

Louis XI

by Gerald Rose

March 27—It was France’s King Louis XI, who established the world’s first nation-state republic. This he did in the wake of Jeanne D’Arc’s victory, and in the midst of that Golden Renaissance which her martyrdom had triggered, a Renaissance which began among a section of the Catholic clergy. Louis himself identified the new-born republic as a “Commonwealth.” As you will see, under Louis, for the first time in modern history, the core of the nation is the development of its people.

Before Louis XI, the territory of France had had no citizens. It had feudal barons, each a law unto himself; a corrupt clergy, whose allegiance was to the Pope; and a King to whom they paid fealty. Everyone else was only a serf of one sort or another. With Louis’ consolidation of France based on the principle of the commonwealth, there was a veritable explosion of real wealth, and for the first time in Europe, a real productive class centered in the cities, whose first allegiance was to the nation in the person of the King, not to the local barons.

Read his own words in his famous treatise “The Rosebush of War,” written at the end of his life, to his son. In this treatise, he establishes a set of principles that, to this day, are the basis of any real government on this planet. As you read his words, you will be astonished at the clarity and passion with which they are written.

It is even more striking when you realize that France had been decimated by the Normans, who controlled England, for over 100 years of war. In her book *A Distant Mirror*, Barbara Tuchman details the utter devastation of the French territory by Edward III of England’s war of occupation, by the Black Plague, and by the marauding bands of private armies that looted whatever was left after the wars and Plague. It can’t be documented exactly, but possibly half the population of France was killed by this combination of calamities.

Commonwealth vs. Oligarchy

In 1429, Louis met Jeanne d’Arc just before the battle to lift the English Siege of Orleans. You can just

imagine the effect of Jeanne on a young boy of six who was to become King. The story of Louis and his consolidation of the first modern nation state, is detailed in several studies in *Fidelio* magazine. Excerpts from some of these studies will be included in this article.

The issue at hand is the immortal mission of Jeanne d’Arc, as it bears on the creation of modern history and the creation of the modern Nation State or, in Louis’ words, the “Commonwealth.”

It was precisely breaking the back of the genocidal Norman oligarchy that allowed forces in the Church allied with the Augustinian teaching order “The Brethren Of The Common Life,” to re-establish control of the Catholic Church.

It was the loss of France, as Shakespeare so brilliantly demonstrates in his history plays, Henry VI-Richard III, that brought on the fratricidal War of the Roses. This war brought down the Plantagenet House of Edward III and brought in Henry VII, who established the House of Tudor to run England on the basis of Louis’ commonwealth principle.

This bears directly on the creation of the United States. Not only by analogy and copying the Commonwealth, but by creating the culture of Cusa and Kepler as the basis for the Renaissance, and the idea of man that was the basis for America and its Presidency. It was out of the devastation of the Dark Age, during which the rate of collapse of population was astronomical, that the victory of Jeanne d’Arc and Louis XI consolidated the Italian Renaissance, whose effect was the exponential growth of the human population on the planet.

The Principle of the Commonwealth

In his treatise “The Rosebush of War,” Louis writes: “Cities were from the first the name of the common good or the commonweal.”¹ What Louis did, was to successfully apply those ideas of city-building, to the work of an entire nation. As he writes in “The Rose-

1. “The Rosebush of War,” by Louis XI of France, translated into English in *Fidelio*, Fall 1995.

bush,” “the Prince must provide for maintenance of the public works and edifices, and make improvements and repairs on the roads, the bridges, the ports, the walls, the moats, and the other things in his towns and castles which are necessary.”

“Consider the duty of Kings and princes and their cavaliers, that their estate and vocation is to defend the common good, both ecclesiastic and secular, to uphold justice and peace among their subjects, and to do good. They will have good in both this world and the next; and if they do evil only, affliction will come. It shall come to pass some day that one must leave the world to go and give account of one’s undertakings, and receive one’s reward. To risk their lives for another, among all other estates of the world, is most to be praised

and honored. And because the common good which concerns many, which is the commonweal of the Realm, is more praiseworthy than the particular, which often has frustrated the common good, we have freely put into writing the acts of the princes and the cavaliers, and all good doctrines which serve their estate.”

This principle was clearly demonstrated during Louis’ exile to the territory of Dauphiné, before he became King. In his book on Louis XI, Paul Murray Kendall details the breathtaking accomplishments of Louis there.² After first personally visiting every part of the “threadbare” territory, and convening all the estates of Nobles and Clergy, he created a Parliament; abolished feudal wars between barons; encouraged local agriculture by tariffs; gave financial inducements to



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King Louis XI not only founded the first nation-state, after defeating France’s feudal oligarchy, but laid out the precepts of a Commonwealth principle for all heads of state worthy of the name.

local merchants; took their sons into royal service; and set up the first postal system in all Europe. This, in the little area of the Duchy of Dauphiné.

In Kendall’s words, “Nothing quite like it had ever been seen before. He transformed this backward province into a State, doubled the extent of its territory, gave it cohesion it had never known, and organised an administration that was probably more efficient than any in all Europe.”

Building the Nation-State Commonwealth

As Stephanie Ezrol wrote in *Fidelio* magazine in the Fall of 1995:

When Louis XI took power in France, it had fourteen feudal duchies and ninety-four major cities, which he unified on the basis of the

common good and common development opportunities. This *commonwealth* idea was conveyed throughout the country in the slogan, “One law, one weight, one currency.” Louis’ focus was to win the cities: to develop cultural centers, build manufactures, establish international trade fairs, and so forth, in order to attract talent from the rural areas, as well as from abroad, to form a new political nation-state entity. And indeed, the cities contributed fully in supporting this royal policy.

During Louis’ short, twenty-two year reign, from 1461 to 1483, the most significant political change which he forced though as King, was the bankrupting of the feudal landed aristocracy by the creation and defense of industries, by the opening of reciprocal trade with England, and by

2. Paul Murray Kendall, *Louis XI: The Universal Spider* (Phoenix Press, 2001).

new treaty agreements with Genoa, Florence, Naples, Sicily, and Calabria.

Louis guaranteed the development and expansion of industries by subsidizing the cities; such subsidies came from taxes (*la taille*) which were levied in inverse proportion to the productivity of the taxpayer. Accordingly, the feudal princes were taxed at a higher rate than the urban population. Thus, while salaries doubled during the reign of Louis XI, the income from taxes tripled during the same twenty-year period: the *taille* collected 1,200,000 livres in 1462, and had reached the level of 3,900,000 livres in 1482. Add to this other forms of tax, the *aides* and the *gabelle*, which reached a total of 655,000 livres, and the royal domain, which brought 100,000 livres, for a total sum of 4,655,000 livres per year. Through the judicious use of tax policy, both levying and exempting as the case required, Louis was able to direct economic growth and development throughout the kingdom. And, whereas the majority of the people in the cities never complained, the historical records are filled with complaints from the aristocracy, which was being frustrated in its privileges. In fifty years, no city ever turned against the central government rule established by Louis.

Reforms in tax policy, universal coinage, and administrative and judicial reorganization, made Louis the most hated enemy of the feudal lords, who were no longer able to wage private wars, nor exercise the privileges of potentates.

Most reforms, issued in the form of *Ordonnances* (ordinances), were posted and read out in public squares throughout the entirety of France. Under Louis, members of the nobility, who in most other regions of Europe were liable to lose their privileged status if they engaged in productive labor, were in France rewarded for such labor. Louis proclaimed an ordinance allowing nobles and churchmen to work: “Whereas among all those things necessary for the well-being of the commonwealth . . . the [most] honest and profitable occupation [is] the industry of mechanical arts. . . . Let it be known that we desire with all our heart to enquire of and practice the means which can be turned to the profit

and utility of our subjects, and give them industry from which they might profit, enrich themselves and better live under our law.”³

As you just read, Ezrol documents that in the 20 years that Louis ruled France, he increased the revenue of trade and production by 300%. While these were the effects of his idea of the Commonwealth, we go now to the inward cause and mission as Louis describes it as follows in his “Rosebush of War.”

The Mind of a President

You will be shocked at what you are about to read. It is at this level that the real mission of the Presidency is determined. It is in the realm of what is known as Temporal Eternity that mankind has triumphed over what seems impossible, to create human society. Our next presidency must approximate these considerations.

On the World: The greatest care a wise man must have in this transitory world is for his soul, which is perpetual and which bears the charge for the activities of the body, which shall rot upon death, [death] which spares neither the great nor insignificant, noble nor villain, strong nor weak, rich man nor poor, old nor young—all are equal before it, and so it gives no more time or better forewarning to one than to the other; for which reason each should seek to have a good soul, and not put his heart too much in the world or its goods, which he must leave finally behind. And it is a passage through which have passed and will pass all valiant warriors, all wise men, all saints and all of those who from Adam and Eve descended and will descend, and none will remain; but only the renown of their acts will remain, those for the good in benediction, for evil in malediction; for which reason, each in his estate and his calling must hold and conduct himself such that, when the trumpet of retreat sounds, of which the hour is uncertain, we be so provided as to give good account and balances when presented before the great Judge.

This world is compared to a well-lit fire, in that a small one is good to light the way and lead us, but who takes too much of it, is burned.

The world will easily consume him who relies too much on it.

3. Stephanie Ezrol, “The Commonwealth of Louis XI,” *Fidelio*, Fall 1995.

The world, which lives not in equity, is but delight for one hour, and sorrow for several days.

The world teaches those who live in it by those who have left it.

He who takes great pleasure in this world, cannot but be unfortunate in one of two things: that is, to not have what he coveted, or to lose that which he has won through great effort.

He who looks at and considers the span of his life, will find that he will have had more affliction than peace in this world.

We must not love this world except in doing good, because life in this world is brief and affliction endless, which shall be brought upon those who have not lived rightly.

Man cannot but have affliction and toil in his life. If he eats not, he dies, and if he eats little, he becomes feeble, and if he eats too much, he injures himself and becomes sick and cannot sleep. Thus is it a hard thing for a man to be hungry long.

The estates of this world and the end, are represented by the game of chess, wherein each personage is in the place and degree which behooves his estate as long as the game lasts; but when it is done, everything is put into a bag without order or any difference; thus it is with all estates of this world: While life lasts, each holds the status which is ordained to him, but when life ends in death, which separates the body from the soul, all are put into the earth, or into a tomb, which is the same thing.

On Death: Death is a light thing to him who is certain that after him good will come of it: for who lives a good life, will die a good death.

Death is the rest of the covetous, because the longer he lives, the greater his afflictions and yearnings multiply, and thus to him death is more agreeable than a long life.

The death of an evil man gives great respite to the good who has recompense of his good works; and to the evil man as well, such that he will do no more evil nor sin against anyone.

None should fear death, having defended the common good, for therein is merit. As well we are bound to fight for our country.

On the Soul: Who wishes to die a good death, must seek to have a good soul.

A good soul is a delight and joy among good men, but among evil men it is sorrow: it loves the good and commands it be done. The good soul plants good and its fruit is salvation; the evil plants evil and its fruit is damnation. The good one defends itself, and others are saved by it; and the evil [one] loses itself, and others are lost through it. The good [soul] receives truth and the evil receives lies; for there is no lesson so small that a good soul might not profit, while the evil [soul] is unable to profit from any good lesson which one might put before it.

Who wishes the life of his soul must not fear corporal death. For when a reasoning soul changes itself to the nature of a beast for lack of reason, even though it be an incorruptible substance, it is taken for dead, for it loses its intellectual life.

Since everything, including our creation, comes from God, we must desire that our souls return to Him, by doing such good works that the memory of them will be in perpetual benediction. It is a good and charitable thing to risk one's life to defend the common good which concerns all estates: that is, the commonweal of the Realm, which the Pope Zachariah prescribed to the nobles of France, who had sent him an embassy to advise them on why the Kings who had long reigned in France were content to reign in name alone; for the magistrates of the Royal house governed and led wars. "He," said he, "who governs the commonwealth well, and who understands that he governs for more than his own profit, is worthy of being called King."

Lyndon LaRouche earlier this week made the observation that "History does not teach anyone anything, it is geniuses that teach History." Louis XI could not have accomplished what he did accomplish without the profound inspiration and unique genius of Jeanne d'Arc. Yet without the genius of Louis XI, the Renaissance could not have been consolidated by Cusa and Kepler. The idea of man which is the basis for our Republic comes profoundly and directly from these unique acts of genius.

Other Readings

Irene Beaudry, "The Military Genius of Jeanne d'Arc, and the Concept of Victory," *EIR*, Nov. 17, 2000.

William F. Wertz, Jr. "A Not So Distant Mirror: The Lessons of the Fourteenth-Century New Dark Age," *Fidelio*, Fall 1998.