

Sir William Temple, On the Government of the Dutch Republic, 1673

Introduction: Sir William Temple (1628-1699) served as the English Ambassador to the Dutch Republic from 1668 to 1672 and again from 1674 to 1679. He provided one of the most penetrating analysis and vivid descriptions of the Republic in his *Observations Upon he United Provinces of the Netherlands*, first published in 1672. The selections below are from chapter II, "Of their Government" in the 1673 edition. The idiosyncratic spelling of the original publication has been retained.

It is evident by what has been discoursed in the former Chapter concerning the Rise of this State (which is to be dated from the Union of Utrecht), that It cannot properly be stiled a Commonwealth, but is rather a Confederacy of Seven Sovereign Provinces united together for their common and mutual defence, without any dependance one upon the other. But to discover the nature of their Government from the first springs and motions, It must be taken yet into smaller pieces, by which it will appear, that each of these Provinces is likewise composed of many little States or Cities, which have several marks of Sovereign Power within themselves, and are not subject to the Sovereignty of their Province; Not being concluded in many things by the majority, but only by the universal concurrence of Voices in the Provincial-States. For as the States-General cannot make War or Peace, or any new Alliance, or Levies of Money, without the consent of every Province; so cannot the States-Provincial conclude any of those points without the consent of each of the Cities, that by their Constitution has a voice in that Assembly. And though in many Civil Causes there lies an Appeal from the Common Judicature of the Cities, to the Provincial Courts of Justice; yet in Criminals there lies none at all; nor can the Sovereignty of a Province exercise any Judicature, seize upon any Offender, or pardon any Offence within the Jurisdiction of a City, or execute any common Resolution or Law, but by the Justice and Officers of the City itself. By this a certain Sovereignty in each City is discerned, the chief marks whereof are, The power of exercising Judicature, levying of Money, and making War and Peace: For the other of Coining Money, is neither in particular Cities or Provinces, but in the generality of the Union by common agreement.

The main Ingredients therefore into the Composition of this State, are the Freedom of the Cities, the Sovereignty of the Provinces, the Agreements or Constitutions of the Union, and the Authority of the Princes of Orange...I shall confine myself to the account of Holland, as the

richest strongest, and of most authority among the Provinces; and of Amsterdam, as that which has the same Preheminencies among the Cities.

Government of the City of Amsterdam

The Sovereign Authority of the City of Amsterdam, consists in the Decrees or Results of their Senate, which is composed of Six and thirty men, by whom the Justice is administered, according to ancient forms, in the names of Officers and Places of Judicature. But Moneys are levied by Arbitrary Resolutions and Proportions, according to what appears convenient or necessary upon the change or emergency of occasions. These Senators are for their lives, and the Senate was anciently chosen by the voices of the richer Burghers or Fee-men of the City, who upon the death of a Senator met together either in a Church, a Market, or some other place spacious enough to receive their numbers; And there made an election of the person to succeed, by the majority of voices. But about a hundred and thirty or forty years ago, when the Towns of Holland began to encrease in circuit, and in people, so as these frequent Assemblies grew into danger of tumult and disorders upon every occasion, by reason of their Numbers and Contention; This election of Senators came by the resolution of the Burghers, in one of their General Assemblies, to be devolved for ever upon the standing-Senate at that time; So as ever since, when any one of their number dies, a new one is chosen by the rest of the Senate, without any intervention of the other Burghers; Which makes the Government a sort of Oligarchy, and very different from a Popular Government, as it is generally esteemed by those who passing or living in these Countreys, content themselves with common Observations and Inquiries. And this Resolution of the Burghers, either was agreed upon, or followed by general Consent or Example, about the same time, in all the Towns of the Province, though with some difference in number of their Senators. By this Senate are chosen the chief Magistrates of the Town, which are the Burgomasters and the Eschevins...

This Office is a Charge of the greatest Trust, Authority, and Dignity; and so much the greater, by not being of Profit or Advantage, but only as a way to other constant Employments in the City that are so. The Salary of a Burgomaster of Amsterdam, I s but Five hundred Guilders a year, though there are Offices worth Five thousand in their disposal; But yet none of them known

to have taken money upon such occasions, which would lose all their Credit in the Town, and thereby their Fortunes by any Publique Employments. They are obliged to no sort of Expence, more than ordinary modest Citizens, in their Habits, their Attendance, their Tables, or any part of their own Domesrique. They are upon all Publique Occasions waited on by men in Salary from the Town; and whatever Feasts they make upon Solemn Days, or for the Entertainment of any Princes or Foreign Ministers, the Charge is defrayed out of the common Treasure; but proportioned by their own discretion. At other times they appear in all places with the simplicity and modesty of other private Citizens. When the Burgomaster's Office expires, they are of course disposed into the other Charges or Employments of the Town, which are very many and beneficial; unless they lose their Credit with the Senate, by any want of Diligence or Fidelity in the discharge of their Office, which seldom arrives.

The Eschevins are the Court of Justice in every Town. They are at Amsterdam Nine in number; of which Seven are chosen Annually; but two of the preceding year continue in office. ... They are Sovereign Judges in all Criminal Causes. In Civil, after a certain value, there lyes Appeal to the Court of Justice of the Province. ...

Under these Sovereign Magistrates, the chief subordinate Officers of the Town are the Treasurers, who receive and issue out all moneys that are properly the Revenues or Stock of the City: The Scout, who takes care of the Peace, seizes all Criminals, and sees the Sentences of Justice executed, and whose Authority is like that of a Sheriff in a County with us, or a Constable in a Parish. The Pensioner, who is a Civil-Lawyer, versed in the Customs, and Records, and Priviledges of the Town, concerning which he informs the Magistracy upon occasion, and vindicates them upon disputes with other Towns; He is a Servant of the Senate and the Burgomasters, Delivers their Messages, makes their Harangues upon all Publique Occasions, and is not unlike the Recorder in one of our Towns.

In this City of Amsterdam is the famous Bank, which is the greatest Treasure, either real or imaginary, that is known any where in the World. The place of it is a great Vault under the Stadthouse, made strong with all the circumstances of Doors and Locks; and other appearing cautions of safety, that can be: And 'tis certain, that whoever is carried to see the Bank, shall never fail to find the appearance of a mighty real Treasure, in Barrs of Gold and Silver, Plate and

infinite Bags of Metals, which are supposed to be all Gold and Silver, and may be so for ought I know. But the Burgomasters only having the inspection of this Bank, and no man ever taking any particular account of what issues in and out, from Age to Age, 'tis impossible to make any calculation, or guess what proportion the real Treasure may hold to the Credit of it. Therefore the security of the Bank lies not only in the Effects that are in it, but in the Credit of the whole Town or State of Amsterdam, whose Stock and Revenue is equal to that of some Kingdoms; and who are bound to make good all Moneys that are brought into their Bank; The Tickets or Bills hereof, make all the usual great Payments that are made between man and man in the Town; and not only in most other places of the United Provinces, but in many other Trading parts of the World. So as this Bank is properly a general Cash, where every man lodges his money, because he esteems it safer, and easier paid in and out, than if it were in his Coffers at home: And the Bank is so far from paying any Interest for what is there brought in, that Money in the Bank is worth something more in common Payments, than what runs current in Coyn from hand to hand; No other money passing in the Bank, but in the species of Coyn the best known, the most ascertained, and the most generally current in all parts of the Higher as well as the Lower Germany.

The Revenues of Amsterdam arise out of the constant Excise upon all sorts of Commodities bought and sold within the Precinct: Or out of the Rents of those Houses or Lands that belong in common to the City: Or out of certain Duties and Impositions upon every House, towards the uses of Charity, and the Repairs, or Adornments, or Fortifications of the place: Or else out of extraordinary Levies consented to by the Senate, for furnishing their part of the Publique Charge that is agreed to by their Deputies in the Provincial-States, for the use of the Province: Or by the Deputies of the States of Holland in the States-General, for support of the Union. And all these Payments are made into one common Stock of the Town, not as many of ours are into that of the Parish; So as attempts may be easier made at the calculations of their whole Revenue... 'Tis certain that in no Town, Strength, Beauty, and Convenience, are better provided for, nor with more unlimited Expence, than in this, by the Magnificence of their Publique Buildings, as Stadthouse and Arsenals; The Number and Spaciousness, as well as Order and Revenues of their many Hospitals; The commodiousness of their Canals running through the

chief Streets of passage; The mighty strength of their Bastions and Ramparts; And the neatness as well as convenience of their Streets, so far as can be compassed in so great a confluence of industrious people: All which could never be achieved without a Charge much exceeding what seems proportioned to the Revenue of one single Town.

Government of the Province of Holland

The Senate chuses the Deputies, which are sent from this City to the States of Holland; The Sovereignty whereof is represented by Deputies of the Nobles and Towns, composing Nineteen Voices; Of which the Nobles have only the first, and the Cities eighteen, according to the number of those which are called *Stemms*; The other Cities and Towns of the Province having no voice in the States. These Cities were originally but Six, Dort, Haerlem, Delf, Leyden, Amsterdam, and Tergow. But were increased by Prince William of Nassaw, to the number of Eighteen, by the addition of Rotterdam, Gorcum, Schedam, Schonoven, Briel, Alkmaer, Horne, Enchusen, Edam, Moninckdam, Medenblick, and Permeren. This makes as great an inequality in the Government of the Province, by such a small City as Permeren having an equal voice in the Provincial-States with Amsterdam (which pays perhaps half of all charge of the Province), as seems to be in the States-General by so small a Province as Overysse having an equal voice in the States-General with that of Holland, which contributes more than half to the general charge of the Union. But this was by some Writers of that Age interpreted to be done by the Prince's Authority, to lessen that of the Nobles, and balance that of the greater Cities, by the voices of the smaller, whose dependances were easier to be gained and secured. The Nobles, though they are few in this Province, yet are not represented by all their number, but by Eight or Nine, who as Deputies from their Body have session in the States-Provincial; And who, when one among them dies, chuse another to succeed him. Though they have all together but one voice equal to the smallest Town; yet are they very considerable in the Government, by possessing many of the best Charges both Civil and Military, by having the direction of all the Ecclesiastical Revenue that was seized by the State upon the change of Religion; and by sending their Deputies to all the Councils both of the Generality and the Province, and by the nomination of one Councillor in the two great Courts of Justice. They give their Voice first in the Assembly of the States, and

thereby a great weight to the business in consultation. The Pensioner of Holland is seated with them, delivers their Voice for them, and assists at all their Deliberations before they come to the Assembly. He is properly, but Minister or Servant of the Province, and so his place or Rank is behind all their Deputies; but has always great Credit, because he is perpetual, or seldom discharged; though of right he ought to be chosen or renewed every third year. He has place in all the several Assemblies of the Prince, and in the States proposes all Affairs, gathers the Opinions, and forms or digests the Resolutions; Pretending likewise a power not to conclude any very important Affair by plurality of Voices, when he judges in his Conscience he ought not to do it, and that it will be of ill consequence or prejudice to the Province.

The Deputies of the Cities are drawn out of the Magistrates and Senate of each Town : Their Number is uncertain and arbitrary, according to the Customs or Pleasure of the Cities that send them, because they have all together but one Voice, and are all maintained at their Cities charge: But commonly one of the Burgomasters and the Pensioner are of the number.

The States of Holland have their Session in the Court at the Hague, and assemble ordinarily four times a year...

For extraordinary occasions, they are convoked by a Council called the Gecommitteerde Raeden, or the Commissioned Councillors, who are properly a Council of State of the Province, composed of several Deputies; One from the Nobles; One from each of the chief Towns; And but One from three of the smaller Towns, each of the three chusing him by turns. And this Council sits constantly at the Hague, and both proposes to the Provincial-States at their extraordinary Assemblies, the matters of deliberation; and executes their Resolutions....

Government of the United Provinces

The Union is made up of the Seven Sovereign Provinces before named, who chuse their respective Deputies, and send them to the Hague, for the composing of three several Colledges, called, The States-General, The Council of State, and the Chamber of Accounts. The jSovereign Power of this United-State, lyes effectively in the Assembly of the States-General... In the absence of the States-General, the Council of State represented their Authority, and executed their Resolutions, and judged of the necessity of a new Convocation... To the States-General

every one sends their Deputies in what number they please; some Two, some Ten or Twelve; Which makes no difference, because all matters are carried not by the Votes of Persons, but of Provinces; and all the Deputies from one Province, how few or many soever, have one single Vote.... Neither Stadtholder, or Governour, or any person in Military charge, has Session in the States-General. Every Province presides their week in turns, and by the most qualified person of the Deputies of that Province: He sits in a Chair with arms, at the middle of a long Table, capable of holding about thirty persons; For about that number this Council is usually composed of... The President, Who proposes all matters in this Assembly, Makes the Greffier [secretary] read all Papers; Puts the Question; Calls the Voices of the Provinces; And forms the Conclusion... This is the course in all Affairs before them, except in cases of Peace and War, of Forreign Alliances, of Raising and Coining of Moneys, or the Priviledges of each Province or Member of the Union. In all which, All the Provinces must concur, Plurality being not at all weighed or observed. This Counsel is not Sovereign, but only represents the Sovereignty.

The Council of State executes the Resolutions of the StatesGeneral; consults and proposes to them the most expedient ways of raising Troops, and levying Moneys, as well as the proportions of both, which they conceive necessary in all Conjunctions and Revolutions of the State: Superintends the Milice, the Fortifications, the Contributions out of Enemies Country, the forms and disposal of all Pasports, and the Affairs, Revenues, and Government of all places conquered since the Union; which being gain'd by the common Arms of the State, depend States-General, and not upon any particular Province Towards the 'end of every year, this Council forms a state of the Expence they conceive will be a necessary for the year ensuing; Presents it to the States-General, desiring them to demand so much of the States-Provincial, to be raised according to the usual Proportions, which are of 1,000,000 Grs' [guilders or *gulden*]

	grs	st	d
Gelderland	3612	05	00
Holland	58309	01	10
Zealand	9183	14	02
Utrecht	5 830	17	11
Friezland	1166I	15	10

Overyssel	3571	08	04
Groningue	5830	17	11

Every Province raises what Moneys it pleases, and by what ways or means; sends its Quota, or share of the general charge, to the Receiver-General, and converts the rest to the present use, or reserves it for the future occasions of the Province...

Besides these Colledges [departments of government], is the Council of the Admiralty; who, when the States-General by advice of the Council of State, have destin'd a Fleet of such a number and force to be set out, Have the absolute disposition of the Marine Affairs, as well in the choice and equipage of all the several Ships, as in issuing the Moneys allotted for that service. This Colledge is subdivided into Five, of which three are in Holland, viz. one in Amsterdam, another at Rotterdam, and the third at Horn: The fourth is at Middlebourgh in Zealand, and the fifth at Harlinguen in Friezland...

So soon as the number and force of the Fleets designed for any Expedition, is agreed by the States-General, and given out by the Council of State to the Admiralty; Each particular Colledge furnishes their own proportion, which is known as well as that of the several Provinces, in all Moneys that are to be raised. In all which, the Admiral has no other share or advantages, besides his bare Salary, and his proportion in Prizes that are taken. The Captains and Superiour Officers of each Squadron are chosen by the several Colledges; the number of men appointed for every ship: After which, each Captain uses his best diligence and credit to fill his number with the best men he can get, and takes the whole care and charge of Victualling his own Ship for the time intended for that Expedition, and signifi'd to him by the Admiralty; and this at a certain rate of so much a man. And by the good or ill discharge of his Trust, as well as that of providing Chirurgeons Medicines, and all things necessary for the health of the men, each Captain grows into good or ill credit with the Sea-men, and by their report with the Admiralties; Upon whose opinion and esteem, the fortune of all Sea-Officers depends: So as in all their Expeditions there appears rather an emulation among the particular Captains who shall treat his Sea-men best in these points, and employ the Moneys allotted for their Victualling, to the best advantage...

The Salaries of all the great Officers of this State, are very small: I have already

mentioned that of a Burgomaster's of Amsterdam to be about fifty pounds sterling a year: That of their ViceAdmiral (for since the last Prince of Orange's death, to the year 1670, there had been no Admiral) is Five hundred, and that of the Pensionary of Holland Two hundred. The Greatness of this State seems much to consist in these Orders, how confused soever, and of different pieces they may seem: But more in two main effects of them, which are the good choice of the Officers of chief Trust in the Cities, Provinces, and State: And the great simplicity and modesty in the common port or living of their chief st Ministers; without which, the absoluteness of the Senates in each Town, and the Immensity of Taxes throughout the whole State, would never , be endured by the people with any patience; being both of them greater than in many of those Governments which are esteemed most Arbitrary among their Neighbours. But in the Assemblies and Debates of their Senates, every man's Abilities are discovered, as their Dispositions are, in the conduct of their Lives and Domestick, among their fellow-Citizens. The observation of · these, either raises or suppresses the credit of particular men, both among the people and the Senates of their Towns; who to Maintain their Authority with less popular envy or discontent, give much to the general opinion of the people in the choke of their Magistrates : By this means it comes to pass, that though perhaps the Nation generally be not wise, yet the Government is, Because it is composed of the wisest of the Nation, which may give it an advantage over many others, where Ability is of more common growth, but of less use to the Publique; If it happens that neither Wisdom nor Honesty are the Qualities which bring men to the management of State-Affairs, as they usually do in this Commonwealth...

The other Circumstance I mentioned as an occasion of their Greatness, was the simplicity and modesty of their Magistrates in their way of living; which is so general, that I never knew One among them exceed the common frugal popular air; And so great, That of the two chief Officers in my time, Vice-Admiral De Ruiter, and the Pensioner De Wit (One, generally esteemedby Forreign Nations, as great a Sea-man, and the other as great a States-man, as any of their Age), I never saw the first in Clothes better than the commonest Sea-Captain, nor with above one man following him, nor in a Coach: And in his own House, neither was the Size, Building, Furniture, or Entertainment, at all exceeding the use of every common Merchant and Tradesman in his Town. For the Pensioner De Wit, who had the great influence in the

Government, The whole train and expence of Domestique went very equal with other common Deputies or his Ministers of the State; His Habit grave, and plain, and popular; His Table what only serv'd turn for his Family, or a Friend; His Train (besides Commissaries and Clerks kept for him in an Office adjoining to his House, at the publique charge) was only one man, who performed all the Menial service of his House at home; and upon his Visits of Ceremony, putting on a plain Livery-Cloak, attended his Coach abroad: For upon other occasions, He was seen usually in the streets on foot and alone, like the commonest Burger of the Towp. Nor was this manner of life affected, or used by these particular men, but was the general fashion or mode among all the Magistrates of the State: For I speak not of the Military Officers, who are reckon'd their Servants, and live in a different garb, though generally modester than in other Countreys.

Thus this stomachful People, who could not endure the least exercise of Arbitrary Power of Impositions, or the sight of any Forreign Troops under the Spanish Government; Have been since inured to all of them, in the highest degree, under their own Popular Magistrates; Bridled with hard Laws; Terrifiea. with severe Executions; Environ'd with Forreign Forces; And opprest with the>most cruel Hardship and variety of Taxes, that was ever known under any Government. But all this, whilst the way to Office and Authority lyes through those qualities which acquire the general esteem of the people; Whilst no man is exempted from the danger and current of Laws; Whilst Soldiers are confin'd to Frontier-Garrisons (the guard of Inland or Trading-Towns being lett to the Burghers themselves;) And whilst no great Riches are seen to enter by Publique Payments into private Purses, either to raise Families, or to feed the prodigal Expences of vain, extravagant, and luxurious men; But all Publique Moneys are applied to the Safety, Greatness, or Honour of the State, and the Magistrates themselves bear an equal share in all the Burthens they impose.

The Authority of the Princes of Orange

The Authority of the Princes of Orange, though intermitted upon the untimely death of the last [William II] , and infancy of this present Prince [William III, 1650-1702]; Yet as it must be ever acknowledged to have had a most essential part in the first frame of this Government, and in all the Fortunes thereof, during the whole growth and progress of the State : So has it ever

preserved a very strong root, not only in Six of the Provinces, but even in the general and popular affections of the Province of Holland it self, Whose States have for these last Twenty years so much endeavoured to suppress or exclude it.

This began in the person of Prince William of Nassau, at the very birth of the State; And not so much by the quality of being Governour of Holland and Zeeland in Charles the Fifth's and Philip the Second's time; As by the esteem of so great Wisdom, Goodness and Courage, as excell'd in that Prince, and seems to have been from him derived to his whole Race; Being indeed the qualities that naturally acquire esteem and authority among the people in all Governments. Nor has this Nation in particular, since the time perhaps of Civilis, ever been without some Head, under some Title or other; but always a Head subordinate to their Laws and Customs, and to the Sovereign Power of the State.

In the first Constitution of this Government, after the Revolt from Spain All the Power and Rights of Prince William of Orange, as Governour of the Provinces, seem to have been carefully reserved. But those which remain'd inherent in the Sovereign, were devolved upon the Assembly of the States-General, so as in them remained the power of making Peace and War, and all Forreign Alliances, and of raising and coining of Moneys. In the Prince, the command of all Land and Sea-Forces, as CaptainGeneral and Admiral, and thereby the disposition of all Military Commands; The power of pardoning the Penalty of Crimes; The chusing of Magistrates upon the nomination of the Towns; For they presented three to the Prince, who elected one out of that number. Originally the States-General were convoked by the Council of State, where the Prince had the greatest influence: Nor since that change, have the States used to resolve any important matter without his advice. Besides all this, As the States-General represented the Sovereignty, so did the Prince of Orange the Dignity of this State, by publique Guards, and the attendance of all Military Officers; By the application of all Forreign Ministers, and all pretenders at home; By the splendour of his Court, and magnificence of his Expence, supported not only by the Pensions and Rights of his several Charges and Commands, but by a mighty Patrimonial Revenue in Lands, and Sovereign Principalities and Lordships, as well in France, Germany, and Burgundy, as in the several parts of the Seventeen Provinces; so as Prince Henry was used to answer some that would have flattered him into the designs of a more Arbitrary

Power, That he had as much as any wise Prince would desire in that State; since he had all indeed, besides that of Punishing men, and raising Money; whereas he had rather the envy of the first should lye upon the Forms of the Government; and he knew the other could never be supported without the consent of the people, to that degree which was necessary for the defence of so small a State against so mighty Princes as their Neighbours.

Upon these Foundations was this State first establish'd, and by these Orders maintained, till the death of the last Prince of Orange; When by the great influence of the Province of Holland amongst the rest, the Authority of the Princes came to be shared among the several Magistracies of the State; Those of the Cities assumed the last nomination of their several Magistrates; The States-Provincial, the disposal of all Military Commands in those Troops which their share was to pay; And the States-General, the Command of the Armies, by Officers of their own appointment, substituted and changed at their will. No power remain'd to pardon what was once condemned by rigor of Law; Nor any person to represent the Port and Dignity of a Sovereign · State; Both which could not fail of being sensibly missed by the people, since no man in particular can be secure of offending, or would therefore absolutely despair of impunity himself, though he would have others do so; And men are generally pleas'd with the Pomp and Splendor of a Government, not only as it is an amusement for idle people, but as it is a mark of the Greatness, Honour and Riches of their Countrey.

However these Defects were for near Twenty years supplied in some measure, and this Frame supported by the great Authority and Riches of the Province of Holland, which drew a sort of dependance from the other Six; and by the great Sufficiency, Integrity and Constancy of their chief Minister, and by the effect of both in the prosperous Successes of their Affairs: Yet having a Constitution strained against the current vein and humour of the people, It was always evident, that upon the growth of this young Prince, The great Virtues and Qualities he derived from the mixture of such Royal and such Princely Blood, could not fail in time of raising His Authority to equal at least, if not to surpass that of his glorious Ancestors.