

A Defense of the Prince of Orange against the Province of Holland, 1660

Introduction: After the Jan de Witt's successful handling of the seclusion crisis in 1654, which excluded the Prince of Orange from the office of stadholder, or captain-general, in Holland, de Witt proved to be an effective statesmen of the Republic. There was no effective opposition to de Witt's republicanism until Charles II, the uncle William III, was restored to the throne in England in 1660. The Dutch sought to befriend Charles II with an elaborate reception at the Hague just prior to his departure to England. They also repealed the Act of Seclusion and promised to promote Prince William III at some time in the future. When the Prince's mother, Princess Mary (Charles II's sister) died in December of 1660, Charles II assumed the guardianship over his nephew. The Compromise of 1660, by which the Prince had become a "Child of State" and was to be educated to become captain-general when he came of age, now broke down since the Republic feared that Prince William would come under the influence of England and threaten its independence. The Orangist case in favor of making William III captain-general was made by the States of Zeeland before the States of Holland on September 10, 1660. The excerpt below is from Lieuwe Aitzema, *Saken van Staet en Oorlogh*, 6 vols., (The Hague, 1669-1672), Vol. IV, and was translated from Dutch by Herbert H. Rowen, ed., *The Low Countries in Early Modern Times: A Documentary History* (New York, 1972), pp. 198-199.

. . . A remarkable transformation took place in the body of this state, especially in the form of its government, as a result of the death of his Highness, Prince William II. Often it even ceased to function because many of the driving forces which made the wheel of government go round readily ceased to operate, which caused a notable change in the ordinary course of affairs.

There were many earnest conferences and discussions between these two provinces both before and during the Great Assembly, in the years 1650 and 1651, but they did not result in any final decision at that time because of discordant opinions and because the nature of the business seemed to permit putting off the affair until a later time, when the situation would be more favorable and it would be possible to examine it more closely and with fewer difficulties; for the two provinces [Holland and Zeeland] were at that time principally concerned with the determination of other matters concerning the common Union which could not suffer any delay.

But afterwards the misfortune of various perplexing and unfortunate events abroad completely interfered with these efforts and for many years made it not only impossible to resume them, but also very unlikely that they would have been able to succeed.

But now that it has pleased God Almighty in His merciful and incomprehensible providence to dispose the affairs of the world at this time so that these difficulties have completely ceased, and a more favorable situation has arisen, as is well known, for the advantage

of all Christendom and especially of these lands, the Lords States of Zeeland have judged it useful and proper to bring the matter up again for consideration. . . .

The Lords States of Zeeland therefore declare as a first firm and principal basis for this discussion that the repose and peace of the Low Countries in general and individually can never be maintained without employing heads and lords of eminence in the leadership of the common cause. They assert this not upon the basis of the maxims and teachings of various foreign governments and writers, but upon the judgment and decisions of our own forefathers and of all who throughout the ages have had the best knowledge of the character and constitution of the government of these lands. . . .

It is therefore no wonder that these lands, considered in general and as part of the German nation from ancient times, not just during the past 800 years but for centuries before, have not had any other form of government than one which gave these heads power and authority which was sometimes greater and more absolute and sometimes lesser and more limited. They always considered it necessary to have over them persons of excellent reputation and dignity, restricting and furnishing them with necessary laws and ordinances against all excesses.

The wisest men in the world have always praised this form of government as the safest, fairest, and most honorable. . .

But we do not wish to be found guilty of imprudence or ingratitude and are bound to maintain steadfastly the form of republican government which has been left us by our forefathers down through the generations, and which has been praised not only by the ancients but also by reason and experience (to which special consideration should be given in matters of government).

However, it is nonetheless a fact that this form of government like others is subject to difficulties; yet it continues to be the most fitting for this state; especially since the advantage of a situation should be judged not by abstract speculation but by seeing what will serve best and what has given best service to the respective nations in all ages.

It is well known to the entire world that since the absence of an eminent head as a result of the death of Prince William II, various defects have arisen in the government which apparently can be remedied only by restoring and re-establishing an eminent head to lead it.

These shortcomings exist in various parts of the government, especially in the questions of military movement orders and the common army, the conduct of secret correspondence, the proposal and supply of quotas for the Union, and other points, as our delegates described them extensively to Your Noble Mightinesses in the year 1652.

Furthermore, whenever in these times disputes or disturbances arise between some of the provinces, the state is deprived of the means of conciliation, which the earlier Princes of Orange as heads of the provinces were able with great success and vigor to employ in overcoming these dissensions.

And because it is usual in all communities and societies to entrust the conduct of affairs to a few, so we can now clearly see that many parts of the functions which were exercised by the aforesaid heads have now fallen into the hands of a few who are not qualified to perform them, or do not have authorization to do so, and hence are not responsible for their conduct of them. . .

Your Noble Great Mightinesses during conferences on this affair have considered it not improper to say that attention should be paid to the interests attaching to the present Prince of Orange. But these are such at the present time that the state need have no anxieties concerning them.

First, His Highness is connected by blood to the House of Orange and Nassau, to which these provinces, as has already been said, are in debt for their expenditure of life and property and their indomitable courage which so mightily contributed to the victory of these lands and the vindication of their freedom, their rights, and privileges, and the practice of the true Reformed religion.

Second, this state has a special interest in the alliance of the House of Orange with the House of Brandenburg, because of its possessions and places on the frontier of these provinces, as well as in Pomerania and Prussia on the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, the Elector of Brandenburg is not only one of the most powerful and eminent Imperial princes but is also the only one remaining who professes the Reformed religion. In various situations he has not refrained from risking everything, at the instance of and alongside this state, to repress ruinous and far-reaching designs directed, it appears, principally toward the destruction of the trade of this country, which is its life and soul.

Among the other alliances on the side of the Princess Royal [Princess Mary Stuart, sister of Charles II of England and widow of Prince William II] is the crown of France, which has always had many interests in common with this state and which cannot be separated from it without notable difficulty and hurt for both sides.

But most important in this connection is the family tie with His Majesty, the King of Great Britain, and his brothers. For anyone with ordinary and healthy understanding has sufficient knowledge of how much this country needs the friendship and good understanding of that country and nation, as sad experience has brought painfully home to the good inhabitants of this country, as they still well remember. . . .