... you have great works to do, the planting of a new heaven and a new earth among us, and great works have great enemies...

Stephen Marshall
1641

CHAPTER ONE · THE EMERGENCE OF RADICAL POLITICS

A politics of conflict and competition for power, of faction, intrigue, and open war is probably universal in human history. Not so a politics of party organization and methodical activity, opposition and reform, radical ideology and revolution. The history of reform and revolution is relatively short compared, for example, with that of the political order itself or of the power struggle. The detached appraisal of a going system, the programmatic expression of discontent and aspiration, the organization of zealous men for sustained political activity: it is surely fair to say that these three together are aspects only of the modern, that is, the postmedieval political world.

The study of modern politics might begin at many points in the sixteenth century: with Machiavelli and the new political realism, with Luther and the German princes and their attack upon Roman internationalism, with Bodin and the sovereignty of the new monarchs. The concern of this essay, however, is not with reason of state, the national church, or the idea of sovereignty. It lies instead with another of those startling innovations of sixteenth-century political history: the appearance of revolutionary organization and radical ideology. Revolution as a political phenomenon and ideology as a kind of mental and moral discipline are both, of course, closely related to the rise of the modern state. Yet the idea that specially designated and organized bands of men might play a creative part in the political world, destroying the established order and reconstructing society according to the Word of God or the plans of their fellows—this idea did not enter at all into the thought of Machiavelli, Luther, or Bodin. In establishing the state, these three writers relied ex-

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exclusively upon the prince, whether they imagined him as an adventurer, a Christian magistrate, or a hereditary bureaucrat. All other men remained subjects, condemned to political passivity. But this was an incomplete vision, for in fact the revolutionary activity of saints and citizens played an important part in the formation of the modern state as did the sovereign power of princes. In Switzerland, the Dutch Netherlands, Scotland, and most importantly in England and later in France, the old order was finally overthrown not by absolutist kings or in the name of reason of state but by groups of political radicals, themselves moved by new and revolutionary ideologies.

It will be argued below that it was the Calvinists who first switched the emphasis of political thought from the prince to the saint (or the band of saints) and then constructed a theoretical justification for independent political action. What Calvinists said of the saint, other men would later say of the citizen: the same sense of civic virtue, of discipline and duty, lies behind the two names. Saint and citizen together suggest a new integration of private men (or rather, of chosen groups of private men, of proven holiness and virtue) into the political order, an integration based upon a novel view of politics as a kind of conscientious and continuous labor. This is surely the most significant outcome of the Calvinist theory of worldly activity, preceding in time any infusion of religious worldliness into the economic order. The diligent activism of the saints—Genevan, Huguenot, Dutch, Scottish, and Puritan—marked the transformation of politics into work and revealed for the first time the extraordinary conscience that directed the work.

Conscience and work entered the political world together; they formed the basis for the new politics of revolution and shaped the character of the revolutionary. They also provided, it should be said, an internal rationale for the diligent efficiency of the modern official and the pious political concern of the modern bourgeois. But both these eminent men were revolutionaries in their time; they had first of all to construct a world in which their efficiency and concern would be respectable—and to attack an older world that had made them both objects of mockery or disdain. In politics as in religion the saints were oppositional men and their primary task was the destruction of traditional order. But they were committed after that to the literal reforming of human society, to the creation of a Holy Commonwealth in which conscientious activity would be encouraged and even required. The saints saw themselves as divine instruments and theirs was the politics of wreckers, architects, and builders—hard at work upon the political world. They refused to recognize any inherent or natural resistance to their labors. They treated every obstacle as another example of the devil’s resourcefulness and they summoned all their energy, imagination, and craft to overcome it. Because their work required cooperation, they organized to carry it through successfully and they joined forces with any man who might help them without regard to the older bonds of family and neighborhood. They sought “brethren” and turned away if necessary from their relatives; they sought zeal and not affection. Thus there arose the leagues and covenants, the conferences and congregations which are the prototypes of revolutionary discipline. In these the good work was carried forward; at the same time, new saints were trained and hardened for their unremitting labor. The results of that labor can best be seen in the English Revolution of 1640.

In Elizabethan and Jacobean drama the Calvinist saints who later played such a crucial part in that revolution were described as men of hypocritical zeal, meddlesome, continually on the move, nervously and ostentatiously searching for godly things to do—thus Ben Jonson’s Puritan, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. Zeal-of-the-Land was a comic figure, but he was also a new man, especially susceptible to caricature. The saint’s personality was his own most radical innovation. It was marked above all by an uncompromising and sustained commitment to a political ideal (which other men called hypocrisy), and by a pattern of rigorous and systematic labor in pursuit of that ideal (which other men called

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3 Crane Brinton argues that the Jacobin clubs, all unknowingly, played an important part in training the bureaucrats and petty officials of the Napoleonic era: see The Jacobins: An Essay in the New History (New York, 1950), pp. 250-251. A similar argument, connecting Puritanism with the rise of parliamentary power and the training of parliamentarians, will be made below.

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meddlesomeness). The origins and consequences of this godly commitment and this godly business will be examined below. It is necessary first to suggest how new both were in the sixteenth century, with what incomprehension the contemporaries of Calvin and then of Cromwell approached the savage struggles into which godly zeal and business plunged them, how frequently they doubted the "sincerity" of the saint—long after he had, one would have thought, sufficiently demonstrated it. In discussing rebellion and sedition, for example, both Bodin and Francis Bacon still thought in terms of the ragged plebians of the classical cities and the "overmighty subjects" of bastard feudalism. Bacon, perhaps, had some foreboding of what was to come in England when he wrote a warning against unemployed scholars; such men would indeed become, though not merely because they were unemployed, the alienated intellectuals who fed the minds of the lay saints. But King James' Lord Chancellor had no sense of what this intellectual food would be like or of its consequences in human behavior. Even the great Clarendon, writing after the event, still saw the English Revolution as a conspiracy of discontented noblemen. He barely noticed the Puritans and examined their faith only as a species of hypocrisy and an excuse for "tur­

bubulence." Clarendon was very wrong; yet his opinions surely reflected the wisdom of the ages. The active, ideologically committed political radical had never before been known in Europe. Medieval society was, to use the word of a modern theorist, a society largely composed of Calvinist politics. The collapse of the universal sovereignty of the empire shattered even this politics, subjecting men to a frightening variety of extralegal commands and forcing them to make private and personal arrangements. The feudal system that eventually emerged from these arrangements virtually precluded political relations. For the formal, impersonal, legal and functional-rational ties established by a conventional political system, it substituted the extended family and the private treaty, relations intensely personal and in substance at least putatively natural. For the interests and ideals that bound men together in the pursuit of political goals, it substituted the bonds of personal loyalty, kinship, and neighborhood. For the rational consideration of political methods, it substituted a blind adherence to customary ways. Men came to inherit not merely their lands and possessions, but also their social place and their moral and personal commitments. Reverence for tradition paralleled the reverence for fathers and lords and similarly precluded impersonal devotion to ideas, parties, or states. Familial or dynastic

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from political interests and activity, a radical severance of private needs and aspirations from the public world of cities and empires. The philosopher cultivates internal things; he must be prepared "in every [external] thing to have the inferior part, in honor, in office, in the courts of justice, in every little matter." He is ready to do his duty, to perform any public tasks for which he may be made responsible by birth or by appointment. But since he has no public vision, no idea of the state reformed, no parti­
cular political purpose, he will aim in his office at nothing more than an honorable performance. His narrow sense of duty narrows in turn his political imagination and discovers no ideal to be patiently and systematically pursued. The philosopher forms no party. Himself a slave, Epictetus wrote in an age when citizenship had lost its meaning and all men had become, in one way or another, subjects, whose political existence had but one essential characteristic: that they obeyed impersonal, more or less legal commands.

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—From Daniel Lerner, The PASing of Traditional Society (Glencoe, Ill., 1958).


Epictetus, The Enchiridion, trans. George Long (Chicago, 1934), I, XXIX.

The following several paragraphs are based largely on Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago, 1961), and Walter Ullmann, Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages (New York, 1961).

aggression or retreat replaced political activity. Distant and largely powerless kings retained some vestiges of authority and some claim to dominate the world of feudal arrangements only by invoking divine right and acting out the magical rites of religious kingship. But if this increased somewhat the respect with which monarchy was regarded, it also intensified the apathy of subjects—leaving the kings no dependable supporters except God and their relatives. As much under the aegis of Christianity as through the subversive survival of pagan cults, politics became a distant realm of magic and mystery. Ordinary men lived in a narrower world, tied to family, village, and feudal lord, and forgot the very ideas of citizenship and the common good. Religion reinforced the philosopher’s advice: politics ought never to be the concern of private men.

When in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the feudal system was given theoretical form, it was described, of course, as a political community—but not as a community dependent upon the will or activity of its members and not as a community of equal citizens.

In the work of a writer like John of Salisbury, for example, political society was seen as a great organism, a body politic not open to man-made transformations, as natural as was the family. Men were not properly speaking citizens of this body, but literally members, related to the bodily whole in a functional-organic way. These members obviously shared an interest in the well-being of the body, but they were never called upon to dedde together the precise nature of that interest. If the idea of the body politic suggested a higher degree of social integration than was in fact achieved by the feudal system, it also suggested that the sole agent of that integration was the ruler. It served the interests, then, of the new monarchs of the high Middle Ages. And it left politics a mystery still, open to the understanding of the rational head, but impenetrable to the mindless members. How could the foot challenge the authority or wisdom of the head?

Organic imagery also served to justify the hierarchy of persons which had gradually supplanted the chaos of feudal arrangements. Barons and lords might well yield theoretical supremacy to the king; they gained an assured place within a hierarchical system.

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a natural and inevitable ranking of excellence and honor which was rarely challenged in the premodern period, even though precedence in its upper reaches was always in dispute. This social hierarchy was thought to be reflected not only in the human organism, but also in the cosmos, in God’s universe: as the head rules the body, medieval writers argued, so God the world and the king the polity; as the angels stand below God in nine ranks and orders, so the nobler parts of the body politic below the king and the priests of the body of Christ below the pope. The inequality thus defended established patterns of obedience and deference which made independent political activity as difficult in practice as it was inconceivable in theory.

Efforts to restructure or reform the feudal system could only be made from above, as in any unchallenged hierarchy, by popes and new monarchs, or from outside, by monkish enthusiasts of one sort or another. Neither popes, kings, nor monks, however, dared suggest to lesser men, certainly not to laymen, that politics involved sustained, methodical endeavor or free and rational association—though indeed the papal bureaucracy came to incorporate elements of both. The Hildebrandine reform, fostered over the years by Roman officialdom, was surely part of a rationalizing process, involving as it did a determined attack upon those mysteries (such as the cult of the thaumaturgic king and the sacramental character of coronation) that had invaded the political world. The reformers sought to restrict mystery to the religious sphere (and to organize its administration there) and at least partly on the basis of this restriction to limit the authority of secular kings and establish a papal overlordship and a new moral order. But the new overlord could hardly suggest a new civisme to his subjects—it seems fair to argue that Gregorian Christianity was “civic” only to its priests—nor could he urge upon them any new forms of political activity. Himself a defender of hierarchy in the secular as in the ecclesiastical order, the pope chose among feudal factions but created no new political associations. Methodical, systematic endeavor remained a monkish characteristic,

10 John of Salisbury, Poliomaticus, partially reprinted by John Dickinson, Statesman’s Book (New York, 1937), pp. 64ff. See also Dickinson’s Introduction.


12 Perhaps the best discussion of the Gregorian reforms is to be found in Gerd Tellenbach, Church and Society at the Time of the Investiture Contests, trans. R. F. Bennett (Oxford, 1948).
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imitated perhaps in the papal bureaucracy and again in the religious orders of crusading knights but without significance in the politics of laymen. Calvinists would one day look back to the crusades as a fine example of religious activism, but they could find few other examples in the Middle Ages. Feudal wars were largely the chaotic struggles of aggressive noble families, "overmighty subjects" of weak kings. Rebellions were most often the desperate, furious risings of nonpolitical peasants or proletarians, unorganized, helpless, with only the crudest of programs. The traditional world view of medieval man, with its conception of an unchanging political order, hierarchical and organic, and its emphasis upon personal and particularistic relations, probably precluded any sort of independent political aspiration or initiative. Something of both, however, was surely present in the great cities of the late medieval and Renaissance periods— as the long struggles for democracy in the guilds and for the leadership of the guilds in the government demonstrate. But even in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy where urbanization was most advanced, it would be difficult to discover a politics characterized by zealous, systematic, and sustained activity. There did emerge, among Florentine humanists for example, a new and striking sense of the virtues of political life and the civic duty of citizens. But in practice the intense antagonisms of classes and families among the Italians culminated in conspiracy, assassination, riot, and internal coup, rather than in systematic organization, sustained activity, or revolution. Civic virtue never triumphed over familial loyalty; the idea of shared citizenship never overcame an extraordinary concern with hierarchical status; the class struggle with its usual accompaniment of shared interests and enthusiasms never entirely replaced the feudal vendetta.

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In the early sixteenth century, Machiavelli’s Discourses offer an imaginative and realistic discussion of political life and are filled with a genuine yearning for civic virtue and citizenship. His Prince, however, is not a program for activist citizens, but a handbook for adventurers. The new consciousness of politics as a matter of individual skill and calculation, which Machiavelli best embodies, was as yet unaccompanied by a new ideology that might give form to the creative work, limiting and shaping the ambition of princes and making available to them the willing cooperation of other men. The new consciousness thus produced only an intensely personal, faction-ridden politics. Artistry freed from form gave rise to the political condottiere, the virtuoso of power. Whatever the reality of Weber’s description of Italy’s economic life, the importance of the adventurer in her politics can hardly be denied.

Savonarola may well be an exception, if the martyr is not in fact a kind of religious adventurer. It was his endeavor, he wrote, to “make [Florence] virtuous, create for her a state that will preserve her virtue.” This might have provided an ideal around which to shape political activity and organize a party of zealots. But the single motor force of the Savonarola reform was a charisma so purely personal, so incapable of organizational expression, that there remained after the death of the man himself nothing more than an exotic memory and a rather uninteresting collection of sermons. The Florentines were entirely correct to recognize in Savonarola a man but not a movement, a passion but not an ideology. Half a century later the people of Geneva would discover that precisely the opposite was true of John Calvin.

III

Machiavelli’s adventurer-prince is one of the first of the “masterless men” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These were the heroes and villains of the age, cut loose from organic, (Princeton, 1965), pp. 88, 95, 165-166; and Lauro Martines, The Social World of the Florentine Humanists: 1350-1460 (Princeton, 1985), p. 504.


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hierarchical, and particularistic ties—ambitious, calculating, irreverent—inensitive to the ancient mysteries but not yet integrated into a modern social system. Some of these men eventually found a new master in Calvin's God and then they set to work creating a new society in which he could be glorified and they could be active. Calvin pursued power in Geneva with all the artfulness of a Machiavellian adventurer; the same might be said of his followers in England. Yet the elements of seventeenth-century revolutionary politics need only be listed to suggest the distance the English Calvinists had come not only from the passivity of medieval members, but also from the pure self-aggrandizement of Renaissance princes.

First, the judicial murder—and not the assassination—of King Charles I; the trial of the king in 1649 was a bold exploration into the very nature of monarchy rather than a personal attack upon Charles himself. Secondly, the appearance of a well-disciplined citizens' army in which representative councils arose and "agitators" lectured or preached to the troops, teaching even privates (cobbler and tinkers in the satiric literature) to reflect upon political issues. Thirdly, the first effort to write and then to rewrite the constitution of a nation, thus quite literally constructing a new political order. Fourthly, the public presentation of whole sets of clamorous demands, many of them from previously passive and nonpolitical men, for the reorganization of the church, the state, the government of London, the educational system, and the administration of the poor laws. Fifthly, the formation of groups specifically and deliberately designed to implement these demands, groups based on the principle of voluntary association and requiring proof of ideological commitment but not of blood ties, aristocratic patronage, or local residence. Sixthly, the appearance of a political journalism in response to the sudden expansion of the active and interested public. Finally and above all, the sharp, insistent awareness of the need for and the possibility of reform. Surely one of the decisive characteristics of the new politics, this passion to remake society was clearly manifest in a sermon preached before the House of Commons in 1641:

Reformation must be universal [exhorted the Puritan minister Thomas Case] . . . reform all places, all persons and callings; reform the benches of judgement, the inferior magistrates . . . Reform the universities, reform the cities, reform the countries, reform inferior schools of learning, reform the Sabbath, reform the ordinances, the worship of God . . . you have more work to do than I can speak . . . Every plant which my heavenly father hath not planted shall be rooted up.17

The same spirit was present sixty years earlier in a group of Puritan ministers who drafted a parliamentary bill which with its first clause would have thrown down all existing "laws, customs, statutes, ordinances and constitutions" of the English church.18 It is hard even to conceive of a politics of such destructive sweep in the Middle Ages. It is at least equally hard to imagine the magistrates, scholars, or soldiers who would happily have set about providing new laws, customs, statutes, ordinances, and so on. In his own fashion, however, Cromwell was such a man; John Milton, who served him, was surely another. Not only the church, but the state, the household, the school, even the theater and the sports arena—religion, culture, family, and politics—all these the great Puritan poet would have made anew.19

The very word reform took on a new meaning in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: it had once suggested renewal, restoration to some original form or state.20 This was the connotation it probably carried for early Protestants with their vision of the primitive church and for many French and English lawyers who conceived and glorified an "ancient constitution." But the changes proposed in the name of these two myths were often so radical and represented, despite the appeal to custom and precedent, such a sharp departure from current practice, that reform came eventually to mean simply improvement, change for the better, indeed, radical change for the better. By the 1640's the word implied transformations of the sort associated today with revolution. That was the sense it already had for the conservative Hooker who saw reform as an endless process: "There hath arisen a sect in England which . . . seeketh to reform . . ."21

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17 Thomas Case, Two Sermons Lately Preached (London, 1641), II, 13, 16. (The spelling has been modernized here and in all subsequent quotations and titles.)
20 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. reform, reformation.
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even the French [that is, the Huguenot] reformation.” It had a similar meaning in Milton’s work: “God is decreeing some new and great period in his church, even to the reforming of reformation itself.” Preachers and lawyers continued, of course, to appeal to primitive and ancient practices, but the shift in meaning is clearly visible in the gradual replacement of the cyclical view of history that underlay the idea of renewal with a progressive view that provided a theoretical foundation for the idea of improvement.

The development of a theory of progress is only another sign of the new political spirit, the new sense of activity and its possibilities, the more radical imagination that mark the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The origins and nature of this new spirit are suggested by the fact that progress was first imagined in terms of a Christian history and an imminent millenium, or again, by the fact that it was a minister who preached so energetically of reform to the gentlemen, lawyers, and merchants of the English Commons. The Puritan cleric insisted that political activity was a creative endeavor in which the saints were privileged as well as obliged to participate. The saints were responsible for their world—as medieval men were not—and responsible above all for its continual reformation. Their enthusiastic and purposive activity was part of their religious life, not something distinct and separate: they acted out their saintliness in debates, elections, administration, and warfare. Politics for the moment was the pursuit of a religious goal; its end was joy—if only spiritual joy—as Milton surely knew and even the most somber and dutiful of the saints must dimly have sensed.

But Puritan zeal was not a private passion; it was instead a highly collective emotion and it imposed upon the saints a new and impersonal discipline. Conscience freed the saints from medieval passivity and feudal loyalty, but it did not encourage the individualist, Italianate politics of faction and intrigue. Puritan ministers campaigned against the personal extravagance of the great Renaissance courtiers and deplored the role of “private interest” in politics. The conscientious activity that they favored is perhaps best revealed in Cromwell’s New Model Army, with its rigid camp discipline, its elaborate rules against every imaginable sin from looting and rapine to blasphemy and card-playing and finally its workmanlike and efficient military tactics. Such a discipline, emphasizing self-control (or mutual surveillance), sustained commitment and systematic activity might well have its parallel in politics. Indeed, the new spirit of the Puritans can be defined as a kind of military and political work-ethic, directly analogous to the “worldly asceticism” which Max Weber has described in economic life, but oriented not toward acquisition so much as toward contention, struggle, destruction, and rebuilding. Calvinist conscience gave to war and to politics (and if Weber is right to business as well) a new sense of method and purpose. It is this above all that distinguishes the activity of the saints from that of medieval men, caught up in the unchanging world of tradition, fixed in their social place and loyal to their relatives; and also from that of Renaissance men, pursuing a purely personal ambition.

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The purposive and systematic activity of the saints is at least logically dependent on four other developments in social and political history—aspects of the gradual transformation of a traditional into a modern society. These are not quite accurately described as the preconditions of Calvinist radicalism, for they were themselves the products of human willfulness and even of the willfulness of the saints. They are developments parallel and related to the emergence of radical politics; they helped make ideological commitment and political reconstruction possible. Three of these developments can be described by simply paraphrasing Max Weber’s outline of the social basis of the new economics.

(1) The separation of politics from the household. Already in the Middle Ages, the reordering activity of papalists and new ministers.
monarchs had required a long and only partially successful war against the proprietary rights and legal privileges of the feudal families. It has been pointed out by many observers, however, that popes and kings waged this war not by abolishing but by seeking to appropriate and monopolize these rights and privileges for themselves, for the pope as bridegroom of the church and for the monarch as father of the country. Thus the familial aggression of an earlier period was replaced by dynastic aggrandizement and the petty patriarchies of feudal lords by the grand patriarchies of powerful kings. Such changes obviously did not rule out the continuation of familial politics, in the form of aristocratic faction and bureaucratic nepotism. But they did tend to reduce somewhat the importance of kinship in political life, if only by suggesting that all the king's subjects were equally his children. The activity of the Calvinist saints, however, required a recognition that all subjects were knowledgeable and active citizens rather than naïve political children, that government was not a household, the state not an extended family, and the king not a loving father. Radical politics was dependent upon the breaking up of the traditional family and all its magnified and distorted images. That it also had a part in the reconstruction of the family in a more modern form will be argued below.

(5) The appearance of formally free men. In the sixteenth century it is first possible to glimpse that illegal man who has become so common in modern times, the political exile. He has an importance in the history of politics something like that of the runaway serf in a broader social history. He is the runaway subject, a very different figure from the defeated feudal lord, the banished baron who traveled in countries not precisely foreign and graced the courts of his relatives. The exile first appears in Italy, among the faction leaden of the Renaissance city-states who so often found themselves condemned to wander abroad or to live in embittered isolation on their country estates. But the new, sixteenth-century radical was more likely than the Renaissance politician to be self-exiled for ideological reasons, the victim not of a feud but of a persecution. The religious Reformation, destroying or significantly undermining the corporate church, had set loose a new group of men, freelance preachers and vagabond scholars. Often driven from their native land, these new intellectuals nourished their fervor as well as their resentment and organized an opposition that reached considerably beyond the factious intrigues of the Italians. The mere presence of the exile, however, whether in Italy or in the north, is sufficient indication of the existence of many more persons detached from feudal bonds and obligations. These are the "masterless men" of Hobbes' description; their lives are reflected also in the new literature of the *picaresque*. In Hobbes' work and in the novels they most often appear as rogues—dangerous or delightful depending on one's point of view. But they were also pilgrims and so they are described in the sermon literature of the Puritans. Only such men would be capable of organizing themselves voluntarily upon the basis of ideological commitment. Only with them might the politics of dynastic aggrandizement be replaced by the politics of individual, party, class, and national aggrandizement.

(5) The rational, amoral, pragmatic consideration of political methods. A truly realistic sense of the methodology of power, its acquisition, preservation, and use, probably appears first in the Italian cities. The relative weights of skill, energy, and luck in political affairs were there calculated with great care and dedicated interest. On the basis of an accumulating record of actual political experience the appropriateness of various means to various ends was lengthily debated. The long-term effect of such debates was to end the usefulness of mystery as a political limit: nothing was exempt from the vigorous, pragmatic concern of a man like Machiavelli. Though with obviously different purposes, something of this same concern survived and was even extended and made more profound in the political casuistry of Calvinist and Jesuit writers. The exhaustive and often tedious deliberations of priests and saints as to whether this or that political means might legitimately be employed by Christians had a dramatic effect: the passionate pursuit of personal power was transformed into a collective and conscientious endeavor and the devilish study of the art of politics into a godly science. Every act of every king was opened to the second guessing of alert, calculating, and

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religious subjects—and this pious second-guessing was even more
dangerous to kings than was the cool pragmatism of a Machiavel­
lian adventurer. Conscientious men required the careful casuists,
but once they had been told that power was legitimately their
goal they were extraordinarily effective in pursuing it and proba­
bly even more ruthless than the adventurer in adopting the neces­
sary means.

The rise of large-scale political units. Only in the modern
state are the various centers of traditional political life—family,
corporation, town, and so on—overwhelmed and then trans­
formed into minor units through which children are socialized
and taught obedience and economic or local interests represented.
And only when this, or something like this, is, so to speak, in the
works, is the stage set for the full development of radical politics.

A recent student of revolution is surely correct to argue that a
full-scale party organization of political rebels is the historical
parallel of the complicated, powerful apparatus of the modern
state; the two appear together in the sixteenth century. But this
is not merely a matter of the challenge of absolutist kings and the
response of radicals and heretics. In a sense, the two groups of
men, kings and rebels, work together—whatever the tension, even
the wars between them. The suppression of smaller political units
in which energy and zeal had been dissipated (for example, by
Hussite heretics in a semi-feudal Bohemia), the destruction of
feudal, familial, and local loyalties, the reappearance (out of the
medieval organism) first of the subject and then of the citizen:
these may well provide the social basis for that obedience which
new monarchs required; they also provide the basis for ideological
commitment and voluntary association.

The breakdown of feudal patriarchy; the emergence of free
men, whether exiles or vagabonds, pilgrims or rogues; the ra­
tional calculation of political means; the rise of the modern state
—these developments suggest the historical situation in which
the saint appeared. He was the man who possessed that "unusu­
ally strong character" (to use Weber's phrase) which was necessary
to overcome political traditionalism and to survive in the danger­
ous world of masterless men.

In a rough way, he corresponds to Weber's economic entrepreneur, who differed from the cautious
medieval burgher and the Italian adventurer-capitalist much as
the new saint differed from the medieval subject and the Renais­
sance condottiere. Radical politics was the saint's creation, de­
veloped through a difficult process of invention and experimenta­
tion. Its systematic and sustained character was the saint's own
character, acted out in worldly endeavor. Its particular methods
were produced in much the same way as modern military tactics
were evolved out of feudal disorder and personal combat, that is,
in the course of the political conflict itself, by men systematically
active, imaginatively responsive to opportunity, seeking victory.

Good brother, we must bend unto all means
That may give furtherance to the holy cause.

Thus spoke Ben Jonson's Tribulation Wholesome as he led one
of the Puritan brethren into the shop of the ungodly alchemist.
He suggested the conscientious recklessness of the political
entrepreneur. Tribulation, like his brother Zeal-of-the-Land, was
a caricature; yet the audience that watched Jonson's play un­
doubtedly had some acquaintance with him. The saint to be
described below is in some ways a "type"—the sociological version,
perhaps, of caricature. Yet particular historical men fashioned
themselves as best they could in his image, and some of them
certainly sought every available means to further the holy cause.
It is with these political entrepreneurs that the following pages
are concerned. In every country, their features were roughly the
same; hence the usefulness both of the "type" and the caricature.

It must always be remembered, of course, that these were men
of diverse interests and capacities, of different social backgrounds,
participating in various ways in the going system and committed
with varying intensity to the new order. Individuals were drawn
into the formal life of the reformed churches whose deepest
loyalties covertly lingered behind; others, genuinely committed,
nevertheless maintained anachronistic or disjointed patterns of

27 Koenigsberger, "Revolutionary Parties," p. 555. On the development of the
institutions of the modern state in England, see G. R. Elton, The Tudor Revolution

28 Weber, Protestant Ethic, p. 69.
29 Jonson, The Alchemist, III, I.
The Revolution of the Saints

thought, expression, or conduct. Despite all this, however, the saint is visible, open to caricature and idealization, the new politics inexplicable without him. His presence in this world of confusion, caution, and perennial half-heartedly suggests a series of questions. Genevan Calvinists, French Huguenots, Scottish Covenanters, English Marian exiles, Disciplinarian ministers, Puritan saints: what was it that moved particular men to join these associations of godly strangers? What were the concrete needs that sainthood served, with its rigid self-discipline and its nervous, incessant activism? What was the basis in routine reflection and day-to-day activity of that "unusually strong character" that enabled the saints to experiment politically and ignore, whenever necessary, the age-old customs, the trained passivity, and the traditional loyalties of their fellows?

The purpose of this book is to answer these questions through an historical and sociological study of Calvinist politics during the hundred years that preceded the English Revolution. At the end of the book it will be possible to state in theoretical terms the argument already suggested in this introduction: that Calvinist politics, indeed, radicalism in general, is an aspect of that broad historical process which contemporary writers call "modernization." Calvinism taught previously passive men the styles and methods of political activity and enabled them successfully to claim the right of participation in that ongoing system of political action that is the modern state. Not that modernity is in any sense the intentional creation of political radicals: few of the elements of the modern ("rational-legal") order detailed by Weber, for example, have much to do with radical aspiration. Calvinism is related, as the final chapter of this study will argue, not with modernity but with modernization, that is, with the process far more significantly than with its outcome. The saint appeared at a certain moment in that process and is remembered afterwards for the dramatic part that he played and for the effects that he had rather than for his own motives and purposes. But he cannot be understood unless the historical sources of his sainthood are carefully examined and his purposes distinguished from the results of his activity.


The Emergence of Radical Politics

In the history of Western Europe, and especially of England, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries mark a crucial phase of the modernizing process, a "crisis" manifest finally in the mid-seventeenth-century English Revolution in which the Puritan saint is the central protagonist. In a sense, the saint is the cause rather than the product of that crisis; it occurs, in different countries at different times, whenever a group of men, hardened and disciplined by an ideology, decisively challenge the old order, offering their own vision as an alternative to traditionalism and their own persons as alternatives to the traditional rulers. But in another, equally important, sense, the saint is a product of his times: for men are open to ideological discipline only at certain moments in history. Most often, they are immune, safe from whatever it is that inspires self-discipline and activism, disdainful of all enthusiasm. The crisis of modernization might be defined as the moment when old immunities are suddenly cancelled, old patterns of passivity and acquiescence overthrown. It is only then that groups of men seek (and indeed, require) some such strengthening of character as Weber describes. Different ideologies, of course, can serve their purposes; clearly Calvinism is not the unique form of political radicalism. Parallels with Jacobinism and Bolshevism will be suggested below. But it is probable both that radicalism was first expressed through the medium of religious aspiration and that Calvinism was the ideological system through which men were first organized for the new sorts of worldly endeavor which have been described above.

For this reason, the study begins, in Chapter Two, with an examination of Calvinism as an ideology, marked by its critical view of the patriarchal and feudal world, its political realism, its bold suggestion for social reconstruction and its extraordinary capacity for organizing men and sending them into battle against Satan and his allies—even when those allies turned out to be kings and noblemen. The immediate effects of these views are examined in Chapter Three through two case studies: the French Huguenots and the English Marian exiles. Here the appeal of Calvinism to particular social groups can be analyzed and the various approaches of individual men to sainthood—awkward, anxious, and enthusiastic—systematically described. Only some understanding of the human needs that Calvinism met, both for
Calvin himself and for the later saints, will make it possible to understand the appearance of such a totally new world-view at this particular moment in history. For needs are causes, in a way, though this is not to suggest that men always or ever get what they need.

The two social groups in England whose members were most likely to adopt the Calvinist ideology, to become saints, and to shape sainthood to their own needs, were the clergy and the new class of educated laymen. Professional intellectuals play a vital part in the modernization process everywhere and they are usually seconded by those amateurs of knowledge who arise out of the economic and social transformations of the traditional order, usually as leaders of the new middle classes. The role of the minister in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England provides the occasion for an analysis of the radical intellectual as the man who first freed himself from the controls of a corporate church and who proved (perhaps because of this freedom) most sensitive to the strains of social change, most open to conversion, and most ready to experiment with underground organization and radical ideology. The sociology and politics of the Puritan clergy are examined in Chapter Four; their new ideas, the day-to-day articulation of their discontent and new-found godliness in sermons, diaries, and theological tracts, are studied in Chapters Five and Six. The highly regulated life of the ministers, the modes of their organization, the very tone of their literature, all suggest, will be argued, a new world of discipline and work in which medieval hierarchy and patriarchy, organismic feeling, and corporate association are left far behind.

The lay saints, most often or most importantly pious gentlemen like Oliver Cromwell or university-educated merchants and lawyers who aspire to gentility, are described in Chapter Seven. Puritanism proved admirably adapted to the needs of these men—just as radicalism in different forms has often since proven itself functional to the "rise" of new social classes, or at any rate of the educated members of such classes. The annoying word "rise" which seems to denote some collective and impersonal ascent actually conceals a vast amount of painful human endeavor requiring willfulness, calculation, nerve, and perhaps above all an anxious, introspective discipline and self-control—requiring.