

## Absolutism

Louis XIV  
*The Sun King*

### 17th century was a period of great transition

- European climate was getting colder - less food
- Governments spent more - mostly on armies and raised taxes on the poor
- France and Spain gained control over the papacy
- England and Germany establish national churches

### What is Absolutism?

- We see the start of absolutism - rulers with absolute power.
  - An attempt to concentrate powers of the state in the hands of one person.
- They reigned by divine right not like medieval monarchs, by the grace of God
- Wealth often went to building national armies for defense and attacking other monarchies.

### How did they get their power?

- They:
  - controlled the church
  - law courts
  - abolished freedoms and liberties
  - maintained permanent armies
  - used secret police and spies
  - established huge bureaucracies focused on the king
  - secured the cooperation of the nobility

### So this is like Hitler right?

### Differences between Absolutism and Totalitarianism

- Not total rule because
  - they lacked the resources
  - Less concern with everyday people.
- Did foreshadow totalitarianism in 2 respects:
  - i) glorification of the state over all else
  - ii) use of war and expansionism to divert attention from domestic problems

### Where was it found?

- Various rulers attempted to establish absolutist rules.
  - Spain, England, Russia, Prussia, Austria . . .
- However The best example of an Absolute Monarch can be found in France's Louis XIV

### Foundations of Absolutism in France

Henry IV and his advisor the Duke of Sully laid the foundations for absolutism in France

- Sully:
  - a) revived the paulette tax
    - a tax on hereditary positions
  - b) started a highway system
  - c) dreamed of an international organization to keep the peace
  - d) indirect tax on salt and sales

- However the number of taxes actually declined –revenues increased as they were enforced

*Louis XIII (1610-43)*

- Henry died; Marie de Medici ruled for the boy-king Louis XIII
- In 1624 she appointed Cardinal Richelieu her Council of Ministers

**Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642)**

- *Richelieu's Actions:* He broke power of nobility and made it clear there was only one law - the King's.
  - Supervised tax collection & Regulated economic activity.
  - Estates General meets for last time in 1615.
  - He began administrative reform and centralized control over regions. He sent out *Intendants*.
  - He fought Habsburg Dynasty - made France a great power (fought for Protestants in Thirty Year's War)
  - Richelieu also opposed Huguenots - as defiant of King's power and began the road to oppression. Removed their right to fortified towns.

*Cardinal Mazarin  
(1602-1661)*

- Richelieu persuaded the king to appoint Jules Mazarin as his successor
- Richelieu and Louis both died
- Queen Anne of Austria governs for her son Louis XIV

**The Fronde (1648-53)**

- Mazarin continues Richelieu's policies but leads to a civil war
  - The war was between the king and the nobility
  - Violence continued for 12 years and had three significant results:
    - government would have to compromise with the nobility
    - the economy was ruined and would take years to rebuild
    - Louis XIV would never forget the trauma

**Louis XIV**

*(Ruled 1643-1715)*

- Under Louis (Sun King) absolutism reached its height
- 1661 Mazarin died and Louis took control of the economy
- “When Louis sneezed, all Europe caught cold”
- Reigned for 72 years

**Louis XIV – Taking Power**

- Married Maria Theresa because of a diplomatic arrangement with Spain
- Had complete control over all classes of society

**Versailles**

- Ruled from Versailles where he required the nobility to reside for several months each year
- 60% of revenue was spent on the maintaining of Versailles
- Used to bring all the important nobility to his court." This deprived them of power - as did a very expensive lifestyle.

#### Versailles (Cont.)

- Detail of manners and ritual. Different ways to open a door etcetera. Aim was to impress. Half Louis' income went on Versailles but it gave him power.
- Versailles and Louis' government were admired in Europe and it was copied everywhere;
  - French became the language of many courts
  - Copycat Palaces built all over Europe

#### Government of Louis XIV

- Often seen as one of the first modern governments.
- System of councils to control the real ruling of the country
  - Intendants - royal officials in provinces gives central control of the entire country.
- Establishment of a standing army which Louis used in a series of expensive wars. This gives him great power.

#### Louis XIV – Taking Power

“L'etat. c'est moi.”

- Never called the Estates General
- Other monarchs imitated Louis and French replaced Latin as the language of the educated

#### Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1693)

- Louis XIV's weakness was always finances
- He appointed Jean-Baptiste Colbert Controller of Finances
- Colbert believed the wealth of the country should serve the state
- He applied the theory of mercantilism to France

#### Mercantilism

- government policies for the regulation of economic activities by and for the state
- It centralizes economy + close government control.
- Relieves the need for direct taxes
- Problem was nobles would not pay tax. This was not solved. France remained under-taxed.

#### Mercantilism and the New World

- Expansion abroad - emphasis on exports and getting bullion into the country.
  - Trade is needed as it enables indirect taxes to be raised which are necessary without parliaments.
  - Expansion of European Mercantile empires in India, North America and above all the West Indies.
- Colbert sent 4,000 people to Canada
- Marquette and Joliet - Mississippi River
- La Salle - Louisiana

## **Colbert's Results**

- **Colbert's aim was to have a trade balance in France's favor**
- **Commercial class prospered while agriculture declined**
- **Because of war, bad harvests, deflation of currency, and emigration Colbert's goals were never attained**

## **Louis XIV & Religion**

- **1685 Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes**
- **Closed schools, destroyed Protestant churches, and exiled those who would not renounce their faith**
- **“one king, one law, one faith”**  
**“un roi, une loi, une foi”**
- **The revocation won Louis enormous praise**

## **Louis XIV & His Wars**

- **Louis' foreign policy designed to increase the king's power and glory.**
- **Four wars (See Note Handout)**
- **Very Costly**
- **Retained conquests in Alsace & French-Compte**
- **Secured throne of Spain**