

*A short instruction by one who has at heart the prosperity of these Netherlands, in which it is clearly shown that it is lawful to resist a king or lord of the country, 1586*

Introduction: This pamphlet gives a brief summary of the ideas of Junius Brutus' *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* of 1579. The author Francis Coornhert (born 1519) was at the time town clerk of Amsterdam to whose burgomasters he dedicated the pamphlet on 28 March 1586. It was published with the permission of the earl of Leicester. Leicester had been sent to the Netherlands in 1585 with a relief army after the assassination of William of Orange in 1584 and the fall of Antwerp to the Spanish in 1585. He was invited to become the Governor-General of the Netherlands by the Estates and assumed this post in January of 1586 but returned to England in November of 1586. The text is from E.H. Kossmann and A.F. Mellink, eds., *Texts Concerning the Revolt of The Netherlands*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 267-69.

[Having studied the limitations of the king's power in matters concerning religion] we must now consider the question whether there are also secular rights and reasons which make it permissible to oppose and resist a king, prince or lord of the country if, contrary to the oath he has sworn to the provinces and subjects, he wants to rob them of all their possessions and deprive them of their rights and privileges and reduce them to everlasting servitude, slavery and bondage. The vital point here is that before taking possession of his power a king, prince or lord swears to allow the provinces and their inhabitants to preserve their privileges and rights. And after a king, prince or lord has taken possession of his power, he does not govern these provinces or subjects absolutely or alone; he has co-rulers and coregents, who have also taken the oath, and govern with him. These are, for instance, the States of the provinces, the provincial courts and councils, the magistrates, judges etc.

In addition to them a king, prince or lord has his own special councillors, stewards, chancellors, bailiffs etc., but their commission and office come to an end at the death of their king, prince or lord. However, the commissions of the States of the provinces, provincial courts and councils, magistrates etc., are not terminated on the death of the king, prince or lord; they remain unchanged during the life of the king, prince or lord of the country as well as after his death. After the death of the lord of the country the States, provincial courts, councils and magistrates govern the country, administer justice and take complete control (for they took the oath to the provinces as well as to the king, prince or lord of the provinces) until a new king,

prince or lord is invested, and to him they then renew their oath.

Moreover the king, prince or lord of the country has no power to pledge or still less to sell the provinces, nor may he tax his subjects without the express consent of the States as co-rulers of the country. Nor may he violate, importune or molest any one, nor take his life or possessions on his own authority and at his own will. He has to submit to and put himself under the sacred law and under the judgment of the States, provincial courts and councils of the country, and he may not wrong the humblest of his subjects. Should he think he has some grievance against any of his subjects, he must take them to law. He may not be his own judge. He must accept the authority of the sacred law and of justice if any one, either one of his subjects or a foreigner, believes himself to have cause for complaint and takes legal proceedings against him. These privileges and rights have been observed for as long as the Netherlands have been the Netherlands.

The States, provincial courts and councils and the magistrates have been expressly appointed and sworn as co-rulers of the provinces to watch vigilantly over the administrative activities of the king as lord of the country. If they discover that the king or lord of the provinces is exceeding his power and that consequently the provinces are damaged, the subjects oppressed or the privileges and rights of the provinces violated, they must prevent this with all diligence and stand up against it. It is not sufficient for them to do good and to govern righteously themselves, they must also prevent evil plans, abuses, bad government or tyranny and defend the interests of their fatherland. And if they do not do this but are hand in glove with the prince or lord of the country or connive at abuses, then they should themselves be considered forsworn law-breakers, tyrants and traitors to their fatherland.

Should it be discovered that a king, prince or lord of the country has exceeded the powers given him when he swore his oath, and has not observed the privileges and rights which he swore to the provinces and his subjects to keep, and has reigned willfully and tyrannically, all written and natural laws undoubtedly allow the subjects to resist so tyrannical and an insane king, prince or lord, to defend themselves, to protect the fatherland and their lives, wives, children, grandchildren, descendants and possessions against such violence and tyranny, and against the everlasting slavery to which such a tyrant would wish to reduce us, taking from us our rights and

freedoms without which life is hardly worth living.