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Author: Spanninga, Hotso

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Summary

Friesland was one of the most important provinces in the Republic of the United Netherlands, second only to the much wealthier Holland. In the joint expenditure for the Republic as a whole, which went mainly to the army and navy, Friesland paid one-fifth of the sum paid by Holland. However, in the first decades following the Revolt that led to the Dutch Republic, Friesland was unwilling, and frequently unable, to meet its financial obligations in full and at all times. This reluctance and inability were both a direct consequence of the Dutch Revolt, which had given rise to the Republic and had restored the legendary Frisian freedom lost in 1498. The Frisians now set great store by their independence. They preferred to take as little notice as possible of the confederacy to which they belonged and they were averse to domination by 'The Hague' and Holland. At the same time, the Revolt replaced a monocratic form of government with a collegiate one. A representative and particularist bottom-up structure took the place of a top-down structure, making it much more difficult to take decisions, certainly when it came to financial matters. This book describes how both the revitalized notion of Frisian freedom and the idiosyncratic political culture hampered the province's ability to function within the Republic. It also sets out how and to what extent a process of state building took place, with Friesland becoming more firmly embedded in the Republic. This study is thus also a case study of how the Republic functioned as a confederacy of provinces during the first four decades of the seventeenth century.

At all times there were three different interests at stake within Frisian politics: those of Friesland as a free republic, of the United Provinces as a whole and the personal self-interests of the regents. From time to time these were intersected by yet other interests, which sometimes prevailed but which invariably led to conflicts that were difficult to resolve. These were government interests on the one hand, and on the other, those of private creditors, *kloostermeiers* (who leased former monastic lands) and taxpayers in the countryside and towns. Other interests were those of town and country, the nobility and patriciate, the Hof, States and Delegated States, the *grietmannen* (or magistrates) and the enfranchised, the stadholder and regents, and members of the Reformed Churches and Roman Catholics. This

book is an attempt to unravel these various interests and to show their interrelationships.

Chapter 1 describes Friesland's position within the Republic. Chapter 2 then examines the province's idiosyncratic political culture, which was shaped by the unusual extent to which political powers were divided, more so than in other provinces. After the Revolt, not only did the Frisians once again choose their own administrators and magistrates, as they had done prior to 1498, they also elected sixty representatives to the Landdag, at least for the three rural quarters. Together with twenty-two representatives of the towns, they made up the States of Friesland, where the highest authority had been invested since the end of the sixteenth century. Fierce election battles in the countryside often preceded these elections to the Landdag. In particular, the large numbers of freeholders in the early decades of the seventeenth century, and the fact that for the remaining enfranchised holdings the tenant farmers normally exercised their right to vote, had major ramifications for the functioning of the Frisian States assembly. In the 1620s and especially the 1630s, when the province's dire financial straits made the imposition of new taxes, and the raising of existing ones, a bitter necessity, the representatives and their electors became increasingly embroiled with one another. This was because decisions about taxation had to be taken by the representatives, who had a keen interest in being elected or re-elected by the thousands of voters. These voters were for the most part ordinary tenant farmers, who certainly had no desire to pay higher taxes. Formally speaking, the representatives were chosen without obligation or the need to refer back to their electoral supporters, but in practice they were bound hand and foot to those who had voted for them. In order to secure or better their position, many existing and prospective office holders promised to authorize no new taxes, a phenomenon that would reach its peak in the years 1635-1637.

The Frisian notion of freedom, seamlessly integrated with the representative, bottom-up political system, thus presented a major obstacle to Friesland's ability to function within the Dutch Republic. Although the Republic had been formed to preserve the freedoms and privileges of the individual provinces, these provinces did need to work together in order to be able to fight their common enemy – and that meant raising money to maintain soldiers. Its reluctance and inability to pay made Friesland a notorious – if not the most notorious – defaulter among the united provinces. Even without Friesland's contribution, there were enough ducats flowing from Holland's horn of plenty to keep the war going, a fact that the Frisians were well aware of. Unfortunately, despite this formal – and certainly moral – agreement, Friesland often paid too little and too late. To the immense displeasure of its allies, not least of which was the powerful Holland, Friesland proved to be rather uncompromising when it came to settling its ever greater arrears. Countless delegations from the States General could do little to remedy the situation. They came back empty-handed each time from Leeuwarden, or at most with empty promises.

As the best – and perhaps sole – remedy for Friesland's lack of funds, the States General repeatedly and emphatically recommended that new excises be introduced and existing ones raised. In fact, Holland tried to impose its own tax system on the other provinces, both maritime and inland. This was adopted very grudgingly and only at lower rates. After all, it was these indirect taxes on consumer goods – called simply the 'General Means' – that gave Holland the financial resilience and credit-worthiness to pay more than all the other provinces put together. In Holland, the General Means, whose burden was primarily felt by the ordinary people, yielded roughly three times as much as the *verponding*, or land tax. The opposite was the case in early seventeenth-century Friesland, where the *floreenbelasting*, akin to the *verponding* in Holland, brought in three times as much as the existing excise duties. As a maritime province, Friesland lacked neither trade nor industry, but the predominantly agrarian nature of the province and the fact that its towns were smaller than in Holland probably justified its protest that it was paying too much. The fact that Friesland wanted nothing to do with the General Means was also due to the sharp conflict of interests between the towns, which feared having to pay too much in the event of new and higher excises being levied, and the countryside, which did not wish to see any rise in the land tax. If the Frisian towns had not been outvoted by the countryside at the States assembly and had had more political influence, as was the case in Holland, there would no doubt have been greater support among the citizenry for the heavy taxes that had to be collected. In any event, as a sovereign province, Friesland could not simply be coerced by the other provinces. It could be forced into foreclosure by having to bear the costs of billeting soldiers, but this was a drastic remedy that was seldom applied. Although Friesland was threatened with this measure on more than one occasion, the complex domestic situation meant that the threat was never followed through.

In 1626, following repeated demands and many delegations from the States General, the States of Friesland finally agreed to the introduction of the General Means (Chapter 3). But even before arrangements could be made to lease the tax-collecting privileges, a major rebellion broke out in the province. A failed coup attempt by the Frisian stadholder Ernst Casimir only served to exacerbate the situation. The gentlemen of the States General, in Leeuwarden to promote the adoption of the General Means, were obliged to flee Friesland in great haste in order to save their skins. For the time being, the States General continued to confine themselves to making written requests for payment or to sending delegations.

In January 1632 the Generality renewed its attempts to have the General Means adopted in Friesland (Chapter 4). This time the gentlemen of the Generality were accompanied by a large force of 2000 soldiers. Although the Council of State and Frederik Hendrik, who had dispatched the troops, advised against actual foreclosure, the screws were now put on in earnest. Nevertheless, the Frisian Landdag continued to be divided and indecisive, whereupon the representatives of the States

General introduced the taxes on their own authority and arranged for the leasing of tax-collecting privileges. But no sooner had the gentlemen from The Hague and the soldiers departed (the soldiers could no longer be spared in the war) than the whole matter was immediately withdrawn.

History repeated itself two years later. Although the representatives in the Landdag were still unable to reach agreement on either the sums requested by The Hague or the adoption of the General Means, the delegates from the States General undertook unilaterally to lease out the collection of the new taxes. The excises put pressure primarily on the common people, who then rose up in revolt across the province in June 1634. The representatives, the tax lessees and their collectors were the scapegoats. Because most of the troops were in the field, the government could do little to combat looting and the molestation of regents. Alarmed by the popular uprising, the States General decided in consultation with Frederik Hendrik to once again dispatch a large force to the province. As these troops were not part of Friesland's provincial allocation, they owed their allegiance to the States General and to Frederik Hendrik, and not to the States of Friesland and Hendrik Casimir. A civil war threatened. In this tense situation Hendrik Casimir, the 22-year-old Frisian stadholder and captain general who had succeeded his father in 1632, managed to salvage both his own honour and standing and that of Friesland by galloping to Kuinre just before the troops crossed the Frisian border. There on 22 June 1634 he succeeded firstly in stopping the troops and secondly in billeting them under *his* orders, not that of the States General and Frederik Hendrik, and not just in Leeuwarden, which had been the plan, but dispersed across the larger towns and villages in order to stifle any uprisings that might arise. When the delegates arrived in Leeuwarden with only a portion of their troops, over which they no longer had any say, the sting had been taken out of their mission. It was a complete failure. Like so many times before, the gentlemen from The Hague were obliged to leave empty-handed, Friesland continued in its stubborn refusal to pay and, while the lack of clarity about the new taxes persisted, the people remained restive.

By 1635 Frisian willingness to cooperate with the Generality in fiscal matters dropped to an all-time low (chapter 5). There was widespread dissatisfaction about the burden of taxation, together with deepening financial chaos. The person held responsible for all this misery was Receiver General Johan van Bootsma, the highest tax official. Accused of years of misappropriating funds, he was asked to immediately submit his incomplete accounts for the years 1629-1631. The Bootsma issue assumed tremendous and divisive importance in the Landdag. There were roughly two factions in the Landdag at that time, and they were now even more divided in their opposition to one another. First was the faction surrounding the stadholder and the Hof (the 'Hof faction'), which had effectively had the upper hand until now. That was partly due to the fact that the stadholder and Hof had for many years appointed the magistracy in the towns (with the exception of Leeuwarden

and Franeker) and thus had a major hand in the composition of the Towns quarter. This was the faction that was proportionately most inclined to work together with the States General. Opposed to them was the 'States faction', made up of many nobles and freehold farmers who came mainly from the rich clay areas of Oostergo and Westergo. They were the ones who banged hardest on the drum of 'Frisian freedom', who complained loudest about the onerous tax burden and who were therefore most averse to interference by the States General in Frisian affairs. This faction seized the allegations levelled at Bootsma to strengthen their own position. They circulated the rumour that a good deal of money could be had from him, so much so that there was no need for heavy taxes. In this way the malcontents succeeded in securing so many votes that they gained a majority both in the Chambers of Oostergo and Westergo and in the college of the Delegated States. The Landdag then focused solely on making life uncomfortable for Bootsma and on scheming among themselves for the lucrative posts.

But the States faction was not yet able to get its own way. The towns were its biggest obstacle. In July 1635, however, the faction played a masterful stroke. With a majority of votes, or so at least they claimed, the rural quarters decided to grant the nine towns the right to appoint their own magistrates, thereby placing them outside the sphere of influence of the stadholder and Hof. The burghers and other townsfolk were also stirred up by the allegation that all problems could be traced back to the chaos in Bootsma's office. Many were only too keen to be delivered from the yoke of stadholder and Hof. The Delegated States, who were authorized to take the decision, did the rounds of the towns in question and with little difficulty were able to replace the incumbent magistrates with their own supporters, thereby giving the States faction the upper hand in the Landdag.

Naturally, yet another delegation from the States General paid a visit to the unruly province, in October 1635. This time the five men brought no soldiers with them because the army needed them in the field. In Leeuwarden they met the Frisian stadholder Hendrik Casimir, who of course did not accept the new free magistracy. More of a warrior than a politician, he saw only one way to achieve a settlement. However, an attack on Leeuwarden and Harlingen by soldiers under his command failed miserably when the Delegated States got wind of it, making the position of both the stadholder and the delegates of the States General still more untenable. Nevertheless the delegates appeared at the *Landschapshuis* to make it absolutely clear what they had come for: the debts had to be paid *at once*, the General Means adopted, the deposed magistrates restored to their posts and the Frisian officers to take the oath to the Generality. Otherwise, they would press ahead with foreclosure, which would entail Frederik Hendrik quartering his troops at the province's expense. The Frisians, however, simply denied the size of the debt. They said that enough money had been handed over already, that other provinces didn't pay either and that Friesland was certainly in no position to cough up so much. The

delegates' spirits sank like a stone. Despite their claims, they had no soldiers to back them up and on New Year's Day 1636 they departed with their tails between their legs, leaving the Frisians to their own devices once again. In the battle for the rich official posts, the Frisians sometimes literally went for one another's throats. In the meantime their province sank slowly but surely into the financial abyss.

After years of patience, Holland and the other provinces in the States General, as well as Frederik Hendrik, then at the height of his power, had had enough (chapter 6). The risks had become too great, as Friesland threatened to slide into chaos and place itself outside the United Provinces. In close consultation with Frederik Hendrik, a decision was taken in November 1636 to send the Council of State *en corps* to Leeuwarden. They were ordered not to return until the General Means had been adopted, thereby enabling Friesland from now on to meet its financial obligations to the Generality. They were obliged to support a solution proposed earlier for the Frisian debt problem, namely the sale of monastic lands seized by the States of Friesland in 1580. The return on these assets, roughly 18,000 hectares of prime agricultural land, was extremely poor because farm rents were too low. The sale would earn substantial amounts for the treasury and, at least in part, would cancel the Frisian debts to the Generality.

No sooner had they arrived than the gentlemen were confronted with the biggest and most fundamental problem – one on which, as we have seen, earlier delegations had also foundered. There were seldom, if ever, enough representatives present in the four Chambers to take decisions because they were bound irrevocably to the wishes and desires of their 'principals'. This was particularly the case when the Landdag was obliged to impose or increase taxes and the many principals, for obvious reasons, were unprepared to lend their support. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, the representatives would then leave the Landdag, first one and then the other, to consult their supporters at home. Or they would literally walk away from decisions that their electorate would find unpalatable, all because the representatives wanted to be re-elected in the next annual election. *Kloostermeiers*, those who leased monastic lands, were another important pressure group; in some *grietenijen* they even had a majority of the votes. They leased their land for a song and were naturally vigorously opposed to the proposed sale of 'their' property. Because there were more than 80 representatives with voting rights in the four Chambers, and most representatives felt obliged or had undertaken to refer back to their supporters for instructions, there was an endless coming and going in the Landdag, making it extremely difficult to get anything done.

Just as earlier delegations had done, the gentlemen from the Council of State initially sought to simply get the General Means adopted in Friesland (chapter 7). However, after a lengthier sojourn in the Frisian capital, they had a better understanding of the political situation, and they became convinced that adoption of the new measures would not be possible unless administrative reforms were made.

This meant curbing the influence of the common people and allowing the representatives in the Landdag to take decisions independently, without the electorate constantly breathing down their necks. What the administration needed was a more stable foundation. Step by step and with infinite patience, major reforms were eventually pushed through, although they didn't go as far as the Council of State would have wished. At first a velvet glove was used to this purpose, but later an iron fist. From time to time, when there was no other option, the Council dispatched soldiers, against whom the many petty nobles and freeholders could do very little. Alexander van der Capellen, a Gelderland nobleman and confidant of Frederik Hendrik, played a key part in this. As a member of the Council of State, he was present in Friesland at the most critical times. He understood like no other the 'art of persuasion', an art that was indispensable when it came to administering the Republic.

The Landdag's ability to act decisively was boosted by the fact that soldiers fetched persistently absent representatives from their homes and brought them to the assemblies. And the town gates were strictly guarded whenever difficult decisions had to be made, thereby preventing representatives from leaving earlier than the agreed time. The hardest decision, the sale of monastic lands, could only be taken after the Council had gone to great lengths to bring to a resolution several apparently trifling matters that been the cause of endless niggling. The resolution to sell a relatively small portion of the monastic lands was not signed until the Council brought soldiers to the *Landschapshuis* and posted them at the doors, armed with loaded weapons.

In July 1638, after more than a year and a half, the Council of State's mission in Friesland came to an end. Less was achieved than they had hoped, but major steps had been taken that would ultimately lead to more stable political relations (chapter 8). The General Means were adopted, the States General had given the nine towns new rules of procedure regarding the magistracy, thereby curtailing the influence of the common people, the stadholder was granted the *magistraatsbestelling* (the power to appoint magistrates), giving him significantly greater control over Frisian politics, the political influence of the *kloostermeiers* was eliminated, the first monastic lands were sold and the position of the Delegated States was strengthened. Finally, the access to the Landdag was better regulated through the adoption of fixed forms for convocations, for the letters of credence that the representatives were required to bring with them and for the oath that they had to take. These measures did indeed bear fruit in the years that followed. In 1639, 1640 and 1644, the remaining former monastic lands were auctioned without protest. In addition, in 1640 the States adopted rules for the voting procedure, which took up many of the proposals made earlier by Van der Capellen. These rules defined the election procedure precisely. From now on, it was clear with whom the voting rights lay, namely with the owners of the land, and elections became much harder

to manipulate. Moreover, voting registers were established, which clearly stipulated the holdings to which voting rights were attached. The long-term outcome of all this was that especially *grietmannen* and their families systematically bought up franchised properties. This created voting monopolies in many *grietenijen*, with the *grietmannen* acquiring the power of decision over their office and the power to appoint the annual representatives to the Landdag for their *grietenij*. In some respects, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they increasingly became the only true 'free Frisians' – kings of their castles, independent of other owners, of the stadholder and of the conniving co-regents.

All in all, we can conclude that during the early years of the Republic the Frisians were unable to extricate themselves by their own efforts from the political quagmire of their 'recaptured' Frisian freedom, but had to be made to do so from outside. With Holland of course at the helm, they were called sharply to order in 1638-1639 by the other provinces, which did not lose sight of their own financial and other interests and those of the United Provinces as a whole. The Generality's intervention in Friesland did indeed resolve to a degree the most fundamental problem in Frisian politics – the inertia and indecisiveness of the States Assembly. For the first time, the province entered into less turbulent political waters, the nature of Frisian politics changed, Frisian bankruptcy was averted and relations with the other provinces were at their best since the United Provinces were created. Without consensus, the Republic would never have been able to hold out for almost two centuries. This consensus was now more or less achieved in Friesland as well, albeit in spite of the Frisians rather than because of them.