

Voor de muziekpraktijk waren deze ontwikkelingen problematisch. De musicus werd verregaand door de politiek gerecupereerd en bovendien gaf de Belgische politieke klasse, in een innig verbond met de economische elite, blijk van een eng utilitaristische instelling. Bovendien ontbeerde Brussel een geletterde burgerij die het muziekleven in de stad voor een al te drastische 'politisering' kon behoeden. In deze omstandigheden was het voor de stad bijzonder moeilijk om muzikaal haar positie tegenover Parijs te bepalen. Vanuit een positie van outsider kon ze er in de besproken periode niet in slagen het niveau van een imitatiecultuur te overstijgen. Dit neemt niet weg dat de inspanningen van enkelingen om België muzikaal weer op de landkaart te zetten, zonder meer indrukwekkend waren. Met name de figuur van François-Joseph Fétis liet hier zijn stempel na. De muzikale vruchten van wat hij en anderen zaaiden, zouden echter pas in de tweede eeuwhelft geplukt worden.

Koenraad Buyens

A. DE DIJN, *Aristocratic liberalism in nineteenth-century France, 1814-1870*, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Faculteit Letteren, Departement Geschiedenis, 2005, promotor: Prof. Dr. E. Lamberts

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When we talk about liberalism today, we describe it as an ideology that starts from an atomistic conception of society, and that gives the individual a central place in its system of ideas. In Belgium, as in many other countries, liberal politicians have proclaimed it their duty to restore the "primacy of the political" and to re-establish a direct relationship between the citizens and their government by eliminating the political role of intermediary groups and associations, such as labour unions.

This, however, has not always been the ideal of liberalism. In the nineteenth century, an important number of liberal political thinkers believed that individualism posed an important danger to liberty; and that a liberal society could only function if intermediary levels of power existed between the state and the mass of the individual citizens. At the same time, these anti-individualist liberals were highly elitist. Only a powerful, aristocratic elite, many liberals believed, would be capable of checking government power when necessary. Such an elite would form an intermediary body between the citizens and the state, and be capable of protecting the people against the despotic tendencies of central government.

This doctrine, which I have termed "aristocratic liberalism", was not something medieval or old-fashioned. On the contrary, it was a mode of thinking which had its origins in the eighteenth century, in the Enlightenment; more specifically, it had its roots in the *Esprit des lois*, written by the famous French political thinker Montesquieu. Published in 1748, the *Esprit des lois* was one of the most controversial books on political theory of the eighteenth century. Montesquieu developed in this book a highly innovative theory about the preservation of liberty in modern states. Many of Montesquieu's contemporaries believed that political liberty was possible only in small states, in which the people would gather on the market square to make decisions together. The political ideal of these republican thinkers, as they are usually described, was the small city-state of the ancient world, such as Athens or Rome.

Montesquieu, however, believed that the republican conception of liberty was completely unsuitable for modern nations. Modern nations were not and could not be democracies. It was absurd to think that all the citizens of populous nations such as France could gather on the market-place to decide what laws to make. For this reason, modern nations were usually governed by kings rather than by the people as a whole. But this did not mean that citizens in modern states were necessarily unfree. Montesquieu believed that royal subjects could be just as free as republican citizens, if the power of their kings was checked by a social elite. A wealthy and independent nobility could prevent the king from behaving arbitrarily, from changing the laws from one moment to the next. In this sense, the nobility formed an "intermediary power" between king and people that was necessary to prevent the monarchy from degenerating into despotism.

Montesquieu illustrated this point with a reference to the famous story of the Viscount d'Orte. That sixteenth-century French nobleman had resisted the order of Charles IX to massacre the Huguenots on Saint Bartholomew's day because he believed it would be dishonourable to kill innocent people even though this order came directly from the king. To Montesquieu, this example showed that the nobility formed a more or less independent body in the state that guaranteed the liberty of the people against royal tyranny.

The doctrine of aristocratic liberalism, as formulated by Montesquieu, had a considerable impact in the eighteenth century. The opponents of royal absolutism used it to legitimate resistance against the anti-aristocratic Bourbon dynasty. At the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, however, aristocratic liberalism became discredited. The revolutionaries roundly rejected Montesquieu's doctrine. Their model was the direct democracy of the ancient city-states, as it had been for the eighteenth-century republicans. This

has led most historians to suppose that Montesquieu's influence ended with the Revolution. This cataclysmic event, as they argue, established once and for all a democratic political culture in France. Yet, the post-revolutionary political pamphlets and debates I have investigated, suggest otherwise. Far from becoming obsolete in the nineteenth century Montesquieu's teachings knew an important revival in the post-revolutionary period.

Montesquieu's doctrine was first picked up in nineteenth-century France by members of the royalist party. Royalists were highly critical of the French Revolution, which, as they believed, had proven conclusively that the destruction of the aristocracy, and the establishment of political and social equality, inevitably led to despotism and anarchy. But aristocratic liberalism was not only adopted by these defenders of the Old Regime. More surprisingly, it also influenced many of their liberal opponents. Although nineteenth-century liberals rejected the political structures of the Old Regime and defended the new parliamentary institutions which had been introduced right after the Revolution, many of them believed, like their royalist opponents, that these liberal institutions would not be able to survive without the existence of a strong social elite. Montesquieu's doctrine was adopted by important liberal political thinkers and politicians, such as Prosper de Barante, Alexis de Tocqueville, Charles de Montalembert, Victor de Broglie and Odilon Barrot, to name but a few.

Those liberal thinkers were convinced that a levelled society, in which all citizens were social equals, offered no protection against despotism. In such a society, they believed, the government could in fact do as it pleased, because its power was infinitely greater than that of any individual citizen. A strong social elite, that was independent and that would be capable of resisting the government, was therefore necessary to preserve a stable liberal regime. Adopting Montesquieu's vocabulary, they argued that such a social elite was necessary as an "intermediary body" between the government and the people. From this perspective, however, liberal thinkers were confronted with a problem. The old nobility had suffered a terrible blow in fortune and prestige during the Revolution, and liberals believed that it would never be able to regain its old ascendancy. A number of liberal thinkers and politicians therefore argued that French society needed to be reformed, that a new aristocracy needed to be created so as to make the political system more resistant against despotism. More particularly, they hoped that a new social elite would come forth from the ranks of the bourgeoisie, which had come to power with the French Revolution.

However, in the course of the nineteenth-century, many liberals came to believe that the restoration of such a new bourgeois elite in France was an

impossible enterprise. They became convinced that history showed a deterministic development towards ever-increasing social equality. In modern nations, they argued, differences in wealth and social status no longer had the fixed character of the social hierarchy of the Old Regime. Wealth was mobile, a family could be rich one generation and poor the next. Returning to the aristocratic society of the Old Regime, even in a new form, was therefore not an option in modern France. In sum, liberals believed that it had become very difficult, even impossible to recreate the social hierarchy necessary for the protection of liberty.

For this reason, many liberals of the nineteenth century were deeply pessimistic. They did not have much faith that a liberal regime could survive in the modern, democratic age. They characterised their own society as atomised, individualist, egalitarian, and therefore especially prone to despotism. Pessimism was for instance a characteristic of Tocqueville's thought. Writing in 1840, Tocqueville warned that modern, democratic nations were almost inherently despotic. When Napoleon III came to power only a few years later, in 1852, and established a dictatorship based on plebiscites, Tocqueville's worst fears materialized. The illiberal nature of the Second Empire underscored that there was a direct link between social democracy and political despotism.

By now it might seem as if aristocratic liberalism was an anachronistic intellectual tradition of disgruntled elitists, with little to offer the future. But this is not wholly correct. In the course of the nineteenth century, another version of aristocratic liberalism was formulated. Some nineteenth-century liberals came to argue that the old aristocracy could be replaced as an intermediary body by voluntary associations. Not a new social elite, but the cooperation of individual citizens in all sorts of groups and societies should provide the necessary check on government. In particular, liberal thinkers focused their hopes on decentralisation as a means to replace the ancient, aristocratic intermediary structures that had been destroyed by the levelling of French society. By encouraging citizens to cooperate on the local level, decentralisation would strengthen local bonds and unite the power of individual citizens against the central government.

Thus, nineteenth-century liberals came up with a way to reconcile the most important tenet of aristocratic liberalism with the levelled condition of modern societies. By reformulating aristocratic liberalism as an ideology defending the crucial role of intermediary structures, rather than that of a social elite, they made Montesquieu's doctrine more attractive to those who wholeheartedly accepted the rise of modern equality. This explains how it is possible that the legacy of aristocratic liberalism still lives on today. Many partici-

pants in the contemporary political debate still believe that intermediary levels between the people and the government are necessary. In English such voluntary groups are usually described as "civil society", but the key idea of their intermediary role is better captured in the Dutch word *het middenveld* or the midfield.

Indeed, in the context of the present crisis of democracy, interest in such intermediary structures seems more pronounced than ever before. Paradoxically enough, today it are not liberals that profess a belief in such intermediary structures, but rather their political opponents. How these ideas migrate from one political family to another might in itself be worth a whole new study.

Annelien De Dijn

M. VAN GINDERACHTER, *Vaderland in de Belgische Werkliedenpartij (1885-1914). Sociaal-democratie en nationale identiteit from below. Een casusstudie van Gent, Brussel en de Borinage*, Universiteit Gent, 2005, promotor: Prof. Dr. B. De Wever

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Dit onderzoek is met twee ambities gestart: 1) de variabele 'nationale identiteit' binnen de BWP bestuderen (niet zoals al vaak gedaan is de houding van de partij tegenover de taalkwestie); 2) de achterban van de partij in het onderzoek betrekken omdat er te snel conclusies worden getrokken voor grote groepen mensen op basis van bronnen die slechts een geringe representativiteit hebben.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. UITGANGSPUNTEN

Voor de *belle époque* hadden we tot nu toe slechts een zeer schetsmatig beeld van de verhouding klasse-natie in België. Er is natuurlijk al heel wat geschreven over de relatie van de socialisten tot de Vlaamse beweging. Maar omdat

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<sup>1</sup> Een eerste deel van dit proefschrift verschijnt als *Het rode vaderland. De vergeten geschiedenis van de communautaire spanningen in het Belgische socialisme voor WOI*, Lannoo, Tielt (ter perse).