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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE ISSUE OF MUNICIPAL INDEBTEDNESS: THE STRUGGLE FOR MONARCHICAL CENTRALIZATION IN LOUIS XIV'S FRANCE.

BY

WENDY F. KASINEC

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The central government of Louis XIV has been often interpretated by historians as centralizing, modern and absolute. Certainly, the royal government's power over provincial and local authorities increased throughout Louis XIV's reign as royal agents were sent out from Paris into the provinces, but this extension of royal authority progressed neither smoothly or quickly. The conflict between the center and periphery is demonstrated by the gradual imposition of royal authority over municipal affairs, especially as related to municipal indebtedness, throughout Louis XIV's reign.

This study has focused on the imposition of royal authority, through the intendants, upon municipal governments using financial reasons as a method of imposing central authority on the periphery. A careful examination of available primary documents suggests that the centralisation of government may not have been so easy or complete despite the claims of Louis XIV's promoters and historians. The Crown did make significant inroads into local traditions and rights, but often at great cost. Often central governmental gains were illusory and ultimately unobtainable. As the demands of the central government grew while resources contracted, desperate measures were taken in an effort to obtain more funds often at the expense of the Crown's power and to the benefit of

the nobility. Thus, the extension of royal authority in early modern France was ambiguous in nature - the Crown grew in power while sacrificing its independence.

The need for the expansion of the power of royal officials can be seen as an indicator of the central government's weakness. It could not impose central authority over municipal affairs with existing powers, because local traditions and privileges were not given up easily by municipal officials. Evidence revealed in this study and in numerous other historical works questions the general assumption of absolutism and the pervasive nature of the centralization of authority by demonstrating the ambiguous nature of royal/municipal and royal/provincial relationships.

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROBLEMS

The France of Louis XIV has often been regarded by historians as being governed by an absolute and centralizing monarchy which laid the foundations of the modern nation state. This concept of absolutism has provided the basis of most research conducted on early modern France from contemporary times to the modern day, largely due to the tremendous influence of Alexis de Tocqueville's work, The Old Regime and the French Revolution.[1] Nineteenth century historians revelled in the concept of progress and centralisation while their successors placed a greater emphasis on the institutions of early modern France.[2] Modern historical research still embraces that heritage but other approaches have been forwarded.

Most historical research on early modern France has had a centrist orientation, with a heavy reliance on printed documents emanating from Paris, glorification of the state and the progressive nature of centralisation. [3]

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[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Regime and the French Revolution, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1955).

[2]See the representative works of François Guizot, Gabriel Hanotaux, and Adolphe Chéruel.

[3]See the works of Ernest Lavisse, Georges Pagès, Henri Sée, Richard Bonney, and Roland Mousnier.

However, some historians[4] have recently shifted away from the study of the center by pursuing research on regional topics thus following the tradition of the *Annales* school.

The *Annales* school was founded by historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in the 1920s and dominates modern scholarship on French history, especially in France. *Annalistes* promote the study of "total" history: the study of human society with reference to geographical, demographic, economic, sociological and psychological factors instead of concentrating on the study of "great men", diplomatic and political events. This methodological and philosophical approach enthusiastically incorporates research from interdisciplinary fields with a heavy emphasis on economic, social and regional history.[5]

Such exhaustive research on the totality of the human past has largely limited *Annaliste* historians to the study of specific regions, but many have utilized their research conclusions to comment on larger historical issues. Pierre Goubert's study of Beauvais and Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie's

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[4]For example, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Pierre Goubert, William Beik, James B. Collins, Daniel Nickey, and Sharon Kettering.

[5]See William Church's lucid analysis of the Annales school in Louis XIV in Historical Thought (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), pp. 94-110 and Lynn Hunt's commentary in The New Cultural History (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989) for valuable insights into Annaliste philosophy and methodology.

The Peasants of Languedoc are but two examples of such an approach.[6] Part of the impetus for this orientation stems from the regional diversity of early modern France and the suspect nature of any study which posits general principles believed to be applicable to all of France.

This study has focused on the effectiveness of centralization and absolute power of Louis XIV primarily in the south of France and Burgundy where the Crown's interest in municipal indebtedness offers a focus. It has been asserted by numerous historians that during Louis XIV's reign the towns lost control of their political and financial affairs because of the imposition of royal officials who usurped the power of local officials.[7] The extension of royal authority has been linked consistently with these royal officials, the intendants, because increases in their powers, often at the expense of local

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[6] Pierre Goubert, Beauvais et Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730 (Paris: S.E.V.P.N., 1960); Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, The Peasants of Languedoc, trans. and intro. John Day (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois, 1974).

[7] For example, "The edict [of April 1683] transferred control of municipal finance from the towns to the intendants, ... and it was this, more than any single factor, which led to the tutelle administrative over the towns." Richard Bonney, Political Change in France under Richelieu and Mazarin 1624-1661 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 428; Tocqueville expressed similar opinions on this issue, for example, on page 46 of The Old Regime he stated that "the government took a hand in all local affairs, even the most trivial. Nothing could be done without consulting the central authority - [the intendant]".

officials, paralleled the growth of centralization. Little attention has been given by historians to the interaction between intendants and municipal officials or the rate of change and sequence of events within each *généralité* throughout Louis XIV's reign. Sharon Kettering, however, has addressed some of those issues in her examination of the relationship between provincial brokers and intendants in regard to the establishment of a bureaucracy in the southern *pays d'états*.[1]

As is borne out by various studies, Louis XIV's power was limited by the structure of early modern French society.[2] It allowed him to be king of France and to emerge as the foremost leader in Europe while placing restrictions on his methods of control over established power groups, such as the nobility and provincial and municipal governments. Nevertheless, Louis XIV did

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[1]Sharon Kettering, Patrons, Brokers and Clients in Seventeenth Century France. (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986).

[2]James B. Collins, Fiscal Limits of Absolutism (Berkeley and Los Angeles,: Univ. of California Press, 1988); Daniel Hickey, The Coming of French Absolutism (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1986); Hilton Root, Peasants and King in Burgundy. Agrarian Foundations of French Absolutism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1987); William Beik, Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985); Sharon Kettering, Judicial Politics Urban Revolt in Seventeenth Century France. The Parlement Aix 1629-1659. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978).

establish a centralized monarchy serviced by an efficient government - by early modern standards - and his primary agents for this achievement were the intendants. One important area to which Louis XIV and his trusted minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, directed their centralizing efforts, employing intendants, relates to the abolition of municipal debts on a national scale. This interest translated into the gradual extension of royal authority over the municipalities which had local and national ramifications. This extension of royal authority did not proceed easily - it took almost thirty years -and it did not, in the final analysis, resolve the debt situation of the municipalities.

This thirty year period under consideration, from 1661 to 1691, witnessed an increase in prosperity from the legacy of Cardinal Mazarin, the implementation of mercantilist concepts on a national scale, the gradual reversal or stagnation of Colbert's policies after the Dutch War (1672-78) and fluctuations in the economy after 1683 to the great famine of 1693-94. The actual levels of economic activity within France are somewhat difficult to establish as the sources are very limited and often one must rely on inexact qualitative evidence far more than on detailed quantitative evidence. As a result, scholars have reached differing conclusions about the economic condition of

France in the latter half of Louis XIV's reign depending upon which type of source they have employed in their research.[10]

However, the need for money remained constant throughout Louis XIV's reign, and the central government's policy regarding municipal debt was largely formulated on the basis of freeing capital so funds could be obtained for the central government, either through direct taxes or through an increase in trade and commerce which was subject to taxation. The structure of government changed throughout the seventeenth century, but the focus remained on the ability of the Crown to obtain funds for warfare - civil or foreign.

While examining the central government's interaction with the municipalities over the debt issue, this study has focused on the southern *pays d'états*, because of the structure of royal-provincial and provincial-municipal relations. As well, the greater emphasis on trade and commerce in the south, even among the nobility, resulted in an increased interest in the area by Colbert in regard to the economy and municipal indebtedness which he saw as being interrelated.

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[10]Betty Behrens, Henri Sée, Jean Meuvret, Warren Scoville, C.E. Labrousse vs. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Thomas J. Schaeper.

Interest in the municipalities, on both political and financial levels, goes back to the reign of Henri IV through the *de facto* rule of the Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin. However, their interest in municipal debt was not on the same level as that undertaken by the central government during Colbert's ministry. Louis XIV and Colbert were primarily concerned with the liquidation of municipal debts because of the economic consequences. However, the instrument employed by the central government, the intendant, moved the situation out of the economic sphere into the political one as it involved the relationship between the Crown and the provincial authorities, the Estates and *parlements*, who often safeguarded the interests of the municipalities. The membership of these provincial bodies consisted primarily of nobles, which links this issue of municipal indebtedness to one of the central issues of early modern French historiography, that of the relationship between the Crown and the nobility."

Once the intendants had established fiscal authority on the municipal level, which they eventually did through their authority in the liquidation of municipal debts, the

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"Varying views exist on this topic, for example, Kettering emphasises the concept of cooperation between the two groups while Beik feels that there existed resistance along with cooperation and others such as Root and Mousnier assert that resistance and coercion were the primary factors.

foundations of centralization had been largely laid. Nevertheless, the process was a lengthy one, and the economic victory was largely illusory as the gains made did not last. The in depth investigation into municipal debt under Louis XIV began in 1661, and while the debts were liquidated by 1689 under the guidance of the intendants -- who had gained virtual control over municipal finances by the royal decree of 1683 -- by 1691 most municipalities were in debt once again.

It could also be speculated that the need for increased powers for the intendants regarding municipal finance reflected the inability of the central government to achieve its goals. It needed constantly to increase the powers of the intendants because they encountered resistance or circumstances which hindered their work and necessitated progressive increases of their jurisdiction and power. This expansion of authority paradoxically demonstrates the weakness of the central government for it was unable to impose its policies on the municipalities without conferring greater powers on to the intendants.

Although the intendants did eventually liquidate the municipal debts after they were given control of municipal finances in 1683, that situation was not sustained because of the social structure and the continued existence of local traditions which gave municipalities their autonomy.

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Indeed, the intendants had to rely on local authorities to accomplish much of the work assigned to them by the central government because royal administrative structures did not exist. Society had been decentralized for so long it could not be transformed overnight and, in reality, the central government needed support from those municipalities as evidenced by the widespread use of local men (*subdélégués*) by the intendants after 1683.

Thus, the situation in 1691 was remarkably similar to that of 1661 - economic chaos, spiraling municipal debts, corruption and a high degree of local autonomy - despite the momentary reversals and the growth of central authority. Why did it take approximately twenty-eight years to liquidate the municipal debts? Why was there a change in municipal response to the liquidation of debt from the initial period (1661-1683) to the following period (1683-1689)? Was it merely municipal capitulation to the greater powers of the royal bureaucrat or did other reasons exist? Why did these municipalities fall into debt so quickly after the initial liquidation at a time when the intendants' municipal responsibilities increased? Was central control, as embodied in the intendants, really so pervasive and powerful as historians have alleged in their scholarly works on Louis XIV and the rise of absolutism?

These questions, and many additional ones, can be

answered only partially by the use of available printed materials which originate from the central government. However, these reports between the intendants and the various *contrôleurs généraux* throughout the period under consideration can provide some insight into the relationship between the Crown and municipal governments. As well, they certainly do reflect the great interest shown by the central government in the verification and liquidation of municipal debt, the evolution of that interest and the response of the municipalities. Also, they raise many interesting questions about the interaction of local power groups and the central government, rivalries among municipalities and the ethos of provincial and muncipal authorities which cannot be fully addressed without further research using documents from provincial and municipal archives.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROYAL ADMINISTRATION

Royal officials of the French government, the intendants, originally were sent into the provinces for financial reasons, though these eventually had political and administrative consequences. The origins of the seventeenth century intendants can be traced back to the sixteenth century, and a look at their functions and duties illustrates the continuity that runs from their origins to their institutionalisation during the reign of Louis XIV.

Throughout this period the intendants were known by various names, but they were always sent out as agents of the royal government, to extend royal authority into the provinces. They compiled detailed reports on each province, suppressed local rebellions, gradually controlled municipal government and supervised tax collections. Their powers increased dramatically in times of war so that they eventually supplanted the local and provincial officials. Because of this they encountered much opposition, but the support of the central government for these generally loyal and efficient officers ensured their survival. Thus, the provincial intendants came to represent royal authority in

the provinces.[1]

The primary purpose of the intendants was to gather information about the king's realm and to send that information back to the central government, so that the king could devise an appropriate strategy to govern the land. Another basic function that the intendants performed was related to the collection of taxes. The tax system of seventeenth-century France was very complex, with the nobility and the clergy exempt from the most important direct tax, the *taille*. [2] The peasants and the poor townspeople thus carried the burden of the *taille* which was levied by the state in increasing amounts, especially in times of war. In the *pays d'élections* the *taille* was a personal tax levied on each individual who did not have the status that resulted in exemption. In the *pays d'états* the *taille* was levied on the land, and the provincial estates had to be consulted in regard to the amount levied and

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[1]Ernest Lavisse, *Louis XIV, La Fronde, Le Roi, Colbert (1643-1685)* in *Histoire de France Depuis les Origines Jusqu'à la Révolution*, vol. VII (i), ed. E. Lavisse (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1905), p. 167.

[2]Ibid., p. 188. See also: Inna Murat, *Colbert*, trans. by R.F. [illegible] & J. van Amelt (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1984), p. 94, and Pierre Goubert, *Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen*, trans. by A. Carter (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 121.

played a significant role in collection.[3] During Louis XIV's regime the provincial estates lost some of their powers; thus, they usually complied with royal requests which stipulated the amount of taxes owed to the royal government. Other types of taxes, which were levied on all people - at least theoretically - were indirect taxes such as the *gabelles*, the *aides*, and various internal duties and tariffs.[4] Though frequently burdensome and an obstruction to economic growth, these did not constitute a major source of revenue for the Crown, at least in comparison to the *taille*.[5] This tax program and this system of privilege invited a mass of corruption, especially on the part of the officials of the realm, who were venal officeholders intent on protecting their properties and investments.[6] As a result, the tax burden often was shifted onto the least prosperous parishes, those which could not afford to bribe the venal officials and which could least bear the burden

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[3]Marcel Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France aux at XVIII siècles* (Paris: Librairie des archives nationales, 1923), pp. 526-531. See also: F.C. Green, The Ancien Regime (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1956), pp. 16, 17.

[4]Marion, pp. 247-250, pp. 9-12. See also: Green, p. 19.

[5]Andrew Trout, Jean-Baptist Colbert (Boston: Twayne, 1978), p. 48.

[6]Robin Briggs, Early Modern France 1560-1715 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 124.

of the *taille*.[7]

In an effort to facilitate faster and more complete tax collection, to check the various abuses in the system and to suppress local rebellions, the central government in the sixteenth century created a type of royal official who was sent into the provinces on inspection tours (*chevauchées*). In Henri II's reign, the intendants, as these royal officials were called, were sent to supervise administrative, judicial and financial operations. These intendants did not have any decision-making powers in the provinces; they were merely inspectors. These intendants were drawn from the *maitres des requêtes* (members of one of the courts of the Parlement of Paris), royal councillors and judges often related to venal office holders.[8] However, as intendants they were appointed servants of the royal government and could be dismissed if they failed to perform their duties. These intendants were to report any abuse or misappropriation of funds to the central government.

In the 1560s the *maitres des requêtes* were sometimes

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[7]Lavisse, pp. 189, 190. See also: Vivian R. Gruder, The Royal Provincial Intendants (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968), p. 4.

[8]Roland Mousnier, The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy 1598-1789, trans. by A. Goldhammer, vol. II (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 302, 303. See also: Briggs, p. 125.

given a commission from the government and therefore were known as *commissaires*. These *commissaires* were sent to various areas for a specified amount of time, in order to settle particular situations.[9] They were problem-solvers for the central government, who would execute royal edicts, sell offices, recover funds or try rebels. The *maitres des requêtes* continued to work for the central government into the seventeenth century in areas where there were no intendants, such as in Brittany which did not have an intendant until 1689.[10] *Maitre des requêtes*, *commissaire* and intendant were all titles which denoted a royal official and were often interchangeable, depending upon the period under consideration.

In the late sixteenth century many *commissaires* were willing to be known as intendants, because the term intendant was seen as being of greater status, denoting a superior type of *commissaire*.[11] But from 1600 to 1624 the royal government abandoned the title of intendant in favour of *commissaire*. At this time there was a rapid increase in

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[9]Richard Bonney, Political Change in France under Richelieu and Mazarin 1624-1661 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 32. See also: Green, p. 11.

[10]Gruder, p. 8.

[11]Roland Mousnier, "The Development of Monarchical Institutions and Society in France", in Louis XIV and Absolutism, ed. R. Hatton (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 48. See also: Mousnier, Institutions, p. 505.

the number of *commissaires* due to the internal problems which plagued France. These *commissaires* were still used primarily for surveillance and inspections, and they were limited to specific areas for regulated amounts of time. [12]

These internal problems arose largely after the assassination of Henry IV in 1610, which changed the balance of power within Europe and within France. The regency of Henry IV's widow, Marie de Medicis (1610-1623), was a time of turmoil as competing nobles tried to usurp her power. However, none of these nobles enjoyed a strong position which, when combined with Regency's policy of divide and rule, meant that no one noble successfully threatened the Regency government. Nevertheless, the Crown was without a strong leader and in serious financial difficulties. With the establishment of Louis XIII's power in 1622 and the growing influence of Cardinal Richelieu, the king's First Minister (appointed in 1624), the position of the Crown solidified. Problems still remained as Louis XIII had to contend with internal and foreign conflicts. Domestically, the growing power and discontent of the Huguenots throughout the 1620s was threatening, until the Crown's victory

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[12]Geoffrey Treasure, Seventeenth Century France, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 317. See also: Gruder, p. 5.

over the Protestants at La Rochelle resulted in the Peace of Alais (1629).[13]

Foreign problems began to dominate the policies of the royal government as the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) continued to rage in central Europe. As well, France had become involved in smaller conflicts, such as the war over the Valtelline (1624-6) and the War of the Mantuan Succession (1628-31). Although France did not become officially engaged in the Thirty Years War until 1635, when she declared war on Habsburg Spain, she had been very supportive, through secret financial support, of the Protestant enemies of the Habsburgs. This financial involvement necessitated a continual influx of capital which was primarily obtained through taxes. [14] This increased demand, coupled with the imposition of royal officials and worsening agricultural conditions, led to many popular up-

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[13]See Richelieu's outline of the potential problems arising because of discontent among the Huguenots: Richelieu, Memorandum for the King, May 1625 in Richard Bonney (ed.), Society and Government in France Under Richelieu and Mazarin, 1624-61(New York: St. Martin's, 1988), p. 4.

[14]Memorandum of Richelieu for the King, 13 April 1630 in Bonney, Society and Government, pp. 13, 14; Claude de Bullion, finance minister (1632-1640), to Richelieu 31 December 1635 in ibid, p. 44; Bullion to Louis XIII, 9 May 1636 in ibid, p. 45.

risings in the 1630s and 1640s. [15] The people could not, and often would not, pay these increased taxes. These actions, along with a growing distrust of the government by financiers, contributed to the bankruptcy of the government in 1634 and in 1648. [16]

The extent of the *commissaires'* powers changed with

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[15]Of course, each revolt had its own "causes", but the three factors mentioned above were usually present in the revolts. See P.J. Coveney, (ed.), France in Crisis 1620-1675 (London: Macmillan, 1977) for detailed discussion about the controversy over popular revolts (ie. the Porchnev-Mousnier debate) and numerous translated essays by the major participants in the debate. Other relevant articles are: Raymond Kierstead (ed. and intro.), State and Society in Seventeenth Century France (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975); Henna Prestvich, "Review of *Les Soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648* by Boris Porchnev and *Classes et luttes des classes en France au début du XVIIe siècle* by Robert Mandrou", in The English Historical Review, vol. 81 (July, 1966), pp. 568-572; J.H.M. Salmon, "Venality of Office and Popular Sedition in Seventeenth Century France", in Past and Present, no. 37 (July, 1974), pp. 21-43; David Parker, "The Social Foundations of French Absolutism 1610-1630", in Past and Present, no. 53 (Nov, 1971), pp. 67-89; Leon Bernard, "French Society and Popular Uprisings Under Louis XIV", in French Historical Studies, vol. III, no. 4 (Fall, 1964), pp. 454-474; as well as the French translation of Porchnev's book: Boris Porchnev, *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648* (Paris, 1963) and Mousnier's response: Roland Mousnier, "Recherches *sur les soulèvements populaires en France avant la Fronde*", in Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine, no. 5-6 (1956), pp. 81-113. See Trevor Aston, Crisis in Europe 1560-1660 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) for a discussion of other mid-seventeenth century 'crises' throughout Europe.

[16]Sullion to Richelieu, 24 March 1939 in Bonney, Society and Government, p. 47; James Collins, Fiscal Limits of Absolutism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988), pp. 8, 17.

French intervention in the Italian conflict in 1631, and especially when France formally declared war on Spain in 1635. With war came the demands for more revenue, which meant increased taxes which had to be collected quickly. [17] This demand pushed the intendants into a new role, and their powers increased. They slowly began to supplant the traditional officials, the élus and the trésoriers de France, because these officials had shown that they were not willing to aid the central government in its endeavour to obtain taxes swiftly and to distribute their weight somewhat more equitably. [18] However, in order to augment its liquidity, the central government also increased the number of offices being sold to lesser nobles and the wealthy bourgeoisie which led to further internal problems. [19]

In 1633 the royal government extended the powers of the intendants in an attempt to obtain more funds and to

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[17] A. Lloyd Moote, "The French Crown Versus Its Judicial and Financial Officials, 1615-83", in The Journal of Modern History, vol. 34 (1962), p. 153.

[18] Sullien to Richelieu, 2 March 1939 in Bonney, Society and Government, pp. 46, 47; Gruder, p. 4; Beik, pp. 13-15; G. Durand, "What is Absolutism?", in Louis XIV and Absolutism, ed. Ragnild Hatton (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 21; Briggs, p. 124.

[19] Mousnier, Institutions, vol. II, pp. 76, 77.

equalize the tax burden, [20] but these extended powers were still of a temporary nature. With the escalation of military costs and the consequent demand for more money, the central government in 1642 gave the intendants the task of assessing and supervising the collection of the *taille*. Thus, the intendants became the actual *trésoriers de France*, while the titular *trésoriers de France* were reduced to attending to the legal formalities and offering advice. [21]

As well, throughout the 1630s and 1640s the central government began using the intendants in an attempt to help many municipalities liquidate their debts. [22] The intendant had become an administrator and a reformer, not just an inspector. This tremendous increase in the power of the intendants made them the direct and responsible representatives of the central government and the administrators of the provincial tax system.

One very unpopular and debilitating measure undertaken by the royal government to obtain more revenue during the Regency for Louis XIV was the transfer of one of the prin-

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[20]Commission as intendant for commissioners carrying out the regulation of the taille, 25 May 1635 in Bonney, Society and Government, pp. 98, 99.

[21]Ruling on the taille, 22 August 1642 in Bonney, Society and Government, pp. 110, 111; Mousnier, "Development", p. 45. Gruder, p. 6.

[22]Beik, pp. 271-273; Bonney, Political Change, p. 150.

cipal sources of revenue for the municipalities, the *deniers octrois*, to the Crown after 1647. [21] This proved to be detrimental to the municipalities, which had to incur greater debts in order to pay their operating costs, and it contradicted previous royal policies concerning the liquidation of municipal debts. The Crown, however, was primarily interested in obtaining funds in an expeditious manner without regard for the long-term effects.

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[21] *Deniers communs: deniers patrimoneaux* were revenues obtained from assets belonging absolutely to the town while *deniers octrois* were revenues obtained from taxes conceded by the king to the towns to cover local expenditures, see Clément, vol. IV, p. 610. Roland Mousnier (ed.), Lettres et Mémoires Adressés au Chancelier Séguir, 1633-1649 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), vol. II, p. 959. This correspondence reveals that in 1649 the *deniers octrois* had already been diverted; Richard Bonney, The King's Debts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), p. 201; Temple, p. 69; Lavisse, pp. 27, 28, 207; It should be noted that disagreement exists among scholars concerning the date when the *deniers octrois* were diverted. For example, Richard Bonney states in Political Change, p. 342 that d'Hémery wanted to divert the *octrois* in 1647, but that it was Servien and Fouquet who did so after 1654. However, Bonney asserts in The King's Debts, p. 201 that d'Hémery diverted municipal taxes (both the *deniers communs et octrois*) to the Crown on 21 December 1647. Julian Dent in Crisis in Finance, p. 36 states that half of the *octrois* were diverted in 1657 by Fouquet and Mazarin, while Roger Mettam in Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 138 posits that d'Hémery tried to divert the municipal taxes into the royal treasury. It would seem that the *deniers octrois* were diverted into the royal coffers in 1647 until 1650. Obviously, the municipalities would have suffered severely from this prolonged diversion of funds. On the other hand, if these municipal taxes had been diverted for just two years (1657-1659), then one would suspect that the financial damage would not have been as great.

This changing situation alarmed provincial and local officials who felt that the intendants were encroaching on their territories and duties.[24] This dislike of the intendants by the venal officeholders, judicial and financial officials who had purchased their offices, was translated into action during the *Fronde parlementaire*; on 30 June 1648 the rebellious parlementarians decreed that all intendants should be recalled save those in the border provinces (ie. Languedoc, Provence, Lyonnais, Picardy, Burgundy, and Champagne). These remaining intendants were not to become involved in tax assessment or collection, except in relation to the army. [25] In these border areas the intendants, initially restricted to dealing with the needs of the army, gradually took on greater responsibilities so that they regained their previous powers as provincial intendants. The government did try, from 1648 to 1651, to reintroduce the intendants elsewhere under other titles, but it encountered fierce opposition which

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[24]Syndic of the élus to the élections of the Kingdom, 1 June 1649, in Bonney, Society and Government, p. 134; Moote, p. 148.

[25]Bonney, p. 89. Mousnier, Institutions, p. 515; See Lloyd Moote, Revolt of the Judges. The Parlement of Paris and the Fronde 1643-1652. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971) for an overview of the Fronde.

forced it to abandon its plans. [26]

By late 1651 and early 1652 the improved position of Louis XIV and Mazarin, the chief minister of the Regency government, along with the decline in power of the Frondeurs, allowed the government to reinstate the intendants in the provinces.[27] The war with Spain had continued throughout the Fronde, and with it the need for increased revenue. The Fronde had wrought havoc with France's economy and her finances, especially through the abolition of the intendants; thus, with the re-establishment of royal authority in 1652 the Crown proceeded to try to recover some of the lost revenue by slowly reintroducing the intendants into the provinces so they could restore order and obtain the finances needed to pay for the war.[28] Although intendants returned to their *généralités* at the request of the central government, they were not legally reinstated to their posts for the reforms of 1648 had not been revoked. As a result, venal officials maintained the illegality of the intendants down to the Revolution in

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[26]Mousnier (ed.), Lettres et Mémoires, vol. II, pp. 939-941; Bonney, Political Change, pp. 62-64.

[27]Decree of the council of finance, 17 September 1653 in Bonney, Society and Government, pp. 142, 143; Moote, p. 157.

[28]Le Tellier to Mazarin, 24 July 1657 in Bonney, Society and Government, p. 147; Gruder, p. 8; Bonney, Political Change, p. 74.

spite of continued and increased royal support of the intendants. The ambiguity of this situation no doubt affected relations between intendants and local officials, especially since intendants continued to wrest control from these officials in such areas as municipal finance and elections."

In 1659, with the Peace of the Pyrenees between Spain and France, one of the major reasons for the use of intendants - war - disappeared and there was a move within the government to reduce the number of intendants and to return them to their inspectoral or supervisory role. The government of Louis XIV was eager not to enrage the provincial parlements or nobility so soon after they had attempted to usurp the power of the Crown. Therefore, in

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"Roots, pp. 157-159; The intendants' powers continued to grow after Louis XIV's reign until the Revolution of 1789 causing Voltaire to describe them as "the thirty tyrants of France". For further information on the role of the intendants in eighteenth century France see: Paul Ardascheff, *Les Intendants de Province sous Louis XVI*, trans. Louis Jousserandot (1909: Rpt. Genève: Slatkine, 1978); Nora Temple, "Municipal elections and municipal oligarchies in eighteenth-century France", in J.F. Bosher (ed.), *French Government and Society 1500-1850* (London: Athlone, 1973); Vivian R. Gruder, *The Royal Provincial Intendants, A Governing Elite in Eighteenth Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968); Maurice Bordes, *L'administration provinciale et municipale en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1972); Franklin L. Ford, *Robe and Sword* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953); Maurice Bordes, "*Les Intendants de Louis XV*", in *Revue Historique*, vol. CCXXXII (1960), pp. 45-62.

the beginning of Louis XIV's rule there was a shift back to the sixteenth century role of the intendant and away from the extensive powers which had been granted under Richelieu and Mazarin. [30]

Upon the death of Mazarin in 1661 Louis XIV became ruler of the country in fact as well as name. Louis XIV's authority as king was absolute in theory; but in reality, he encountered various difficulties and obstacles which limited his authority. Absolutism, as a theoretical concept, had evolved throughout the early modern period in partial reaction to the chaos wrought during the minority of Louis XIII and Louis XIV. It did not arise out of a vacuum, however, as it had links to medieval French conceptions of kingship originating with the Capetian kings even while competing with them. The power of the King devolved from the concept that he was God's representative on earth, not subject to worldly laws but bound by divine and natural laws.[31] Louis XIV was an absolute ruler, on a

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[30]Mousnier, "Development", p. 45; Murat, p. 96; Bonney, Political Change, pp. 324, 343.

[31]François Dumont, "French Kingship and Absolute Monarchy in the Seventeenth Century", in Louis XIV and the Craft of Kingship, ed. J.C. Rule (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 55-64. See also G. Durand, "What is Absolutism?" in ibid., pp. 18-36; E.H. Kossman, "The Singularity of Absolutism", in ibid., pp. 3-17; See also Chapter Twelve of Ford, Robe and Sword for a discussion of the Three Nobilités.

theoretical level, but not on a tangible level because he could not ignore the privileges and traditions held by the people whom he needed for support. As a result, he had to deal with established provincial and local institutions throughout the realm, all of which were intent on maintaining their autonomy. [32]

The France of 1661 was stronger than that of 1610, as Louis XIV did not have to contend with powerful nobles, governors and Huguenots to the extent that Richelieu and Mazarin had done in the early part of the seventeenth century. This lack of concentrated opposition to the central government allowed Louis XIV to rule much more autocratically than any of his predecessors. [33] Nevertheless, Louis XIV was forced to compromise with the existing powerful institutions, as he was unable to control them fully, and indeed, he needed them. The ties of patronage and of the hierarchically structured society were still strong in seventeenth century France, ties which Louis XIV could not ignore but which he used to his own advantage. [34]

Louis XIV used the structures handed down to him from

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[32]Trout, p. 52; Bonney, Political Change, pp. 448-450.

[33]Bonney, Political Change, pp. 438, 441. See also: Dumont, p. 29.

[34]David Parker, The Making of French Absolutism (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 139; Dumont, pp. 20-24.

Richelieu and Mazarin, with some adaptations, to expand centralized administration. The growth of a royal bureaucracy and the extension of a centralized government ultimately limited the king's personal power [32] because he needed the existing structures of provincial and local governments to collect taxes and to execute royal policies, especially in the *pays d'états*. Therefore, he dared not destroy them, but he did attempt to control them.[33]

Louis XIV's absolutist rule forced nobles to retreat from their established positions and to embrace his rule. But why did they do so? The traditional explanation lies with the impressive use of force displayed by Louis XIV's troops towards recalcitrant nobles and the flocking of local nobles to Versailles. Other reasons which could be cited are linked to his better organisational skills and to the fact that his dreams and ambitions somehow related to those of the provincial nobility. [34] Thus, they were willing to follow him.

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[32]Briggs, pp. 156, 157; Gruder, pp. 10, 11; Green, p. 4.

[33]Hilton Root, Peasants and King in Burgundy. Agrarian Foundations of French Absolutism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1987), pp. 30, 31.

[34]William Beik, Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 200, 201.

This theory relates to the wish of the Sun King that all of his subjects submit to his will and do so with a proper attitude of submission. He wholeheartedly embraced the concept of traditional pledges of loyalty, and he extended it to a subject-king relationship. It was this kind of personal tie which helped to bring about institutional changes within France.[38] The importance of the personal force of the king is shown in Colbert's correspondence where he constantly refers to *'Sa Majesté'*, as if the king were deeply concerned over every issue discussed in Colbert's reports. Indeed, Colbert often threatened to tell the king of an intendant's tardiness or insolence in an effort to make him work harder or more efficiently. [39] The importance of loyalty to Louis XIV is shown by the central government's directives to the intendants to report on the status of people's loyalty to the king in every *généralité*.[40]

This extension of personal loyalty to the monarch helped to produce more uniformity within France. Because

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[38]Ibid, p. 304.

[39]Ibid., p. 305.; Pierre Clément (ed.), Lettres, Instructions et Mémoires de Colbert (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1861-71), vol. II, p. 226.; G.B. Depping (ed.), Correspondance administrative sous le règne de Louis XIV (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1850-55), vol. I, p. 136.

[40]Depping, vol. I, p. 136.

of his greater strength, Louis XIV was able to cope with provincial problems much more effectively than his predecessors. In fact, his success led people to have confidence in his reign. His record often made provincial nobles more willing to align themselves with the Crown often with the hope of benefiting socially, politically and economically. [4] This is shown in the expanding role of client systems originating from the center, Paris, and extending out to the provinces. Another aspect of Louis XIV's increased personal rule was that many of the high nobility became his creatures instead of being under the control of local magnates. This resulted in a shift in power away from the provinces and the nobility to the court and the king. Thus, "Clients of his clients looked to him as their overpatron just as they regarded him as their ultimate feudal overlord." [5]

The incessant demand for money by the king was an obstacle for Colbert, as was the power of privilege and tradition which proved too strong to overcome. The nobility resisted any attempt by the government to make the tax system more equitable. One of the major sources of the nobles' power was their purchase of offices carrying tax

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[4]Baik, pp. 333, 334.

[5]Major, p. 670.

exemption which the government sold in times of need, a dangerous expedient. In the seventeenth century the sale of offices increased dramatically. Richelieu and Mazarin had sold offices, especially in times of war, to obtain ready cash. Though the sale of offices proved to be a quick solution for immediate fiscal demands of the Crown, the practice served to undermine the authority of the central government and to diminish its long-term revenues. Many people coveted these venal offices since they meant direct tax-relief and an increase in social status, [43] which sometimes was hereditary as a result of a law which allowed for the direct transfer of office to one's heir provided that one paid the annual tax, the *paulette*. [44]

By selling these offices the Crown obtained windfall cash from the sale; but the offices absorbed many men of talent from the bourgeoisie for transferal of noble status to these officials effectively meant that they could no longer participate in trade or commerce -- not only by reason of social prejudice but also by law. The detrimental impact upon the French economy is a matter of speculation; but damage to Louis XIV's rule and to Colbert's economic plans is incontestable if unmeasured as yet,

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[43]Parker, The Making of French Absolutism, p. 147; Treut, pp. 117, 118.

[44]Green, pp. 14, 15.

because venal offices meant that a considerable front opposed any change in society. These people wanted to maintain the *status quo* which would keep them exempt from taxes and assure them of their privileged positions, [44] despite the costs. [45]

The interrelationship of the intendants, the venal officeholders and the collection of taxes affected the economy and political structure of seventeenth century France profoundly. Throughout Louis XIV's reign the intendants were responsible for the supervision and/or collection of taxes and the implementation of economic and social programs emanating from the central government. Often this led to conflict between them and local officials. These officeholdings represented a tremendous financial investment for the officeholder, so he defended his position vigourously. Moreover, this investment could not be expropriated or bought out by the Crown for fear of uprisings and reprisals, besides the fact that it would be too expensive an undertaking.[46] The absolutist state of Louis XIV relied heavily on a constant influx of revenue to

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[44]Lionel Rothkrug, Opposition to Louis XIV (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 133, 134; Lavisse, pp. 204, 205; Treasure, pp. 79, 332, 333.

[45]Trout, p. 117.

[46]Briggs, p. 210; Bonney, Political Change, p. 480.

support its military adventures; and venality of offices provided much of that revenue, for it was virtually the only way which Louis XIV could regularly tap the wealth of nobility. [4]

Therefore, absolutism and venality of office were uneasy partners in the social structure of seventeenth century France. Both were dependent on the continuance of privilege and the hierarchical structure of early modern society, but this did not deter either of them from attempting to limit the power of the other. [5] The venal officeholder had secured a way of life that allowed for social and political advancement, but at a price and the state was forced to pay the price of it to secure stability. And venal offices resulted in a permanent drain on the realm, especially as most of them were non-functional. [6] For example, a survey in 1664 showed that 40,000 out of 46,000 tax-exempt offices were unnecessary. Colbert abhored the excessive number of venal officeholders because they were no longer contributory members of the society as their money and their person were tied up in the office

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[4]Briggs, 124.

[5]Mousnier, Institutions, vol. II, pp. 39, 49; Salmon, "Venality of Office", p. 33; Parker, The Making, pp. 118, 148.

[6]Parker, The Making, p. 147.

rather than in trade, commerce or investments except through third-person financing which seems to have been rather common. [31]

It has been argued that venality of office was a type of feudalisation since it symbolized the Crown's approval of private ownership of administrative power by rich subjects. And even Richelieu questioned whether things could be better done otherwise, given the King's responsibility for patronage. Debate surrounding the nature of this venal power and the manifestation of it exists in abundance, but venality of office definitely weakened the power of the central government and 'absolutism'. This meant that the state could only try to control the officers through the intendants. [32] It would be difficult to contest the judgement of one noted historian, that "La monarchie, avec un roi en principe absolu, fut en fait-...une monarchie tempérée par la vena ·té des offices." [33] Louis XIV exhibited more success ... controlling the officeholders than his predecessors, but he was just as

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[31]Ibid, p. 149; Trout, p. 117; Treasure, pp. 332, 333; Dent, Crisis in Finance, p. 66.

[32]Beik, pp. 13, 14; Roland Mousnier, La Vénalité des Offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII, 2nd. ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1971), p. 19; Moote, "The French Crown", pp. 149, 150.

[33]Mousnier, La Vénalité, p. 666.

bound to them for financial and military support because of his ambitions for himself and France.

THE COLBERT YEARS

Louis XIV's most trusted minister was Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683), who helped Louis XIV to govern France through his dedication and hard work. Son of Nicolas Colbert, a draper from Reims turned *officier*, he was a very influential minister in the government of Louis XIV. Colbert entered into service for the Crown by working in the office of the secretary of state for war, Le Tellier, for eight years; then, in 1651 Cardinal Mazarin employed him to look after his affairs in Paris during the Fronde years. Colbert proved himself to be a loyal and trustworthy employee, and as a result he and his family prospered. Because of his association with Mazarin, Colbert obtained a position in the government of Louis XIV in 1661, when the cardinal died; [1] and he quickly moved through the ranks to become eventually the most important minister in Louis XIV's government from 1661 to 1683.

Colbert became *contrôleur général* in 1665, after which he exercised a tremendous amount of power as he eventually came to control the navy, finance, trade, colonial affairs

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[1]Charles W. Cole, Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism (1939; Rpt. Hamden: Archon, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 279-285; Pierre Goubert, Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen, trans. Anne Carter (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 116; Geoffrey Treasure, Seventeenth Century France, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1981), p. 326.

and public works as well as many other duties. Indeed, Colbert became the symbol of the royal bureaucrat. [2] An essential part of his financial reforms for the government was his advocacy of a balanced budget. He intensely disliked deficit financing, which left the government dependent on outside sources for revenue, for he wanted to make the central government stronger by his reforms, not weaker. This policy of balanced budgets was extended from the central government to the municipal governments throughout Louis XIV's reign, especially during Colbert's tenure.

One of Colbert's most important tasks was to obtain the maximum amount of money from the country to finance Louis XIV's wars. In an effort to do so he concentrated his energies on more efficient tax collection and improvement of the economy, and the intendants became pivotal to both his programs. Also, the intendants were to promote local industry and commerce as well as verifying and liquidating the municipalities' debts. Colbert had

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[2]John C. Rule, " Louis XIV, Roi-Bureaucrate," in Louis XIV and the Craft of Kingship, ed. J.C. Rule (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1969), p. 48; Ines Murat, Colbert, trans. R.F. Cook and J. Van Asselt (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1984), p. 100; Julian Dent, "An Aspect of the Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: The Collapse of the Financial Administration of the French Monarchy (1654-61)", in Economic History Review, 2nd series, vol 20 (August, 1967), p. 256.

intended to levy more indirect taxes to help make taxes more equitable, but this plan was only feasible during peace time.[3]

Colbert used many of Richelieu's ideas, but instead of focusing on foreign affairs, he was more concerned with solving internal problems which had existed during Richelieu's and Mazarin's times. When Colbert became the *surintendant des finances* in 1661 he inherited a very corrupt tax system. [4] He had the support of Louis XIV, but the king was not overly interested in the actual mechanics of royal finances. Thus, it was left to Colbert to introduce order and to develop a viable financial system. [5]

Colbert was concerned with the tremendous amount of corruption within the system, and he attempted to eradicate many abuses. When Mazarin returned to France in 1652 the French economy was in complete disarray primarily because of continued war expenses and lower tax returns due to economic and political distress, but Mazarin was limited in

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[3]Richard Bonney, Political Change in France Under Richelieu and Mazarin 1624-1661 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 433.

[4]See his comments in Memorandum of Colbert to Mazarin, 1 October 1659 in Pierre Clément (ed.), Lettres, Instructions et Mémoires de Colbert (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1861-71), vol. I, pp. 164-183.

[5]Clément, vol. II, p. 110; Andrew Trout, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (Boston: Twayne, 1978), pp. 46, 47.

his course of action because of political circumstances. Nevertheless, he needed capital to pay war costs and royal expenses for which he turned to financiers. As a result, financiers gained a tremendous amount of power during the Regency and *de facto* rule of Mazarin.[6] The financiers, however, were still bothered by their memories of the 1648 royal bankruptcy in which many of them suffered substantial losses. It was the job of the *surintendant des finances* to win over the financiers in order to obtain short-term financing. Often, the *surintendant des finances* was well connected to the financial world through marriage or birth which facilitated negotiations. For example, d'Hémery had been a financier from 1620 until he obtained his post as an *intendant des finances* in 1631, and his father-in-law was a prominent financier.[7]

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[6]Omer Talon's memoires in Michaud and Pojoulat, pp. 270-2, 299, 300 as cited in Richard Bonney (ed.), Society and Government in France Under Richelieu and Mazarin, 1624-61 (New York: St. Martin's, 1988), pp. 49, 50; Lack of confidence in the royal government 1649-50 see Bonney, Society and Government, pp. 51-78; Julian Dent, Crisis in Finance: Crown, Financiers and Society in Seventeenth Century France (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), p. 20; James B. Collins, Fiscal Limits of Absolutism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988), p. 12; Hilton Root, Peasants and King in Burgundy, Agrarian Foundations French Absolutism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1987), p. 28; Roger Mettam, Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 156.

[7]Dent, Crisis in Finance, p. 67.

In 1654 Nicolas Fouquet, joint *surintendant des finances* with Abel Sérvien, was given the task of procuring funds for the government. At that time royal finances were operating in a deficit situation as revenues for 1655 and 1656 had been already anticipated and loans taken out against them. Fouquet's solution was to use his own funds in order to secure loans for the royal government, as an investment for himself, but also as a way to build up the confidence of financiers in the central government. For example, in November of 1657 he arranged for a new loan totaling 11.8 million *livres* in anticipation of three months' revenue in 1657-8. Fouquet held a substantial portion of the loan, a share worth 4.3 million *livres*. [8] By his active, and perhaps ill-advised, personal involvement in royal finance Fouquet laid himself open to Colbert's accusations of financial mismanagement. Colbert's rise to power, his distrust and jealousy of Fouquet eventually resulted in Fouquet's arrest, trial and conviction which stripped him of his position, much of his wealth and exiled him to Pinerolo.[9]

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[8]Bonney, The King's Debts, pp. 250, 253, 254.

[9]See Clément, vol. I, pp. 164-183 where Colbert outlines his plans for royal finances and denounces Fouquet's personal involvement in the king's finances and with financiers while subtly accusing Fouquet of misconduct. For more details on the affaire Fouquet see Daniel Dessert, Argent, Pouvoir et Société au Grand Siècle (Paris:

During Colbert's first years in office he attacked the financiers, whom he felt were largely responsible for gouging the populace in the name of royal finances. However, as Colbert still had to rely on the financiers for loans he had to convince them of the solvency of the royal government so that they would lend the Crown money. One way of showing financial stability was through increased control over tax collection, as those taxes would often be used for collateral for loans.

Colbert's next target was the numerous people who claimed noble status, and thereby exemption from taxation, but in fact had no legal basis for such claims. This was an attempt to secure more revenue for the Crown, -- as with the legitimate nobility -- but he was largely unsuccessful. [10] Therefore, the burden of taxation continued to fall onto the shoulders of the peasants as they were the most accessible group to tax, and they formed the base of the

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Fayard, 1984), pp. 279-310. See Bonney, Society and Government, pp. 51-78 for examples of the lack of confidence in the royal government felt by financiers as borne out in extracts from primary documents.

[10]Cole, vol. I, p. 304; Pierre Goubert, Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen, trans. A. Carter (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 120; Mousnier, pp. 101, 102.

royal financial system. [11] Although under Colbert the rate of the *taille* was less, the peasants paid more because of increased efficiency of collection. Colbert helped establish Louis XIV's position in Europe because of this increased efficiency in tax collection.[12]

Although Colbert wished to implement many reforms, it was impossible for him to do so given the social conditions and structure of the seventeenth century as well as the demands of wartime financing. Many of the reforms advocated by Colbert were positive, but unfortunately many of them were never implemented due to the opposition either from the nobility or officials. Such reforms included the abolition of the *paulette*, the suppression of venal officeholding and the liquidation of the *rentes* (government annuities that siphoned off money from investment). All of these measures would have improved the Crown's long term financial situation, but at the cost of short term loss; and they were too radical and too dangerous in a war-

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[11]Clément, vol. IV, p. 119; David Parker, The Making of Absolutism (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 124; Robin Briggs, Early Modern Europe 1560-1715 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 147.

[12]G.B. Depping (ed.), Correspondance administrative sous le règne de Louis XIV (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1850-55), vol. III, pp. 165, 166; Treut, pp. 49, 50; Lionel Rothkrug, Opposition to Louis XIV. The Political and Social Origins of the French Enlightenment (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p. 140.

economy to be acted upon in Colbert's time. [13]

Other aspects of Colbert's thought were associated with mercantilistic theories of the seventeenth century. For Colbert, mercantilism meant that France had to protect and stimulate trade and manufacturing within France, through regulation and protection, while gaining the largest share in foreign trade. Thus, he was more interested in internal mercantilism rather than external mercantilism as exhibited by the Dutch and the English. He spent a large part of his life working for the achievement of these goals, but he was unable to accomplish either self-sufficiency or international domination. [14]

As noted, the demands of war often resulted in the negation of many of Colbert's reforms, as the need for increased revenue became paramount. The Dutch War, which began in 1672 and which initially was promoted by Colbert, did not end in a quick victory for France. It dragged on until 1678, and as a result finances were strained severely and Colbert was forced to resort to extraordinary measures to raise more money. Thus, he had to sell rentes and offices and raise the taille. Therefore, in the 1670s

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[13]Parker, p. 141; Treut, p. 47; Cole, vol. I, pp. 302, 303.

[14]Treasure, pp. 318, 328-332; Cole, vol. I, pp. 335-337.

Colbert was forced to renounce the reforms he had heralded in the 1660s, [13] and the possibilities for reform became dimmer as time progressed.

Administratively, under Colbert more emphasis was placed on regular and detailed accounts of all expenses and income of the central and municipal governments. He was very concerned with the finances and commerce of France which he felt existed to serve the interests of the state and the king. Indeed, Colbert "felt that the strength of a state depended on its finances, its finances on its taxes, and the collection of taxes on an abundance of money." [14] Thus, for Colbert the interconnection among these factors was of paramount importance; if one were weak then the entire system would be impaired.

The economy of the later seventeenth century traditionally has been viewed by contemporaries and historians as one of stagnation, declining population and falling agricultural production." [15] This bleak assessment of economic life in Louis XIV's France has been challenged

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[13]Cole, vol. I, p. 307; Romney, Political Change, p. 433; Goubert, p. 138; Trout, p. 80; Dent, Crisis in Finance, p. 22.

[14]Clément, vol. II, p. 660; Cole, vol. I, p. 336.

[15]Contemporary observers: Fénelon, La Bruyere. Historians: Philippe Segnac, Betty Behrens, Warren Scoville, and Jean Meuvret.

partially by *Annaliste* historians. While not proclaiming an overly prosperous economy, these historians place the second half of the seventeenth century within a longer time frame (a *conjuncture*) which experienced fluctuations while remaining generally stagnant. The problems of 1685-1715 had existed throughout the early modern period, though they were exacerbated by the increasing demands of the central government.[16] In addition, there was considerable regional diversity throughout France, especially between primarily agricultural districts, such as Burgundy, and the varied economy of Languedoc. (However, both of these *généralités* were *pays d'états* and thus had similar royal-provincial relations). There were fewer fluctuations in the economy along the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coasts because of more consistent climatic conditions than in the northern and central areas of France.[17] Languedoc and Provence were in a better position for Mediterranean trade as southern coastal provinces and could easily obtain grain or supplies in times of famine; as well, they could distribute goods through shipping, and they enjoyed a variety in trade and

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[16]Thomas J. Schaeper, The Economy of France in the Second Half of the Reign of Louis XIV (Montreal: Inter-university Centre for European Studies, 1980), p. 55.

[17]William Beik, Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), p. 37; Schaeper, pp. 11, 12; Briggs, pp. 38, 41.

commerce.[20]

Under the supervision of Colbert the intendants became the instrument to effect better tax collecting and to impose central authority on the provinces despite these diversities. Although there was a temporary shift back to former times in the early years of Louis XIV's rule, in the aftermath of the Fronde, the intendant remained the symbol of royal authority and will in the provinces. Indeed, during the reign of Louis XIV, under Colbert, [21] the role of the intendant became institutionalised and permanent, [22] and it expanded to encompass even farther reaching powers than under Richelieu and Mazarin. The intendant became "the personal embodiment of the monarch's sovereignty and the supreme executor of the Crown's will." [23] The cause for the extension of the intendant's power was the same, warfare and the need for additional revenue to finance it. Intendants stripped other officials of their duties in their attempt to collect taxes and ensure the smooth

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[20]Schaeper, pp. 23, 24, 28, 29, 42.

[21]Cole, vol. I, p. 288.

[22]Male, p. 30; See also: J.H.M. Salmon, "The King and His Minister", in History, vol. 14 (1964), pp. 484, 486.

[23]Vivian R. Gruder, The Royal Provincial Intendants, A Governing Elite in Eighteenth Century France (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968), p. 209.

running of the country in a time of war. [34] They also were used, as before, to act as a check on the venal office-holders and the municipal councillors, but additionally they helped to implement Colbert's reforms, especially those concerning the liquidation of municipal debts. Soon the intendants came to supervise almost every aspect of life in the provinces.[35]

The increased use of the intendants did not result in the abolition of venal offices under Louis XIV. In fact, Colbert instructed the intendants to respect the powers of the traditional officials. [36] An example of this is found in Colbert's reprimand to Creil, the intendant at Rouen, February 1673:

> Je crois vous avoir cy-devant donné avis qu'il falloit que vous prissiez garde à ne connoistre que des matières que peuvent estre de vostre compétence...qu'il a paru clairement, par la lecture de ce qui y est contenu, que vous preniez connoissance de toutes les matières concernant les tailles qui sont de la juridiction des élus et de la Cour des aydes.[37]

Of course, the intendant was still expected to watch over

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[34]Clément, vol. II, pp. 380, 381; Roland Mousnier, "The Development of Monarchical Institutions and Society in France", in Louis XIV and Absolutism, ed. Ragnild Hatton (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 45, 46.

[35]Clément, vol. II, pp. 381-383; Briggs, p. 158.

[36]Parker, pp. 138, 147; Treasure, p. 318.

[37]Clément, vol. II, p. 270.

the *élus* and to prevent any instances of corruption or maladministration in the provinces. For instance, instructions sent by Colbert to Le Blanc, the intendant of Normandy, on 17 June 1678 urged him to investigate the role of the officials in regard to possible misappropriation of funds and tax evasion. He instructed Le Blanc to see if

> ces élus et la Cour des aydes eussent favorisé une concussion si claire et si manifeste que celle là, il faudriot faire le proces aux fermiers et punir ceux qui eu part à cette concussion. [1]

In the early years of Louis XIV the *élus* and *trésoriers de France* constantly attacked the intendants, but the central government continued to protect them as it needed the intendants to oversee the activities of the established officials who were becoming increasingly corrupt and ineffective. Thus, the intendants began to stay longer in their *généralité* in order to implement the orders of the Crown. Under Louis XIV the intendants became more attuned to the needs of the provinces, a trend that continued down to the Revolution, but they were still agents of the Crown. [2] The advantage to the Crown of using intendants was their flexibility and the fact that their commissions could be adapted to meet the changing

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[1]Clément, vol. II, pp. 380, 381.

[2]Bonney, Political Change, pp. 426, 427, 442, 452.

needs of the Crown and, at least theoretically, could be revoked if the intendant was remiss in fulfilling his assignment.

Under Colbert the intendancy assumed more general powers relating to financial and judicial matters on a permanent basis. Thus, the intendant "usurped not only the functions of the lesser courts and taxing bureaus but also the appellate jurisdiction of the sovereign courts over these bodies." [32] The extensive use of the intendants enabled the Crown to exert more control over the venal officeholders, especially on the level of the lower courts and financial bureaus, and municipal councillors. However, the Crown's efforts were not as successful on the level of the more senior royal institutions, especially in the *pays d'états*. [33]

Although the central government used the intendants very effectively to extend royal authority into the provinces, the structures of Bourbon France remained unchanged. The venal officials, local authorities, provincial Estates and *parlements* all challenged the authority of the central government, and to some extent they forced the central

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[32] A. Lloyd Moote, "Law and Justice under Louis XIV", in Louis XIV and the Craft of Kingship, ed. J.C. Rule (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1969), p. 150.

[33] Ibid., pp. 159, 160.

government to make some concessions to them and their traditions. One example of this power struggle between Louis XIV's royal government and established local authorities was waged for thirty years (1661-1691) over the control of municipal finances, an issue which had both economic and political ramifications. An examination of the contest adds shadings and subtle distinctions to the usual generalizations.

MUNICIPAL INDEBTEDNESS: A CASE STUDY IN ROYAL AGGRANDIZEMENT

The Crown's interest in municipal debt, especially during Louis XIV's personal rule, provides a specific example of the Crown's centralizing efforts. Initially devised as an economic initiative, the increased use of intendants in regard to municipal indebtedness resulted in political and administrative changes throughout France. An examination of this policy, through intendants' reports, primarily from the southern *pays d'états*, enables one to test the validity of Louis XIV's absolutist state in one area: royal control of municipalities over the issue of municipal indebtedness.

This is a specific example of the extension of royal authority and policies aimed at imposing central authority over traditional local areas of power and the limits of absolutism on a municipal level in the southern *pays d'états*. The Crown also tried to control municipal elections, with varying degrees of success, as it was fearful of the provincial *parlements*. Nevertheless, the major reason behind the Crown's interest in municipal affairs, particularly municipal indebtedness, was linked to financial concerns. An examination of the royal government's interest in municipal affairs provides an example of

relationships between the center and the periphery which is characterized in royal/provincial and royal/municipal relations.[1]

Within the provinces the intendants had to deal with entrenched ancient positions which could not be destroyed but which had to be subordinated to the will of the king. Thus, the recurring conflict between the provincial and royal powers was conducted through the intendants, especially in financial matters. With the extension of their powers in the 1670s and 1680s, many of the provincial authorities saw the intendants as a threat to their own authority. This ill-feeling was exacerbated in the 1680s and 1690s when the intendants were given virtual control of the financial affairs of debt-ridden municipalities. [2]

Central governmental interest in the reform of municipal finance existed throughout the entire seventeenth century. Various *surintendants des finances* established commissions on municipal debts, including those advanced by Henry IV's finance minister, Maximilien de Béthune, duc de

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[1]Edward Shils, Center and Periphery, Essays in Macrosociology (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975).

[2]Pierre Clément (ed.), Lettres, Instructions et Mémoires de Colbert (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1861-71), vol. IV, p. 138.

Sully, in 1603 and 1610.[3] This interest in the verification of municipal debts continued and expanded during Louis XIII's reign, especially under the leadership of Antoine Coiffier de Ruzé, maréchal d'Effiat, *surintendant* between 1626-1632. Generally, commissions instituted from 1635 to 1642 were concerned with the army, but some also investigated municipal debt. However, from 1643 to 1648 there was an increase in the number of commissions concerned with municipal expenditure, debts and elections.[4]

A debt commission was established in Languedoc in 1631 but was suspended early in 1632 because of the Montmorency rebellion. After the imposition of the Edict of Béziers (October 1632) on Languedoc, however, another debt commission was formed under the leadership of intendants Le Camus and Miron.[5] This commission was replaced by another debt commission in 1635, after which Louis XIII froze local debts until the intendants could investigate them. In 1638 a royal *arrêt de conseil* suspended interest payments on these debts for eight years: another royal *arrêt de conseil* in 1639 seized the interest on these debts. These

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[3]Richard Bonney, Political Change in France Under Richelieu and Mazarin 1624-1661 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 338.

[4]Bonney, pp. 147, 150, 155.

[5]Bonney, pp. 338, 339.

provincial and municipal debts were quite substantial: one historian has estimated that the debt of Languedoc in 1639 was twelve million *livres*, while another states the indebtedness of the city of Toulouse for the period 1622 to 1670 to be 1,294,980 *livres*. [6]

Other investigations into municipal debts during the 1630s and 1640s occurred in Provence and in Dauphiné. A commission was established in November of 1634 in Provence by the Crown but was rejected by the Assembly of Provence as it did not want outside interference in Provençal affairs. As a result, this commission was suspended in March of 1635, but resumed functioning in August of that year. By April of 1636 the *parlement* of Aix had become involved in the commission along with the intendant, but the debt situation was not solved by 1647. In Dauphiné, the Third Estate prompted the investigation into municipal debt, and the intendant, Jacques Talon, was appointed to the task. His plan called for all interest payments to be suspended on these debts from 1635 to 1639, in an attempt to halt the growth of indebtedness. Nevertheless, after thirteen years Talon's work remained to be completed.[7]

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[6]Bonney, p. 340; William Beik, Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), p. 271.

[7]Bonney, pp. 340, 341.

Mostly, these municipal debts had been incurred during the League wars of 1589-98 and from 1627 to 1659, during French involvement in the Thirty Years War.[8] These conflicts had certainly hindered the progress of Burgundy and other frontier provinces due to the lodging of troops and the various campaigns waged in those areas.[9] As a result many municipalities throughout all of France were seriously in debt. This situation was aggravated by the policies of the central government which from 1647 to 1659 diverted the municipalities' major source of revenue, the *deniers octrois*. This action was introduced in 1647 by the Regency's finance minister, Particelli d'Hémery, in an attempt to raise funds even if at the expense of municipal finance. [10] The Crown was severely in debt because of the

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[8]G. B. Depping (ed.), Correspondence Administrative Sous Le Règne de Louis XIV (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1850-55), vol. III, p. 11; Depping, vol. I, pp. 666, 667; A. M. de Boislisle (ed.), Correspondance des Contrôleurs Généraux des Finances avec les Intendants des Provinces (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1874), vol. I, pp. 36, 37; James Collins, Fiscal Limits to Absolutism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988), pp. 216, 217; Bonney, p. 338.

[9]Hilton Root, Peasants and King in Burgundy. Agrarian Foundations of French Absolutism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1987), p. 35.

[10]Richard Bonney, The King's Debts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), p. 201; Charles Godard, Les Pouvoirs des Intendants sous Louis XIV (1901; Rpt. Genève: Slatkine-Megariotis, 1974), p. 190; See footnote #23 in Chapter II for a full discussion of the differing historical interpretations regarding the diversion of the octrois.

rising war costs and poor fiscal management.[11] Thus, the Crown looked to the municipalities for additional revenue which was further obtained through forced loans and increased levies on towns. [12] Until 1661 the Crown evinced little interest in municipal debt because of its involvement in internal and external conflicts so when Louis XIV undertook personal government in 1661 municipal finances were in a state of serious disorder, which had severe consequences for royal finance.[13]

Colbert wanted to use royal authority to encourage local officials to rid their municipalities of debts [14] which had arisen as a result of disputed dues owed by the town for taxes, tithes, forced loans by the Crown, back

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[11]Le Tellier to Mazarin, 11 January 1652 in Richard Bonney (ed.), Society and Government in France Under Richelieu and Mazarin 1624-61, p. 59. The central government, in a bid to obtain more funds, increased its revenue through forced loans from the ministers. See ibid, pp. 54, 55.

[12]Le Tellier to Mazarin, 30 July 1659 in Bonney, Society and Government, p. 149; Fouquet to Mazarin, 3 September 1659 in ibid, p. 150.

[13]See F. Isambert, et. al (eds.), Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises depuis l'an 420 jusqu'à la révolution de 1789 (1802-33; Rpt. Farnborough: Gregg, 1966), vol. XIX, pp. 370-373 for a declaration by Chancellor Séguir on the dreadful financial condition of the municipalities (22 June 1659); Bonney, Political Change, pp. 154, 155, 342.

[14]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 50, 51; Clément, vol. II, pp. 131-135.

taxes originating in the sixteenth century and seigneurial dues. Indeed, there was competition between the Crown and seigneurs over peasant dues, especially in times of strife as often the peasant could afford to pay only one of many dues owed.[15] More reasons existed for the payment of seigneurial dues because of the direct benefits accorded the peasant from the seigneur, primarily that of protection in times of war. But it was too expensive to challenge these dues in court, so they accumulated over time, from generation to generation. Towns often had to pay excessive interest rates on their loans which greatly increased their indebtedness. As partial payment on these loans these towns gave up communal lands: this constituted a permanent loss of assets for the town.[16]

Many of these situations were caused by dishonest officials who either embezzled the money or spent it on inappropriate goods and services. This situation was allowed to develop because there had been no effective checks on the administration of these officials. Often the inspecting official, such as the local *bailli*, examined the accounts in a very superficial manner, checking only to see

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[15]Root, p. 49; Andrew Trout, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (Boston: Twayne, 1978), p. 120.

[16]Robert W. Pestechbe, "The Intendancies of Guyenne and Languedoc in the Era of Colbert", unpublished M.A. Thesis (Univ. of Alberta, 1969), pp. 120, 188; Root, pp. 34, 38.

if the sums matched but not inquiring about the actual expenditure of funds.[17] The intendants were sent out to help the councillors pay off their debts and to avoid any repeat of the debt load.[18]

During Colbert's ministry investigations by the royal government into municipal debt increased. Thus, in 1661 intendants obtained the responsibility for verifying community debts; in 1683 they received control of municipal finances; and in 1691 they obtained the right to check municipal accounts. [19] However, with the extension of the intendants' powers in the 1680s, which prohibited municipalities from contracting new debts without the approval of the intendant, tensions began to erupt.

By the edict of 1683 the intendants supplanted municipal officials who had been responsible for municipal accounts, the allocation of funds, and credit arrangements. After 1683 all municipal expenditures had to be approved by the intendant. As well, the central government discouraged

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[17]Clément, vol. IV, p. 174; Nora Temple, "The Control and Exploitation of French Towns During the Ancien Regime", in State and Society in Seventeenth-Century France, ed. and intro. Raymond F. Kierstead (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), pp. 67, 68.

[18]Depping, vol. III, pp. 216, 217; Robin Briggs, Early Modern France 1560-1715 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 49, 50.

[19]Isambert, vol. XVIII, pp. 7-9; Ibid., vol. XIX, pp. 420-425; Ibid., vol. XX, pp. 133-136.

municipalities from contracting new debts by restricting municipal expenditures to the raising of monies for war, famine relief and the repair of damaged churches. Municipal officials, frustrated by these changes, attempted to circumvent the intendant by appealing to the Estates, hoping to capitalize on the existence of their mutual interests and growing hatred of the intendant.[29]

Despite these increases in power accorded to the intendants royal intervention in the realm of municipal finance did not progress in an orderly fashion. Advances were made only to be followed by retreats. Indeed, these royal edicts may need to be "understood as general statements of policy", as one historian has asserted. [30] Perhaps the continual increase in power held by the intendants really signified a lack of effective power as these officials could not accomplish their objectives with their existing powers. Can one believe that royal policies and officers were imposed on local authorities, protective of their rights, without some resistance? Valuable insight can be gained from reading the administrative correspondence; year after year the instructions from the central government were the same, so obviously little had changed

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[29]Clément, vol. IV, p. 138; Postschka, "The Intendancies", p. 232; Beislisle, vol. I, p. 23.

[30]Root, p. 80.

in the provinces. As well, every intendant experienced a different set of circumstances and people to deal with according to his own unique personality and experience, thus making uniformity a virtual impossibility.[22] Throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century some towns successfully liquidated all of their debts, often to become indebted once again, while other towns never liquidated their debts completely.

Intendants verified municipal debts through a commission formed by the intendant to determine the validity of these debts and the exact rate of interest on the loans. Funding for such commissions in Languedoc often came from the Estates. During this period the Estates of Languedoc often sided with creditors against the royal government because many members of the Estates, or their relatives, were the actual creditors of the municipalities. They opposed the debt commissions because they feared that these commissions would invalidate loans they had made to the municipalities. As a result, they petitioned the royal government, the sponsor of these debt commissions, for protection of their investments. Thus, there existed in Languedoc a pattern of resistance along with cooperation.[23]

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[22]Orest Ranum, Richelieu and the Councillors of Louis XIII (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 7.

[23]Beik, Absolutism and Society, pp. 271-273.

They assisted with the intendant's investigation into municipal debt in 1662 and even provided funding for the subsequent debt commission. This spirit of cooperation, as expressed by funding, continued to exist throughout this period in Languedoc, and certainly until 1675.[24]

In other regions of the south, intendants such as Claude Pellot exemplified the Crown's interest in municipal debt. Pellot began to verify debts in Guyenne during 1666, whereupon he sent Colbert a proposal to use intendants as overseers of the collection and expenditure of municipal funds. He also devised a plan for municipalities to pay off their debts by taxing specific goods, the revenue obtained to be applied directly for the liquidation of the municipal debt.[25] Other intendants also forwarded plans to the central government concerning the liquidation of municipal debts.

Interestingly, in February of 1680 Colbert had requested any suggestions about liquidating municipal debts from the intendants in regard to their respective généralités.[26] This may indicate that the central government did

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[24]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 43, 44; Beik, p. 273; Postschka, "The Intendancies", pp. 189, 190.

[25]Depping, vol. I, pp. 711, 712; Postschka, "The Intendancies", 128.

[26]Clément, vol. IV, p. 138.

not have an overall scheme concerning municipal indebtedness, as many historians have assumed, or that Colbert realized that the Crown's approach was not viable for many areas. Colbert's solicitation of ideas from his agents in the provinces is contrary to traditional interpretations of a Colbert who directed French affairs from the center according to a rigid plan. It also shows an awareness by Colbert of the regional diversity of France and realization that one overall program concerning the liquidation of municipal debt could not be successful. This receptive attitude of the central government continued on after Colbert's death. For example, Baville, intendant in Languedoc, persuaded the contrôleur général, Le Peletier, to allow the consolidation of the city of Nimes' debts and to impose special taxes on certain goods which would be used to liquidate municipal debts. [2]

In Burgundy, the Crown started in 1662 to help towns recover their alienated properties by giving the intendant the power to verify debts. However, conflicts arose between the intendant, Claude Bouchu, and provincial authorities. As early as June of 1662 Bouchu experienced problems with the Estates over the use and control of the octrois, especially in relation to the payment of debts.

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[2]Boislisle, vol. 1, pp. 134, 168, 169.

By November of 1662 he was still trying to persuade the provincial officials to become more involved in a debt commission, but with little success.[32] By January of 1665 Bouchu definitely believed that the *parlement* of Dijon was working against him over the issue of community debts. As well, he suspected the municipal officials of falsifying the accounts.

The situation seems to have remained static for the next six years, until May of 1671, when a payment plan involving the diversion of the *deniers* was forwarded by the duc de Bourbon, governor of Burgundy. As a result, within a very short period, all of Burgundy's community debts were liquidated after the implementation of Bourbon's plan. Louis XIV and Colbert were pleased with this result as Burgundy was one of the few *généralités* to liquidate their debts by 1671.[33] This is one example of necessary, and successful, cooperation between various officials from different levels of government.

Nevertheless, by September of 1683 municipal debts had arisen again in Burgundy, primarily because of the unauthorized diversion of municipal funds. Once again, by

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[32]Depping, vol. I, pp. 434, 435; Depping, vol. III, p. 11.

[33]Depping, vol. I, pp. 446, 447; Clément, vol. IV, pp. 56, 57.

April 1687, the intendant suspected the *parlement* and *Chambre des comptes* of Dijon of conspiring against royal policies. These debts were liquidated after 1687 because of the stringent regulation of municipal charges by the intendant. However, by June of 1691 the situation had deteriorated once more because regulation proved to be too difficult to maintain. Therefore, regulation was abandoned which resulted in a rising municipal debt.[30]

Louis XIV and Colbert did not wish to destroy the municipal governments; they only wanted to control them. But both Louis XIV's constant need for money and Colbert's reforms threatened the position of the municipalities. Colbert wished to use the intendants to limit the power of corrupt local officials, in an attempt to eliminate municipal debts.[31] As Colbert told Bouchu, intendant for Burgundy, on 30 June 1671 it was necessary to:

> Examinez...le tout, et voyez ce qu'il y a à faire pour le plus grand advantage de la province, et pour la décharger au plus tost de ces dettes et des impositions qu'elle souffre pour cella.[32]

Although such actions against municipal debts were taken by

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[30]Boislisle, vol. I, pp. 1, 2, 100, 249, 250, 437.

[31]J. Russell Major, Representative Government in Early Modern France (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980), p. 669; Richard Bonney, Political Change, p.428.

[32]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 59, 60.

the central government in an effort to establish these communities as viable places of industry and employment in the provinces, inevitably they conflicted with entrenched local interests.[32]

This concern for the financial welfare of the communities was an outgrowth of Colbert's mercantilist policies whereby he wished to increase commerce and trade within France so that she could become a powerful trading nation. He wanted more trade and more money to enter France via Marseilles through Levantine trade, which would improve France's status as a trading nation. [33] By becoming such a dominate nation France would enter into the marketplace in an attempt to garner a considerable share of the finite amount of gold and silver bullion available, which was necessary for the economy of France and the financing of Louis XIV's wars.[34] Thus, the liquidation of the debts of France's major southern port, Marseilles, was of great importance to Colbert.

In October of 1673 Colbert decided that Marseilles' debts had to be eradicated very quickly, even if the echo-

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[32]Clément, vol. IV, p. 4; Ibid., pp. 84, 85; Clément, vol. II, p. 165; Trout, pp. 120, 121.

[33]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 114, 115, 165, 166.

[34]Geoffrey Treasure, Seventeenth Century France, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1981), pp. 328, 329.

vins had to be circumvented. [36] By November of the same year Colbert insisted that all of Marseilles' debts be liquidated within eight years. However, to the chagrin of the central government, by November of 1682 these debts continued to exist. [37] Throughout this period Colbert continually wrote to the intendant, Morant, urging him to work on liquidating Marseilles' debts and even proclaiming that royal intervention was warranted. However, even Colbert realized that direct royal intervention would not be welcomed by the councillors of Marseilles, so he recommended that Morant present a program designed to liquidate Marseilles' debts expeditiously to the councillors.[38] Thus, Colbert recognized that royal policies could not be brutally enforced on a resistant group of officials, despite the increased powers of the intendant.

Colbert's primary incentive for the liquidation of Marseilles' debt was economic. He wanted all municipalities to operate on a balanced budget, just as he was

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[36]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 100, 101; Charles W. Cole, Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism, vol. I (1939: Rpt. Hamden: Archon, 1964), pp. 342, 347.

[37]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 101, 102; Ibid., pp. 166, 167.

[38]Ibid., pp. 114, 115.

trying to make the central government do. [39] The importance of the liquidation of municipal debts and the prohibition of any further debts to the king [40] is borne out by Colbert's instruction on 29 February 1680 to all intendants that:

> Le Roy vous ayant tesmoigné plusiers fois par mes lettres que la principale et la plus importante application que Sa Majesté desire que vous ayes consiste en la liquidation et payement des dettes des communautés de toutes les généralités...,elle m'ordonne d'ajouter qu'elle veut que vous examiniez avec soin les moyens d'empescher a l'avenir les communautés de s'endetter et la liberté qu'elles ont eue, par le passe, qui a produit une infinité d'abus.[41]

After the edict of 1683 the intendants' workload increased so much that they were forced to employ local men (*subdélégués*) to help them in their endeavours. Colbert himself detested the use of *subdélégués*, but he was forced to admit their necessity for the proper functioning of the intendants in the provinces.[42] He feared that the *sub-*

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[39]Pierre Goubert, Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen, trans. A. Carter (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 119, 139.

[40]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 62, 63.

[41]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 138, 139; Colbert voiced similar feelings in his instructions to the intendants in September of 1662, ibid., p. 38.

[42]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 108, 150, 155, 164; Boislisle, vol. I, p. 11; Roland Mousnier, The Institutions of France Under the Absolute Monarchy 1598-1789, trans. A. Goldhammer, vol. II (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 533, 534; Robin Briggs, p. 125, 158; David Parker, The

délégués would benefit financially from their work, especially if they came to be involved in non-authorized activities. Despite Colbert's warnings to the intendants, this situation did arise, and it supported his prejudice against these local officials. Colbert's distrust is evident in his correspondence with the intendant at Lyon where he declared that "des subdélégués...qui ont toujours des intérests particuliers ou des affections et des haines que ne conviennent pas pour rendre justice dans une matière de cette conséquence".[4]

Colbert wanted the intendants to be in control of municipal finances so they could put an end to the exploitation of towns by corrupt officials and local nobles. The municipalities were, in general, controlled by a single individual who was frequently corrupt and uninterested in the policies proposed by the central government; often he was interested in safeguarding his own position and thus did not relish the prospect of being answerable to a royal

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Making of French Absolutism (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 125; Bonney, Political Change, p. 428.

[4]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 164; John C. Rule, "Louis XIV, Roi-Bureaucrate", in Louis XIV and the Craft of Kingship, ed. J.C. Rule (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1969), p. 32.

agent.[44] But the central government was intent on rectifying the problems of the communities, and wished to install measures so that they would not happen in the future.[45]

One way to accomplish this was through the intendant's involvement with municipal officials on debt commissions. Colbert wanted the intendants to watch the important people very carefully as he suspected them of wanting to divert municipal funds. In the *généralité* of Montauban Colbert in October of 1672 warned the intendant, de Sève, to be alert to all abuses of funds, and by August 1673 de Sève reported numerous infractions that had been committed by local officials. [46]

Such maladministration, and the obvious misappropriation of funds, which existed in many municipalities, outraged the central government. A typical report issued by an intendant to Colbert outlines the debts of the communities which ranged from 400,000 livres to 600,000 livres. Some could be attributed to war, but much was the result of

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[44]F.C. Green, The Ancien Regime. A Manual of French Institutions and Social Classes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1956), p. 13.

[45]Clément, vol. IV, p. 132, 172, 173, 175; Ines Murat, Colbert, trans. R.F. Cook and J. Van Asselt (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1984), p. 103; Briggs, p. 50.

[46]Clément, vol. IV, pp. 76, 77, 91.

> la mauvaise administration, depuis trente ans, et la confusion qui s'y rencontre, oultre celle qu'apporte la continuation d'un désordre pratiqué tant de temps,...la bonne foy de la plus grande partie des créanciers dans une pratique vicieuse, mais universelle, authorisé et quelquefois commandée par tous ceux s'y devoient opposer, empeschent d'y faire tout le bien qu'on souhaitteroit, et nous réduisent à ne pouvoir sevir que contre la friponnerie des créanciers ou celle des magistrates et leur négligence."

Colbert urged the intendants in these areas to limit the power of the consuls, because it was they who had made their people pay extraordinary taxes but had not paid off municipal debts. Colbert consistently directed the intendants to obtain any information about the missing funds, and to attempt to recover them while conducting detailed investigations into municipal records and the conduct of local officials." For example, Colbert requested a list of all abuses committed by municipal councillors in Bordeaux from the intendant, de Ris, on 7 August 1681, which was to be sent promptly. Thus, he was interested in

> tous les vols, concussions, payemens de fausses dettes, accommodemens illicites et autres abus qui ont esté commis dans ce fait, en d'en juger souverainement les auteurs et coupables dans l'un des présidieux de la province, tel que vous le nommerez dans le mémoire que vous m'enverrez."

"Depping, vol. I, pp. 666, 667.

"Clément, vol IV, pp. 91, 146, 175.

"Ibid., vol. IV, p. 147.

However, problems continued to exist in this généralité as almost two years later Colbert was still concerned, and frustrated, about the continual abuse of municipal funds as shown in his correspondence with de Ris, dated 26 March 1683:

> Vous voyez de quelle conséquence est cette affaire puisque le Roy ayant entrepris depuis vingt-deux ans la liquidation et le payement des dettes des communautés, il se trouveroit au contraire qu'elles auroient esté extremement surchargées d'impositions, sans s'acquitter.[29]

The continued existence of such violations by local officials, even after twenty-two years of royal intervention, demonstrates the limited effectiveness of the intendants regarding municipal indebtedness. The intervention of the intendant in municipal finance often resulted in more honest administration in the provinces, on a municipal level, but often only for a short time. This failure necessitated an increase in the intendant's power, as the Crown could not abandon its interest in this matter as this initiative still had economic and political consequences.

Under Colbert's direction the intendants were instructed to declare partial bankruptcy on the towns, which passed part of the burden to the creditors. This did not please the municipal officials, as many of them, or their relatives, had served as creditors. It was usually the

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[29]Ibid., vol. IV, p. 178.

elite and the important who were the creditors of much municipal debt.[31] This financial investment linked the nobility to the municipalities, which meant that any action taken by the Crown regarding municipal finance had obvious implications for the Crown's relationship with the nobility. The aristocracy also invested in the provincial debt. Indeed, all levels of government in early modern France were deeply in debt, especially during the 1630s/1640s and from 1670 onward.[32]

The plan was finally successful, and the repayment of the remaining debts was completed by 1689 [33] - too late for Colbert to witness the completion of his project. However, after their administration had been freed from debt many municipalities fell into debt once again by 1691, despite the increased powers of the intendants.[34] Most of the municipal debts had been liquidated after the 1683 edict gave intendants virtual control of municipal finance. The intendants' increased powers may have led to fewer opportunities for local officials to embezzle or divert munici-

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[31]Boislisle, vol. I, p. 23; Beik, pp. 271-273; Temple, p. 70.

[32]Boislisle, vol. I, pp. 12-14, 36, 37; Beik, pp. 249, 251, 269, 270.

[33]Temple, p. 70.

[34]Boislisle, vol. I, pp. 246, 250, 437.

pal funds, especially after 1683 when they no longer could resist the imposition of the royal policies regarding municipal finance. Arguably, they then changed their approach, realizing that cooperation with the intendant would be economically, politically and socially beneficial, while at the same time the increased use of *subdélégués* tied the intendant and the Crown closer to the provinces.[34] Also, the intendants became more involved in local affairs through the administration of poor relief and hospitals and the allocation of goods during times of famine.

After 1688 many towns became indebted again because of the advent of the Nine Years War (1688-1697), which resulted in increased royal expenditures and, thus increased demands for revenue from the country. As well, the cost of billeting troops, increased taxes, forced loans from the towns and general economic decline all contributed to the return to debt for many municipalities. [35] The intendant as a royal official was forced to comply with royal governmental demands for increased revenue and to see the reversal of all gains in municipal finance. In Béarn, municipalities became indebted again by 1691 after li-

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[34]Boislisle, vol. I, p. 199.

[35]Boislisle, vol. I, pp. 188, 355, 387, 388, 438.

quidating their previous debts in January of 1684.[37] Other areas fell deeper into debt after liquidating their previous debts because of acute economic distress in their areas.[38]

This redeveloping situation prompted the new contrôleur général, Louis Phelypeaux de Pontchartrain, in an effort to prevent the continuance of gross mismanagement and corruption in the towns, to persuade Louis XIV to issue further edicts concerning municipal affairs.[39] Thus, in 1691 new legislation gave the intendants the right to check municipal accounts, which set in motion the extension of financial control into the political realm and the eventual destruction of municipal autonomy. This process was extended, in one sense, when in 1692 Louis XIV decreed that all mayoralties and various other local offices would be sold as hereditary venal offices.[40] This provided immediate cash for the Crown and closer ties between the towns and the central government, at least in one sense, but it also gave these mayors more freedom as venal officeholders. Obviously, it also altered relationships among the varying

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[37]Ibid., pp. 241, 242.

[38]Ibid., pp. 239, 280, 323, 324.

[39]Isambert, vol. XIX, pp. 420-425; Temple, pp. 70-72.

[40]Isambert, vol. XX, pp. 158-164.

levels of government.

One historian has noted that, as a result of the 1683 edict, "the towns were deprived of political and financial independence, and as a result the crown was able to exploit them...ruthlessly and systematically."[44] One could also argue, however, that the increased use of local men actually strenghtened the power base of local authorities since the intendant became increasingly dependent on *subdélégués*. As well, especially in the *pays d'états*, intendants began to stay longer in their assigned *généralité* during the reign of Louis XIV. For example, Claude Bouchu, a native of Burgundy, served as the intendant for Burgundy from 1656 to 1683. And in Languedoc, Claude de Bezons served as intendant from 1653 to 1673 and was followed by Nicolas Lamoignon, marquis de Baville, who occupied the post of intendant from 1685 to 1718. Often these longer tenures were a result of the intendant's involvement in the liquidation of municipal debts and sometimes led to a greater identification with their area.[45]

The increased role of the intendants in municipal affairs roused considerable distrust among the local

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[44]Bonney, Political Change, pp. 428, 429.

[45]For example, the intendant Baville defended the rights and customs of the *pays d'états* in his letter of 30 October 1689 to Pontchartrain: Boislisle, vol. I, p. 199.

officials. For example, in Burgundy the intendant took over functions traditionally done by the seigneur or the Burgundian *parlement* because of royal concern over the liquidation of communal debt. [4] The intendants continually ran up against the existence of traditional usages, exemptions, privileges and contracts while seeking to extend royal authority in financial, administrative and judicial matters in the provinces.[5] Thus, one historian has claimed that under Louis XIV the "towns lost autonomy, but their debts were safe, fiscal disputes were minimized, and their consuls enjoyed unprecedented prestige."[6] If one can accept such a broad statement, it suggests that there were trade-offs for the provinces as a result of increased interference by the central government in their affairs.

Although the central government expanded the use of intendants under Colbert's direction, it was still dependent on existing local structures for tax collection, especially in the *pays d'états*. Usually taxes had been assessed and collected on a communal basis in the municipalities under the guidance of local officials. The

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[4] Depping, vol. II, pp. 27, 28; Clément, vol. II, pp. 142, 143; Root, pp. 49, 50.

[5] Mousnier, pp. 103, 232; Green, p. 1.

[6] Beik, Absolutism and Society, p. 334; This view is shared by David Parker, The Making of Absolutism, p. 122.

central government did not have the manpower or bureaucratic structures to take over completely the responsibility of tax collection in the seventeenth century. Therefore, the royal government attempted to control these local officials by making them subservient to the Crown while allowing them to keep their positions. [6] The intendants were the most important factors in this transformation, but their role was interaction, not dictatorial authority.

One historian has argued strongly for reciprocity in this interconnection of the Crown and community, for as intendants gained increased power over municipal finance, they also affected royal finance as it improved its credit because of greater efficiency in tax collection. This, of course, provided motivation for further royal intervention in municipal affairs.[7] However, with so many variations within France generalization is difficult and possibly dangerous. It can be suggested, however, that in an increasingly integrated politico-economic context there was some advantage to both parties despite the offense to traditional patterns.

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[6]Root, pp. 2, 10, 13, 30, 31, 34.

[7]Root, pp. 39, 40.

A CAUTIOUS REASSESSMENT

The royal government of Louis XIV has been traditionally interpreted by historians as centralising, modern and absolute. Certainly, the central government's power over provincial and local authorities increased throughout Louis XIV's rule as royal agents were sent out from Paris into the provinces, but this extension of royal authority progressed neither smoothly nor quickly. Indeed, it appears necessary to redefine the concept of absolutism as pertaining to Louis XIV in that even when the supposed absolute state was achieved the interactions between monarch and nobility, royal bureaucrat and subject remained considerably more complicated than a simple order-power hierarchical relationship. An examination of central governmental initiatives concerning municipal indebtedness is one way of testing the absolutist nature of Louis XIV's central government.

While it is true that Louis XIV exercised tremendous powers and profited from the centralising efforts of his predecessors, he could not arbitrarily impose his will on the people of France. His power rested upon ancient rights and on the support of the nobility who enjoyed a subordinate yet independent position in early modern France. These nobles could not ignore the power of the Crown, but

they could, and did, force concessions from the King for their support of the royal government. This reciprocal relationship is particularly evident in the Crown's interaction with provincial authorities in the *pays d'états*; they enjoyed greater powers than those in the *pays d'élections*, and being farther away from the center, it was difficult for the central government to coerce them.

This conflict between the center and the periphery is demonstrated by the gradual imposition of royal authority over municipal affairs, especially as related to municipal indebtedness, throughout Louis XIV's reign. The primary royal officials involved in this conflict were the intendants, who had to deal with local authorities. The concept of an expanding network of central authority under Louis XIV constitutes one of the basic tenets of the historiographical concept of absolutism. The march toward greater central control over the periphery in financial and political matters has been seen by historians as a positive, progressive event that was epitomized by Louis XIV's reign.

Recent historical studies have shown that this concept of absolutism as characterized by the growth of central

authority in the provinces is not tenable. The interconnection between Louis XIV and the centralising tendencies of his government is important because centralization and the growth of a royal bureaucracy are regarded as providing the foundations of the modern state. As well, they are perceived to be essential to Louis XIV's rule because they constituted the cornerstones of his rule. They were extensions of him but yet he relied on them to support his various endeavours.

Thus, if central authority was imposed successfully on the provinces that would be a reflection of Louis XIV's power, but if it did not progress easily or uniformly then it could lead to the questioning of Louis XIV's absolutism or omnipotence. This study has focused on the imposition of royal authority, through the intendants, upon municipal governments using financial reasons as a method of imposing central authority on the periphery. The usual assumption of historians has been to regard the evolution of the intendant's power, on general and specific levels, as an indicator of central authority over the provinces. A careful examination of available primary documents suggests that the centralization of government may not have been so easy or complete despite the claims of Louis XIV's

promoters and historians. The relationship between the intendants and provincial and local officials must be examined closely as in most situations all is not black or white. The Crown did make significant inroads into local traditions and rights, but often at great cost. As well, the central government had its own agenda, that of obtaining funds for its functioning and the support of Louis XIV's military campaigns. Thus, financial expedients often laid the basis for political interference and the eventual imposition of central control.

One must recognise that centralization was not static or consistently progressive. As well, central governmental gains often were illusory and ultimately unobtainable. As the demands of the government grew, and as the country's resources were stretched to the limit, desperate measures were taken in an effort to gain more funds often at the expense of the Crown's power and to the benefit of the nobility. The extension of royal authority was ambiguous in nature - the Crown grew in power while sacrificing its independance.

Even the intendant with his increasing powers encountered resistance, subtle and overt, from local authorities which affected the course and rate of the

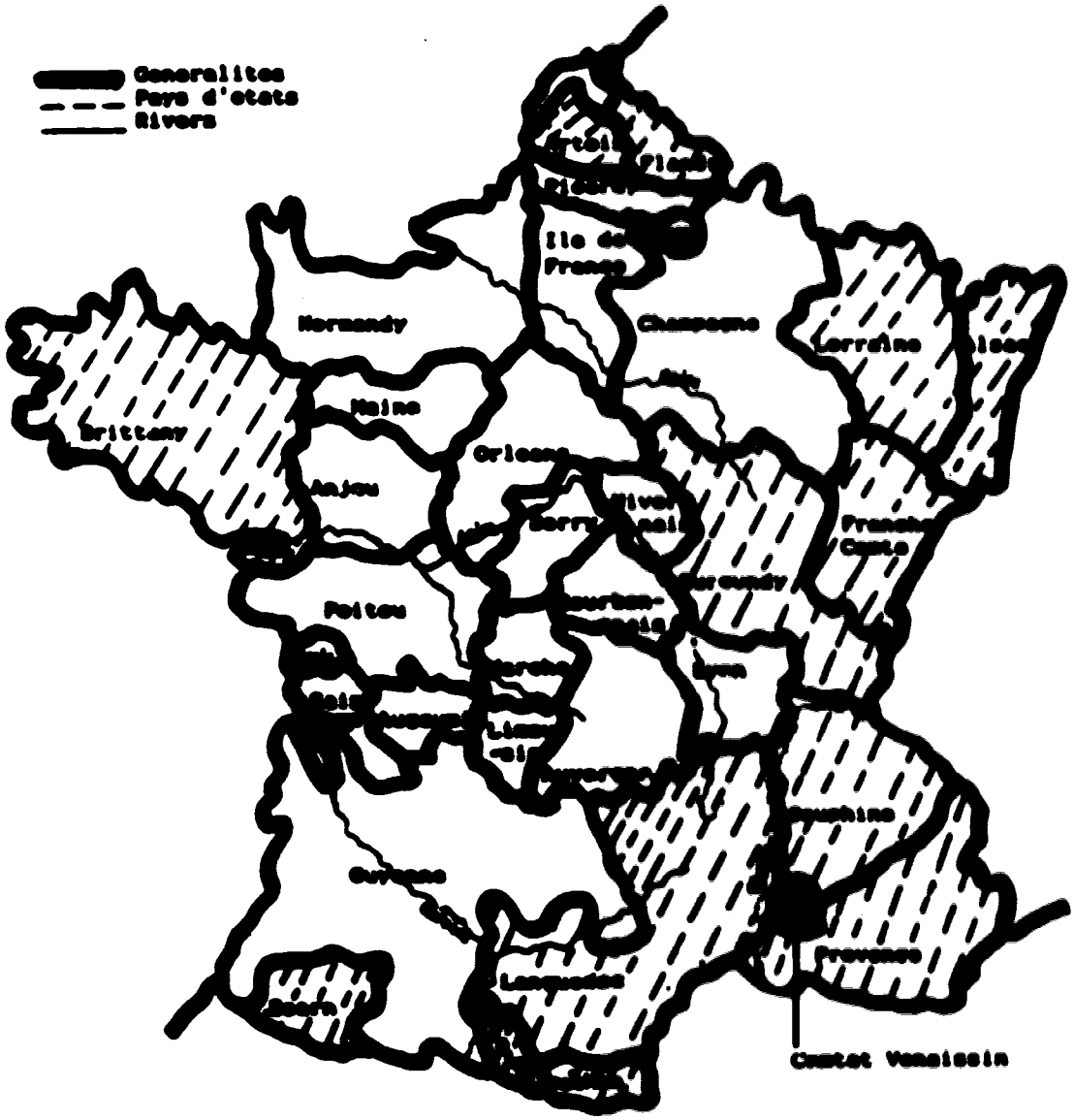
imposition of central authority in the provinces. The need for the expansion of the intendants' powers can be seen as an indicator of the central government's weakness. It could not impose central authority over municipal affairs with existing powers, because local traditions and privileges were not given up easily by municipal officials. Even after the intendants took over municipal finance, they could not completely control the financial or political destinies of the municipalities.

An examination of provincial and municipal archives no doubt will reveal more clearly the intricate relationship between municipal officials and the intendants and perhaps provide insight into the conflicts and cooperation between these officials and the different levels of government. This would certainly illuminate evidence gained from published administrative correspondence which reveals only one side of the equation, that of the central government and its agents, the intendants. To evaluate the viability of Louis XIV's absolutism, more research needs to be done on specific *généralités* and municipalities using provincial and municipal archives. Evidence revealed in this study and in numerous other historical works questions the general assumption of 'absolutism' and the pervasive

nature of the centralization of authority by demonstrating the ambiguous nature of royal/municipal and royal/provincial relationships. While major revisionism cannot yet be undertaken, a reassessment using expanded sources certainly is needed.

Generalites of seventeenth century France

Figure 1



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