevor-Roper's views really in keeping with these facts?

Can one say that this bureaucratic apparatus of officers imposed an unbearable burden on the country? Trevor-Roper should have distinguished more clearly between the great officers of the Crown and the courtiers, some of whom became very rich thanks to the privileges of their offices or their relations with tax-farmers, and those officials who were not of the Court but who nevertheless held a high rank in society and exercised important functions: members of the sovereign courts (*Parlements, Chambres des Comptes, Cours des Aides, Grand Conseil*); officials of the *Présidiaux*, the *baillages* and the *senéchaussées*; *Trésoriers Généraux de France, Elus*, etc. In spite of what Trevor-Roper believes, these officials were on the whole men of simple tastes, who had nothing to do with the opulent way of life of princes and a handful of great courtiers. Plain practitioners learned in the law and in the rules of their profession, rarely humanists and with little interest in the arts, save perhaps at the third generation⁶, they made their money less as office-holders than as landowners and feudal lords, as money-lenders and creditors of peasants and artisans. Their salaries and fees, the fortunes built up by the courtiers, could have upset the balance neither of the budget nor of society. In seventeenth-century France the expenses of the Court never represented more than a small fraction of the expenses of the State. The same applies to the salaries and fees of the office-holders. The sums levied by officials in the form of judicial bribes, fees, *taxes de finances*, does not strike me as affecting more than a modest part of the resources of the King's subjects. The great expenses of the State, the heavy burdens on the unprivileged were those of the army and of war, pay, munitions and billeting for the troops. It would therefore be necessary to prove that these huge armies, these long wars, were merely of interest to the Court, and not to the nation, and this would be a difficult task.

Would it be possible however to say that in fact this opposition on the part of the office-holders was an aspect of the struggle of the country against the Court? On the one hand there were the officials, owners of their offices, irremovable, given security of tenure by the *Paulette*, landowners and often feudal lords in the district where they practised, linked with many local families, themselves with local roots, convinced that if office demanded fidelity to the King, it

required them equally faithfully to serve justice and protect the rights of the King's subjects; they were thus simultaneously notables representing the districts and provinces in their dealings with the King, and instruments of the royal will. On the other hand there were the *commissaires* used by his Council, his Household, his Court. Is it not then a struggle of officials against the Court rather than (as in Trevor-Roper's view) of the country against the Court and its bureaucratic apparatus?

But one cannot simplify things in this way. The royal *commissaires* came from the same social stratum as the royal officials. A *maître des requêtes* was also an official. Before becoming one he might have been *conseiller au Parlement*. Many *conseillers d'Etat* came from the sovereign courts. The King's *commissaire* would have been powerless in the provinces if he had not always found among the officials, judges to help him pass judgement, finance officers to help him with their technical skill, and in the country barristers to act as Public Prosecutors. Nor must we forget that it is at Court that the worst revolts occurred. It was when magnates such as Monsieur, the King's brother, or Condé, a prince of the blood royal, withdrew from the Court and rallied their supporters, that provincial risings took a particularly serious turn. Is it not a little artificial to oppose the Court and the rest of the country? Trevor-Roper could obviously answer that what matters is not so much the origins of the *commissaires* and those who helped them as their obedience to the will of the King, in his Council, in his Court.

But what did all their followers want? Monsieur and Condé wanted to turn absolute monarchy to their own ends. They wanted an aristocratic monarchy, not a *ständestaat*. Other princes and other magnates dreamed of a quasi-independence in their provinces and in their *seigneuries*, of a return to the French institutions of the time of Hugh Capet "and better still if possible". They were followed by many feudal lords, many towns, many provinces, who looked back with regret to their days of autonomy or independence, and feared their increasing subjection. As contemporaries saw very clearly, in most of France it was undoubtedly a struggle of feudal elements against the State.⁷ It was less an opposition between the country and the Court, than between what remained feudal in society and what was new, *étatique*, progressive, "modern" in the King's Council and its dependent organs.⁸ Since the time of Henry IV, it was lawyers and no longer landed gentry who formed the majority in the King's Council. If we ask to what extent the Council was part of the Court we raise yet another question: to what

extent had society ceased to be feudal and become penetrated by commercial capitalism?⁹ This brings us back again to the economic aspect of the problem.

It is doubtful whether one can say that mercantilism represented an attempt to adapt the capacity of the country to support the burdens imposed by the bureaucratic apparatus of officials. Mercantilism was first and foremost a weapon in the struggle against the foreigner, a tool of war and of foreign policy. Already a royal tendency in the days of Louis XI, it became doctrine under Chancellor Duprat in the reign of Francis I. It was taken up once more by the States General of 1576 during the great inflation in the latter half of the wars of religion. In the seventeenth century, Laffemas, Richelieu, Colbert saw it as a means of ensuring French hegemony. The great economic recession of the seventeenth century made it more necessary, without it appearing to be any more closely tied to internal politics.

Nor does it seem that the revolts and the revolutionary attempt of the Fronde mark any sort of watershed in France. Political and social problems are not essentially different before and after. In their nature, they do not seem to change. All that happened was that, for a while, the King was the victor. By the end of the century a process of social change was under way, but this had no connection with the revolts and revolutions of the mid-century. The wars of religion of 1572-98 were certainly of greater importance for France. For these conflicts represent a revolt against the office-holders on the part of those social groups who were thwarted of office, such as barristers, doctors, *procureurs fiscaux*, etc. The victory of Henry IV was, in part, a victory of those in office.¹⁰ It is perhaps to the wars of religion that Trevor-Roper's ideas would best apply.

He appreciates, though perhaps without attaching sufficient importance to it, the strain imposed by the Thirty Years' war, coinciding as it did with the great economic recession of the century. It is a pity that he pays no attention to the increase, during the seventeenth century, in the number of bad harvests, of subsistence crises, of famines, of plagues, which killed off artisans and peasants, and begot a long series of cumulative economic crises. They were so numerous in the seventeenth century that some historians have thought to ascribe them to a change in the climate, which is improbable.¹¹ After the plague of 1629-30 two thirds of the kingdom was in a state of endemic economic and social distress. In these circumstances it is understandable that the struggle between royal taxes and feudal dues should have worsened, that peasants and

artisans should have been more willing to listen to incitements to rid themselves of the agents of the tax-farmers, or the bailiffs with their warrants. A number of revolts coincide with price rises due to subsistence crises.¹² Trevor-Roper would do well to look into these matters.

Trevor-Roper is aware that the use of the word "crisis" for the seventeenth century would be less justified if we considered only its political and social aspects. A great crisis of ideas and feeling, a revolution in the manner of thinking and of understanding the Universe, almost an intellectual mutation took place at that time in Europe. It marks the end of Aristotelianism, the triumph of quantitative rationalism, of the notion of mathematical function, of experimental rationalism, with Descartes, the *Mécanistes* and Newton; it is present in the "catholic renaissance" and the mystical movement, in all that the words classical and baroque signify, in the growth of witchcraft, and in so many other aspects which would need to be studied, if we really want to talk of the crisis of the seventeenth century. None of these matters is totally divorced from politics. Is it pure chance that in France the Kings were "classical" in taste, while the rebel Princes favoured the *libertins* and the baroque?

If we stick strictly to Trevor-Roper's brief, his point of departure is a sound one: the political crisis of the seventeenth century represents a crisis in the relations between the State and society. His attempt at synthesis seems to me to rest on inadequate analysis, but there is considerable merit in having presented the problem as a whole. What emerges is the necessity, which I pointed to in 1958,¹³ of studying afresh the revolts and revolutions in seventeenth-century Europe, through a rigorous social analysis of these movements, which in turn implies a study in depth of social structures, and methodical comparisons with the social structures and the revolts of the preceding and following centuries. Such researches would best be stimulated and co-ordinated by an international commission. Professor Trevor-Roper would be the obvious person to launch such a venture. I am ready to help him and to place at the disposal of such a commission the *Centre de recherches sur la Civilisation de l'Europe moderne* that the Sorbonne has just founded.

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NOTES

¹ R. Mousnier, "Recherches sur les Syndicats d'officiers pendant la Fronde. Trésoriers généraux de France et Elus dans la Révolution", *XVII^e Siècle*, (Bulletin de la Société d'Etude du XVII^e Siècle), no. 42 (1959); "Quelques raisons de la Fronde. Les Causes des journées révolutionnaires parisiennes de 1648", *ibid.*, no. 2 (1949).

² R. Mousnier, "Recherches sur les soulèvements populaires en France avant la Fronde", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, v (1958).

³ R. Mousnier, *La Vénalité des Offices en France sous Henri IV et Louis XIII*, (Rouen, 1945). See pp. 365-386.

⁴ See note 1.
⁵ R. Mousnier, "État et commissaire. Recherches sur la création des Intendants des provinces (1634-1648)", *Forschungen zu Staat und Verfassung: Festgabe für Fritz Hartung*, (Berlin, 1958).

⁶ See "Serviteurs du Roi". Quelques aspects de la fonction publique dans la société française du XVII^e siècle" (Études sous la direction de R. Mousnier), *XVII^e Siècle*, nos. 42-3 (1959).

⁷ R. Mousnier, "Comment les Français voyaient la Constitution", *ibid.*, nos. 25-6 (1955).

⁸ R. Mousnier, "Le Conseil du Roi, de la mort de Henri IV au gouvernement personnel de Louis XIV", *Études d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine* (publ. by "La Société d'histoire moderne"), i (1947).

⁹ R. Mousnier, "L'opposition politique bourgeoise à la fin du XVI^e siècle et au début du XVII^e. L'oeuvre de Louis Turquet de Mayerne", *Revue Historique*, ccxiii (1955).

¹⁰ Henri Drouot, *Mayenne et la Bourgogne, Étude sur la Ligue (1587-1596)*, (Thèse de Lettres, Sorbonne, 1937), 2 vols.

¹¹ E. Leroy-Ladurie, "Climat et récoltes aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles", *Annales (Économie, Sociétés, Civilisations)*, xv (1960).

¹² R. Mousnier, "Études sur la population de la France au XVII^e siècle", *XVII^e Siècle*, no. 16 (1952).

¹³ See note 2.

V

IN HIS DAZZLING AND INGENIOUS INTERPRETATION OF THE CRISIS OF the seventeenth century, Professor Trevor-Roper calls it "not merely a constitutional crisis, nor a crisis of economic production" but "a crisis in the relations between society and the state". In the context, the point is well worth making, but it does not take us very much further, for what revolution does not represent a "crisis in the relations between society and the state"? The real problem is to discover what caused the divorce between the two, and it is in Trevor-Roper's answer to this problem that the main interest of his interpretation lies. The clue, he suggests, is to be found in the expansion and the wastefulness of a parasitic state apparatus; in the size and cost of the court.

It may be suspected that Trevor-Roper's placing of the problem of the court at the centre of the revolutionary crisis was originally inspired by his inquiries into the origins of the English Civil War. Can the idea be satisfactorily carried across the Channel and still retain such validity as it may have for England? Can it, for instance,

help the historian of seventeenth-century Spain to understand the Catalan and Portuguese revolutions — for presumably the object of the exercise is to make these and other revolutions comprehensible? “These days are days of shaking”, and even if Catalonia and Portugal virtually disappear from the scene after the first page, we hope by the last to have a better understanding of the seismic movements that shook them.

Trevor-Roper’s thesis, applied to Spain, would seem to be that the court and the state apparatus had become grossly top-heavy by the end of Philip III’s reign; that Olivares tried, but failed, to introduce the reforms of the *arbitristas*; that (from this point the stages of the argument have to be reconstructed by reference to France, England and the United Provinces) as the result of his failure, “the tension between court and country grew, and the ‘revolutionary situation’ of the 1620s and 1630s developed”; and that the “revolutionary situation” failed to develop into actual revolution in Castile because it lacked the organs of effective protest, but did lead to revolution in Catalonia and Portugal, presumably because they did possess such organs.

If this summary represents his argument correctly, it raises two important questions. First, how far did the court and the state apparatus absorb the royal revenues and divert the national wealth into unproductive channels? Second, how far is the problem of an unreformed court really the “cry of the country” from 1620 to 1640, and in particular the cry of the Catalans and the Portuguese?

The first of these questions — as to the real cost of the court to the country — is virtually unanswerable and is likely to remain so, for, as Trevor-Roper points out, we see only the sun-lit tip of the submerged iceberg. Even in the ostentatious reign of Philip III, however, this is rather less impressive than one might have imagined. If we take the year 1608 as being reasonably representative for the reign of Philip III, we find that ordinary expenditure for the first ten months of the year is expected to be rather over 7 million ducats.¹ Of these 7 million, some 1½ are reserved for miscellaneous expenses and the payment of interest on the Crown’s outstanding debts, and another 1½ for the expenses of the court and the salaries of officials. What happens to the remaining 4 million ducats? They are all devoted to military and naval expenditure.

It is, I think, the proportion of revenues devoted to military purposes — even in the “peaceful” reign of Philip III — rather than to the expenses of court and government, which is likely to strike anyone who looks at the papers of the Council of Finance. It is, of

course, true that real expenditure on the court always exceeded the anticipated expenditure, since Philip III bestowed an enormous number of pensions and *mercedes* which do not appear in the budget figures. Between 1 January, 1619 and 1 December, 1620, for instance, he gave away something like 400,000 ducats in pensions and *ayudas de costa*, besides many other unrecorded gifts.² Yet military expenditure was just as likely as court expenditure to outrun the estimated provisions, as the Council of Finance was always lamenting.

If the visible cost of court and government is well under half, and often nearer a quarter, the cost of military and naval preparations, what of the relative *invisible* costs to the national economy? In discussing the burden of the court, Trevor-Roper is presumably thinking in particular of the diversion of national resources away from economically productive channels into the stagnant backwater of office in church and state. Here we are hampered by the lack of any adequate study of the sale of offices in Spain, but from Mr. K. W. Swart's comparative study of the sale of offices in the seventeenth century, it would seem that offices in Spain were not created and sold on quite the same scale as in France, and that there was a good deal less willingness to buy.³ My own feeling is that, to explain the diversion of money away from economically productive fields of investment, we must look not so much to the sale of offices as to the crippling difficulties that attended industrial development and commercial expansion in Castile, and to the growth of the highly elaborate system of *censos* and *juros* which, unlike trade and industry, provided a safe form of investment and assured rates of interest. In fact, we are driven back again to the appallingly expensive foreign policy of the sixteenth-century rulers of Spain — a foreign policy which led to heavy taxes falling on the most productive members of the community, and to the creation of a vast national debt, in which it was easy and profitable to invest.

Naturally, nobody would dispute the enormous weight of a top-heavy bureaucracy on Castile. This is one of the most frequent complaints of the Spanish *arbitristas*. But we must also remember the burden imposed by Castile's military commitments. One of the principal reasons for the depopulation of Castilian villages must be sought in the activities of the recruiting sergeant and the quartermaster, and I should hesitate to put the scourge of billeting below the plague of officers among the many misfortunes that dogged seventeenth-century societies.

In spite of its intolerable burdens, Castile did not revolt.

Trevor-Roper attributes this, with a good deal of justice, to the lack of "effective organs of protest" in Castile. But let us now turn to the two parts of the peninsula which *did* revolt — Catalonia and Portugal. How far was the "general grievance against which they rebelled" the "character and cost of the state"? Catalans who visited Madrid in the reign of Philip III had no illusions about the "character" of the state, and wrote home the most devastating accounts of the extravagance and corruption of life at court. The Catalans could well afford to be critical of the ways of the court, since they themselves were excluded from all the delights traditionally associated with living in the royal presence. This ambivalent attitude — half-hatred, half-jealousy — fits well enough into Trevor-Roper's general framework. But it is difficult to see that the Catalans or the Portuguese had any real cause for complaint about the *cost* of the state, at least to themselves. *They* did not pay for Castile's large bureaucracy or for the lavish court festivities. They did not even pay for the cost of their own defence, for (like the English gentry?) they were not over-taxed but under-taxed — at least in relation to Castile. Between 1599 and 1640 the King received from the Catalan *Corts* one subsidy of one million ducats, and no other taxes except ecclesiastical dues and a number of minor taxes which did not even suffice to cover the costs of the small viceregal administration in the Principality. Castile, over the same forty years, was paying over 6 million ducats *a year* to the Crown in secular taxes alone. Nor was money raised in Catalonia by the sale of offices, for the Crown could neither create nor sell offices in the Principality. As a result, the royal administration in Catalonia consisted of only a handful of officials, and there simply did not exist a vast parasitic bureaucracy like the one that lay so heavy on Castile.

We have, then, revolutions in two provinces which admittedly possess effective organs of protest, but which — since the cost of court and bureaucracy is hardly any concern of theirs — do not seem, on the Trevor-Roper principle, to have much to protest about. Why, then, do they revolt? For the answer to this, we must look primarily to the policies of Olivares. Trevor-Roper rightly points to the "puritanical" character of Olivares' reforming movement in the 1620s — his anxiety to curb the extravagance of the court, and cut down on the multitude of *mercedes* and offices so lavishly bestowed by the profligate régime that preceded his own. Yet the problem of the court, serious as it was, can hardly be considered the Conde Duques's principal anxiety. His real problem was the high cost of war. With the expiry of the truce with the Dutch in 1621,

the annual provision for the Flanders army was raised from 1½ to 3½ million ducats, and the sum earmarked for the Atlantic fleet went up to one million.⁴ And this was only the beginning. It was primarily the needs of defence and the cost of war which imposed on Olivares the urgent need for reform; and this reform necessarily entailed much more than tinkering with the court or reducing the number of offices in Castile. It demanded a radical reorganisation of the fiscal system within the Spanish Monarchy.

It does not, therefore, seem to me that, even if Olivares had succeeded in doing what Richelieu did in the way of household reform, he would have gone very far towards solving his fundamental problem — that of defence (a problem, incidentally, in which the shortage of manpower was to loom as large as the shortage of money). It was his determination to solve this problem which led him to devise schemes for the more effective exploitation of the resources of the Crown of Aragon and Portugal, and these schemes eventually brought him into conflict with the Catalans and the Portuguese. No doubt the knowledge that the court was still spending lavishly on *fiestas* strengthened their resolve to refuse payment, but I do not believe that "the character and cost of the state", in the sense used by Trevor-Roper, figured very prominently in their calculations. At the time of their revolutions, the apparatus of the state still lay lightly on them, and such money as had been squeezed out of them was being used, not to subsidize the court, but to improve the very inadequate defences of their own territory. Their principal purpose in rebelling was to escape the imminent threat to their national identities and to their economic resources implied in the Conde Duque's demands that they should play a fuller part in the war.

While, then, Trevor-Roper has performed a valuable service in drawing attention to the size and cost of the state apparatus, this seems to be of use mainly in explaining the troubles of the part of Spain which did *not* rebel — Castile. And even here it is very doubtful whether it should be allowed to occupy the centre of the stage, for court extravagance and the inflation of the bureaucracy would hardly seem to rank in the same class among the causes of Castile's decline as the burden imposed on the Castilian economy and Castilian society by a century of Hapsburg wars. Indeed, the proliferation of offices is best regarded, alongside the rise of taxation or the development of *juros*, as one among the many natural consequences of that intolerable burden. To say simply that "war aggravates" the problem of the growth of a parasitic bureaucracy is surely rather a remarkable understatement. Admittedly, "the

sixteenth-century wars had led to no such revolutions” but they had bequeathed a terrible inheritance to the seventeenth century; and, on top of this, seventeenth-century wars were fought on a very different scale. Philip II’s army consisted of perhaps 40,000 men, while Philip IV’s was probably at least twice as large. This new scale of warfare created problems of an entirely new magnitude and order for the rulers of seventeenth-century states. It placed an additional enormous burden on economies already subjected to heavy strain.

How was the strain to be eased? By relating the state’s life, as Trevor-Roper says, to its means of livelihood. This meant a programme of austerity and of “puritanical” reforms; it meant more rational economic policies. But it also meant extending the power of the King over his subjects, in order to draw on the resources of provinces and of social classes hitherto under-taxed or exempt. This was the acid test that faced seventeenth-century ministers. Richelieu may perhaps have met with rather more success than Olivares in his household reforms, but can this really have made any significant difference to the relative fortunes of France and Spain? The most obvious difference stems from the fact that Olivares’ fiscal demands provoked revolution first. Otherwise, it is the similarities not the differences, that impress. Both Richelieu and Olivares came to power with the best intentions of putting their own house in order; these intentions were frustrated by the exigencies of war; both were compelled by the cost of the war effort to tighten their grip on the resources of their states, and, in so doing, *they unwittingly precipitated revolution*. This, I believe, is the real moral of the story. The reforming movement of the 1620s, so far from showing the way of escape from revolution, in fact hastened its approach, because real reform included a fiscal, constitutional and social reorganization so radical that it inevitably brought the power of the Crown into head-on collision with those who had hitherto enjoyed special liberties and immunities. The essential clue to the revolutionary situation of the 1640s is, I suspect, to be found in the determination of governments to exercise fuller control over their states without yet having the administrative means or fiscal resources to ensure obedience to their will; and that determination sprang in the first instance from something which could not be gainsaid and brooked no delay — the imperious demands of war.

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NOTES

¹ A(rchivo) G(eneral de) S(imancas) Hacienda leg(ajo) 345-474 f. 405. *Relación*, 22 Dec., 1607.

² AGS Hacienda leg. 414-573 *Relación de . . . mercedes* (1621).

³ K. W. Swart, *Sale of Offices in the Seventeenth Century* (The Hague, 1949) c. 2.

⁴ AGS Hacienda leg. 414-573 f. 303 *Consulta*, 10 Dec., 1621.

VI

PROFESSOR TREVOR-ROPER'S BRILLIANT SYNOPTIC SURVEY OF THE European crisis of the seventeenth century rings basically true in the strictly English context. I agree that the challenge to royal government by the Long Parliament in 1640 was the culmination of a long-developed resentment of the Country against the Court and all it stood for. I also agree that there are certain elements in the Independent programme of the 1640s and 1650s that appear to fit into a decentralising, anti-Court pattern. Whether this analysis embraces the whole gamut of Independent ideas, and whether the first civil war itself can be fitted into the mould is another matter. The initial crisis of 1640, however, was undoubtedly a crisis of confidence in the Court.

Having accepted Trevor-Roper's main contention, I nevertheless do not agree with the way in which he has used this conceptual tool in his analysis of the English revolution. It seems to me that what was wrong with the English Court and administration was not that they were too swollen and too expensive, but on the contrary that they were far too small. Unlike the systems of the Continent, the *ancien régime* in England possessed no standing army to provide employment for the nobility; no paid local officials at all except feodaries and escheators; and a central bureaucracy which at the lower levels was not too well paid and was limited in numbers, as Dr. Aylmer has recently shown.¹ No systematic organisation of the sale of offices was ever put into operation by the Stuarts, whose half-hearted efforts in this direction did little to further the interests of the Crown either by increasing its revenues or by swelling the number of its dependants. If the bureaucracy was small and not too well rewarded, the Court was certainly large and lavish. But even here the substantial rewards at the disposal of the Crown were very unevenly distributed. Thus the capital value of Crown grants of all kinds to English peers 1558-1641 totalled £3½ m. odd (exclusive of direct profits from offices so granted, corruption etc.); only 117 of the 380 or so English peers benefited, and of these a mere 26 received

no less than 72% of the total. Here as elsewhere the benefits of the regime were restricted to a tiny minority. The result was that when it came to the push those on the inside were neither sufficiently numerous and powerful, nor sufficiently conscious of a personal stake to be able to resist assault from without. The Court and central administration of the Early Stuarts aroused the same hatreds and jealousies as those of the Continent, but failed to represent a vested interest strong enough to ensure their continued existence.

Because the beneficiaries of royal government were relatively so few in numbers, the total cost to the taxpayer — even allowing for the unwieldy mass of concealed taxation in fees, bribes, sale of titles, exploitation of monopolies, and so on — must have been small compared with the burden in France or Spain. In about 1628 it was reckoned that Normandy alone provided Louis XIII with revenues equal to the total ordinary income of Charles I.² But between 1603 and 1641, the English taxpayers were unusually aware of the cost of the Court and administration because in England — perhaps alone among the states of Europe — it, rather than the demands of war, was the main drain on the public revenues. In the 1630s, however, after the death of the Duke of Buckingham, there was undoubtedly a decline in the cost of the Court. In particular there was a sharp reduction to about a fifth of the previous level in the value of grants and favours. If the primary motive for the attack on the Stuart monarchy was hatred of the recklessly lavish share-out of tax-payers' money and Crown resources among a restricted group of courtiers, one would have expected the revolt to have come in the 1620s, not in 1640.

By 1640 the middle age-group of English country gentry, usually the bulwark of respectable conservatism in church and state, had become radicals, even rebels. What drove men like Hampden and Pym to these lengths was not merely the hateful memory of the 1620s, when the finances of the State had been the plaything of the Duke of Buckingham and his clients, nor their dislike of certain aspects of the 1630s reform policy: it was the combination of both. The ban on sale of titles, the drive against corruption, the attack on fees, the shutting down of the flow of favours, the partial clean-up of the morals of the Court, even perhaps the revival of the Elizabethan social welfare policy, were all welcomed by the country gentry in the 1630s — even if with a certain cynicism about the sincerity or likely duration of these measures. On the other hand they disliked the attempt by the Crown to shift part of the burden of taxation from the

poor to the rich by such devices as enclosure fines, rocketing fines for wardship, distraint of knighthood, forest fines, the drive for increased tithes and the attempt at a revival of scutage. It was not that the gentry were having to witness ever more ostentatious profiteering at the Court, but rather that they were now being made to pay an increased proportion of the cost of a less disreputable and rather more economical institution.

But there was more to it than this. In analysing the Court *versus* Country conflict, as much weight must be placed upon imponderable factors of feeling and emotion as upon purely financial considerations. The conflict was one of *mores*, of religious and political beliefs, as well as one of economic interests. In the early seventeenth century England was experiencing the full force of the stresses set up by two cultures, those of the Country, and of the Court: Decker against Massinger, Milton against Davenant, Robert Walker against Van Dyck, artisan mannerism against Inigo Jones; suspicion and hatred of Italy as vicious and popish against a passionate admiration of its aesthetic splendours; a belief in the virtues of country living against the sophistication of the London man about town; a strong moral antipathy towards sexual licence, gambling, stage-plays, hard drinking, duelling and running into debt against a natural weakness for all these worldly pleasures and vices; a dark suspicion of ritual and ornament in church worship against a ready acceptance of the beauty of holiness advocated by Laud; a deeply felt fear and hatred of Papists and Popery against an easy-going toleration for well-connected recusants and a sneaking admiration for Inigo Jones's chapel in St. James'; and lastly a genuine devotion to the theory of a balanced constitution, as opposed to the authoritarian views of Charles and Wentworth.

Psychologically isolated, economically harmful, financially burdensome, numerically small, the central Establishment lacked the resources, numbers and nerve to stand up to the attack when it came. Compared with the Court and administrative structures of the Continent, those of England were mean and pitiful things. Hence their collapse in 1640.

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NOTES

¹ G. Aylmer, "Office holding as a factor in English History, 1625-42", *History*, xlv (1959).

² SP 16/126/44.

VII

Reply by Professor Trevor-Roper

I CALLED MY ESSAY "THE GENERAL CRISIS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY". My distinguished commentators make many points, which I shall try to take up, but only Mr. Kossmann, I think, flatly denies both the generality of the crisis and its occurrence in the seventeenth century. The crisis, he seems to say, was not general at all; my suggestion of a general parallel is "as wrong as can be", and my dates are wrong too, or, if not wrong, vague, elusive and self-contradictory. Well, if I am to defend my thesis at all, I had better start by defending it against this total denial: and I shall defend it by saying that Mr. Kossmann seems to me to demand from history a chronometrical precision which it does not possess.

Can we not agree that there are general historical phenomena? Are we forbidden to see parallels between the different princely courts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or the Enlightened Despots in the eighteenth, or the Dictators in the twentieth, unless we can show that they all marched in exact chronological step? Of course not. Men proceed by imitation, fashions take time to spread, a process here may both begin and end later than a process there, which may nevertheless be comparable with it. Such differences are not important. What I have tried to do is to detect a general parallel in the structural crisis of several Western European monarchies: a crisis which was more acute here than there, and was acute earlier here than there, but which (whether it caused revolution or not) was revealed most forcibly in the seventeenth century. I do not suggest, and do not need to suggest, that in each country the process was similar or simultaneous, even if the explosion itself was simultaneous. For I do not believe that revolutions arise merely out of structural crises. General structural crises may last long; they may pass their peak without revolution. If structural crises alone determined revolution, the English revolution would have broken out in the 1620s (I agree with Mr. Stone here). Revolutions occur because particular political events break the continuity of society at some point during a time of general structural crisis. My argument is that, although all the Western European monarchies had not the same structure or the same time-scale, they had sufficient similarities and were similarly weakened when general economic and political troubles, by imposing an additional strain, caused revolution here, transformation there.

Moreover, I have argued that although such political and economic

troubles had occurred at other times too, and notably in the later sixteenth century, the period after 1620 was crucial: it was then that crisis was felt, not merely by this or that monarchy, but by the whole system. Mr. Kossmann, if I understand his argument, would deny this, but I am glad to have the support of M. Mousnier. Although Holland had, for reasons which I stated, already emancipated itself from the crisis, it seems to me incontestable that all the Western European monarchies, in these years, not only experienced the crisis individually but were aware of it (as they had not been before) as a general phenomenon, a crisis of society. The Spanish empire may have faced serious trouble in the sixteenth century, with the Revolt of the Netherlands, but it was in the last years of Philip III that the Spanish *arbitristas* recognised and analysed a crisis of the state and the Spanish statesmen set up the *Junta de Reformación* to cope with it. The French monarchy may have been convulsed in the late sixteenth century, with the Wars of Religion, but it is in the time of Richelieu that men spoke of a fundamental social crisis needing drastic reformation. It may well be, as Mr. Elliott says, that the military or other strains of the sixteenth century had already weakened the princely states, but the fact remains that it was in the seventeenth century that these weakened bodies were exposed to the general and in many cases decisive challenge which revealed their weakness: the economic challenge of the depression of 1620, the military and political challenge of the Thirty Years' War. To which I would certainly agree with M. Mousnier in adding the physical challenge of exceptional dearth and plague.

In some ways, in my essay, I have doubtless sacrificed clarity to brevity. Let me try to reverse the process by some further explanations. First, let me make it clear that by the words "office" and "court" I have never meant only the offices directly under the Crown, or the court in its narrow sense, as the group of metropolitan officials and courtiers around the sovereign. By "office" I mean all the offices, metropolitan and local, which formed the bureaucratic machine of government, including offices in the law and the state-church; and by "court" I mean the sum of such offices. Consequently any reform of the system was not merely "household reform", it was social reform. Secondly, when writing of the cost to society of such offices, I am not referring merely to the cost paid by the Crown out of taxes but to the whole cost of maintaining this apparatus, the greater part of which fell not on the Crown but directly upon the country. I think that I may have made this latter point more clearly than the former, but some of the criticisms

now made suggest that I did not make either of them clearly enough. For instance, Mr. Stone's references to the narrow circle of noble court pensionaries seems to me to prove nothing: such pensionaries were a mere fragment of the system, and their pensions a mere fragment of its cost. Nor do I agree with Mr. Stone that in England, in the 1630s, "there was *undoubtedly* a decline in the cost of the court". I am well aware of the difficulties of calculation in such matters, but my belief is that, in a less spectacular way, the burden of the court, as I understand that term, was *probably* greater in the 1630s than in the 1620s.

The same distinction must be made in Spain. Mr. Elliott quotes Mr. K. W. Swart's view that offices were not created and sold in Spain on the same scale as in France. This may be so — although until someone gives as much attention to Spain as M. Mousnier has done to France, I would prefer to suspend judgment. But even if it is so, is creation and sale by the Crown a sufficient criterion, and does Mr. Swart use "office" in the same wide sense as I do? I believe that it is a good rule that the foot knows where the shoe pinches, and the literature of complaint shows every sign of multiplication of office in the reigns of Philip III and Philip IV. These offices may not all have been sold by the Crown, but if they (or their reversions, which was perhaps more usual in Spain) were sold from person to person, the effect upon society would be the same. So in 1619 Philip III was urged to abolish, as a burden to society, the 100 *receptores* created six years earlier, even though that should mean repaying the price at which they had bought their offices. In 1622 Philip IV, in his brief reforming period, declared that since an excessive number of offices is pernicious in the state ("most of them being sold, and the officers having to make up the price they have paid"), and since a great number of *escribanos* is prejudicial to society ("and the number at present is excessive, and grows daily") the number of *alguaciles*, *procuradores*, and *escribanos* in Castile must be reduced to one-third, and recruitment must be discouraged by various means. Such demands are regular in Spain; they are repeated in the submissions of the Cortes, the *consultas* of the Councils, the programmes of the *arbitristas*, the letters of statesmen; they were officially granted in the famous *Capítulos de Reformatión* of 1623; but their constant repetition thereafter shows how ineffective were the measures taken to satisfy them.

Moreover, whatever the case of lay offices, it is certain that offices in the Church grew enormously. Socially, superfluous idle monks and friars had exactly the same effect as superfluous, parasitic officials,

and in this sector Spain probably suffered more than France. Philip III and the Duke of Lerma were praised by devout writers for their foundations and privileges (Lerma alone founded eleven monasteries as well as other *obras pias*), and those years were praised as a revival of "the golden age of St. Jerome"; and yet all the time Philip III and Philip IV were being repeatedly begged to reduce these foundations, which contained many persons "rather fleeing from necessity to the delights of indolence than moved by devotion". Thus, using "office" in the wide sense, as I have used it, it does not seem to me that Spain was less burdened than other Western monarchies. As Gondomar wrote to Philip III, the monarchy was imperilled by "two powerful enemies: first, all the princes of the world, and secondly, all us officers and courtiers who serve your Majesty (*todos los ministros y criados que servimos a V. Magd.*)".

The point about the Church as a department of state is important and I regret that I did not express myself more fully. It seems to me that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Church should be regarded, sociologically, as an element in the bureaucratic structure. The Reformation movement, Catholic as well as Protestant, was in many respects a revolt against the papal "court" in the widest sense: the indecent, costly, and infinitely multiplied personnel, mainly of the regular orders, which had overgrown the working episcopal and parish structure. One only has to read the records of the Council of Trent to see this: the exclusion of the Protestants from that assembly merely shows that, socially, Catholic demands were identical. The difference is that, in Catholic countries, such demands were ultimately defeated: the "Catholic Reform" may have been a moral and spiritual reform, but structurally it was a positive aggravation. On the other hand this aggravated clerical bureaucracy could also, if it were reanimated, be made socially palliative, and this is what happened in Catholic countries after the Counter-Reformation. The new orders then created may on the one hand have doubled and trebled the burden of "the court" upon society, but, on the other hand, by evangelisation, they reconciled society to the burden which they increased. They also physically strengthened the court. It was partly for this reason, I suspect, that in the Mediterranean countries the court was able to survive and stifle the forces of change, so that Queen Henrietta Maria could regard Popery, and Italian princes could regard the Jesuits, as the sole internal preservative of monarchy. It was partly for this reason, also, that I described the English court as the most "brittle", of all. There the oppressive class of "courtiers", "monopolists", lawyers who composed "the

court" lacked the massive support of the preaching orders. The English friars, the lecturers, were on the other side. On the relative fragility of the English court I entirely agree with Mr. Stone. It lacked the costly, but also effective outworks of the Catholic thrones.

The same point forces me to dissent from one remark by Mr. Hexter. He asks whether the Dissolution of the Monasteries was not also a great revolution. I answer, No: for a revolution is a challenge to the whole structure of society, not a mere adjustment of detail. The transfer of the legal ownership of some thousands of acres does not seem to me revolutionary, if the land is managed thereafter in the same manner (and often by the same people) as before. Nor is it a revolution if a few thousand discredited monastic parasites snore away on pensions instead of in intitions. The importance of the Dissolution seems to me to be not that it wound up the old monastic system, which had pretty well wound itself up, and which even the Catholic reformers wished to wind up in the same way (see the *Consilium . . . de Emendanda Ecclesia*, of 1538), but that, in Protestant countries, it prevented the creation of those new, reinvigorated regular orders which, after 1560, reinforced the lay bureaucracy in Catholic countries.

I agree with Mr. Hexter and Mr. Elliott that the final strain, perhaps even the greater strain, was war. But can one separate the impact and burden of war from the form of the society which sustains it? In the arguments in the Spanish Council of State before 1621, those who advocated a renewal of war against the Netherlands regularly appealed to a social fact: the fact that whereas the Dutch had constantly gained strength and wealth throughout the years of peace, the Spanish economy, even in peace, had as constantly declined; and this decline, they admitted, was due to social, structural reasons. War to these men was an expedient — a desperate, and as it proved, a fatal expedient — to remedy a disease which was already perceptible in peace-time. Although clearly there are many factors to consider, I would still prefer to say that in the monarchies of Western Europe there was a structural crisis which was general, although the transition from structural crisis to revolution, which is not natural or inevitable but *requires* the intervention of a political event, was effected here by war, there without it.

Moreover, there is a further point to be made about war and structure. Since my article was published, the late Vicens Vives published the communication he proposed to make to the Eleventh International Historical Congress at Stockholm. In this he argued that the Renaissance Monarchies, as I have defined them, were

created by and for the necessities of war. In other words, it was in order to make war and survive the burden of war, that they developed their peculiar social structure. But if this is so, and if war in fact imposed too great a strain upon them, then it follows not that war was an unexpected burden to them, but that their social structure was inadequate within their own terms of reference. And if war created the burden of the Renaissance courts, equally it developed and overdeveloped that burden. M. Mousnier has shown how the French government, again and again, considered reform of that venality of office which was the basic mechanism of the monarchy, but on each occasion, faced by the threat of war, postponed its projects and, instead of reforming, positively strengthened the system. Richelieu at first (like Olivares in Spain) sought to combine war and reform, but in the end (again like Olivares) sacrificed reform to war. Marillac would have sacrificed war to reform. In both countries, we may say that war not only created but extended the system, until not war but its own weight overwhelmed it.

At one point I evidently over-simplified my argument, and I regret that, in the cause of brevity, I omitted two paragraphs which would perhaps have clarified it. This passage concerned the point, or rather the social area, within which the opposite pressures of "court" and "country" met. By excessive economy I have here exposed myself, as I believe, to misunderstanding both by Mr. Kossmann and by M. Mousnier. Both of them point out that in many cases, and particularly in the French *Fronde*, the antithesis of court *v.* country is not at all clear; and Mr. Kossmann requires me, rather summarily, to state in which category, "court" or "country", I place the French *Parlements*. But this is precisely what cannot be done. If court and country were absolutely separable, then, I submit, there would not have been a social crisis. Social crises are caused not by the clear-cut opposition of mutually exclusive interests but by the tug-of-war of opposite interests *within one body*. Figuratively, they are to be represented not by a clean split, but by an untidy inward crumbling: the result of complex pressures on a complex body. And this complexity is caused by the complexity of human interests. "Court" and "country" in the seventeenth century, like bureaucrats and taxpayers, or producers and consumers today, constantly overlap. A man feels himself part of the "country", a taxpayer, in one respect, and then discovers that, in another hitherto forgotten respect, he too is of "the court", dependent on taxes. The history of all revolutions is full of such painful discoveries, leading occasionally to painful apostasies. Sometimes they prevent revolution from breaking

out; sometimes, when it has broken out, they entangle its course, making it bloody and indecisive: instead of performing a neat, surgical operation upon society, men find themselves hacking blindly among unpredicted organs. It is not only in the *Fronde* that one sees this. The English parliament, which represented many of the grievances of the country, consisted also of "officials" with a vested interest in the system against which they complained. Even the Spanish *Cortes* were similarly divided; the representatives of the towns might be mere functionaries, "courtiers", aristocrats, but they did also, at times, represent "country" grievances. The spokesmen of a society in crisis represent not its separate compartments, but its inmost contradictions.

Mr. Hobsbawm seems chiefly concerned to defend his theory of the "bourgeois", "capitalist" revolution in England. His argument, if I understand it correctly, is that even if nobody consciously aimed at such a result, the Puritan revolution did in fact lead to such a result, and moreover that a revolution was necessary to produce such a result: reform of the kind that I envisaged — *viz.* administrative reform of the state and "mercantilist" reform of the economy — might (he says) have brought on certain improvements, but it could not have led, as the revolution did, to England's industrialisation and economic supremacy in the world. I can only repeat my original objection to this thesis, *viz.* that, as far as I can see, no one has ever produced any positive evidence necessarily connecting the uniqueness of English economic progress in the eighteenth century with the Puritan Revolution. Until that is done, I shall continue to consider the theory not an argument but a dogma; and I shall persist in thinking that English puritanism was not "unique". The argument that since mere "mercantilist" reform did not lead to industrial triumph in France, it could not have done so in England seems to me a *non sequitur*. Colbert operated in a society which was already very different from that of England, and his reforms were anyway ephemeral: the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the multiplication of venal office as a means of war-finance were an effective structural counter-reformation. The limits of his achievement were peculiar to France, not inherent in his aims.

M. Mousnier remarks that the general crisis of the seventeenth century was a crisis of ideas as well as of structure. Of course I agree with him (and with Mr. Hexter who implies the same point). But to embark on this topic would be another task and any summary might prove grossly simplified. So I will only say that whereas I believe that experimental science, mysticism and the witch-craze can

all be related to the social and structural revolution, I do not believe that they can be equated with any single social force or party in that revolution. I believe that here too they are to be related rather to the formation or disintegration of the church-state than to any particular interest which contributed to either process. I believe that the sociologists who (for instance) equate experimental science with puritan opposition are guilty of over-simplification only a little less gross than those who equate the witch-cult with protestantism. I hope I may some time say something on this subject, but not here.

Finally, a few small points. I quoted contemporaries to illustrate the sense of universal revolution, and those contemporaries included, in their catalogues, Catalonia and Portugal. But I did not myself pursue the cases of Catalonia and Portugal because I do not consider them to be comparable. In Catalonia and Portugal local separatism and particular forces exploited the weakness of Castile; but it is the structural weakness of the Castilian crown, not the forces which exploited it, which is relevant to my analysis. A better comparison is between Catalonia and Portugal on one hand and Scotland on the other. Equally I did not say anything about "the important Ukrainian upheaval", mentioned by Mr. Hobsbawm, partly through ignorance of its details, partly because I very much doubt whether general conditions in Eastern Europe were sufficiently similar to justify comparison. On the other hand, if I did not deal with Italy, this was merely through lack of space. I believe that (*mutatis mutandis*) my analysis is as valid (or invalid) there as in France, Spain and England, and I gave references to works by Chabod and Coniglio which sufficiently illustrate the phenomenon in Milan and Naples. In Rome the phenomenon hardly needs illustration. Venice, of course, is the exception — and sought to preserve its exceptional character by excluding those religious orders which, elsewhere, were the buttress of the princely, bureaucratic system. I certainly do not accept Mr. Kossman's statement that I have merely applied to Europe a hypothesis put forward in the first instance for England only.

When I wrote this essay, I little expected that it would have the honour of exciting so many distinguished historians to reply. Naturally I am delighted that it has done so. These replies confirm me in my belief that there is still much to be done in this field, and that there are many historians willing to do it, among whom I certainly would not dare to assume the lead so generously offered to me by M. Mousnier. But these replies, by two great gaps, remind me also of two great losses. What M. Mousnier has done for France,

Federico Chabod did for Italy, Vicens Vives for Catalonia. It was the work of these three which, more than anything else, encouraged me to attempt a comparative study along these lines. The sudden death, within a month of each other, of both Vicens Vives and Chabod is a loss which we shall find it very difficult to repair.

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