



CENTRALIZATION OF POWER IN LEVELLER POLITICAL LITERATURE: A GOVERNMENT THAT SECURES INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS OR THE PROJECTION OF AN UNRESTRAINED POWER?

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to study the political literature of a movement known as Levellers, recognized for their important political activity in England during the 1640s and 1650s. The aim is to analyse how in the texts published by some of the most prominent members of this group we can illustrate some ideas that are related to political centralization, framed within Modern State theories. This is a perspective that has not been fully studied in current research on this group. The purpose is to show how some of their political projections, and especially the role they grant to Parliament, can be assimilated into the processes of political centralization linked to the conceptualization of Modern State sovereignty. In this way, the intention is not only to offer a new perspective on the study of this movement's political ideas, but also to consider the projection of centralized political power in relation to other issues present in Leveller ideology, such as political representation, the limits of government, the defence of individual liberties, and citizen participation, among others.

KEYWORDS: Levellers, Political centralization, Sovereignty, Modern State, Political representation

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a wide range of research that focuses on the conceptual origins of important topics in modern political science during seventeenth-century England. In recent decades, alongside studies on renowned thinkers such as Hobbes or Locke, different works multiplied on contemporary figures, perhaps less well known outside the English academic sphere, such as Harring-

ton, Milton, Coke or even radical political movements like the Levellers, Diggers, Ranters or Fifth Monarchists. This article aims to analyse the case of the Levellers. The group was of major importance during the period commonly known as the English or Puritan Revolution or the Great Rebellion. They were especially recognized for their political activism, particularly in the city of London, and the influence of their ideas inside the New Model Army. Perhaps the point for which they are most quoted refers to the publication of a series of documents known as the “Agreement of the People”, in which they proposed a restructuring of the political and legal system in England. Its leaders were John Lilburne, Richard Overton and William Walwyn. The following article focuses on the analysis of texts written by these authors, together with others linked to the movement, from a perspective that has not been wholly developed in current research. The aim is to examine how Leveller literature conceptualizes an institutionalization of politics related to political centralization, framed within some ideas of Modern State formation theories.

Most of the current works on this group focuses on topics such as the promotion of individual liberties, participatory democracy, limits to government, radical individualism, religious freedom, pluralism, political egalitarianism, or even the critique of centralized bureaucracies (Brailsford 1961, 418; Krey 2017, 10–11; Como 2004, chap. 1; Davies 2019; Wood 2002, 163–65). Referring to the specific topic I wish to develop, leading researchers argue that this group had not properly prefixed a scheme of government or a transitional strategy for the establishment of a political order (Foxley 2013, 29-30 and 209; Wootton 2008, 415-25). In other cases, it is noted that they possessed only a program of reform, with no coercive element in their political projects (Curelly and Smith 2016, 2–3; Zagorin 1965, 40). In addition, an important fact that should be considered is that, within the wide range of the texts that correspond to this group, the terms State, government, representatives, Parliament, people and nation are often not clearly differentiated. This is not strange, given that by the 1640s there were other intellectuals who used the words nation, kingdom and State interchangeably (Skinner 2009, 337–38). Finally, along with conceptual diversity, one cannot forget that the Levellers were by no means a homogeneous intellectual movement or any kind of association analogous to a modern political party (Hill 1991, 114; Krey 2017, 2–3; Manuel 1984, 206). Moreover, its members, especially the leaders, changed their political positions throughout the 1640s and 1650s. However, it is also true that there was a certain idea of union, which was expressed not only at a theoretical level, but also in the organization they possessed as a political group (Brailsford 1961, 309; Rees 2016, chap. 15). Within this framework, beyond the differences that may

have existed between its members, my work aims to analyse a series of postulates that can be found throughout several of their texts.

The issue I seek to raise is also a complex one, because even in cases where Leveller literature presents what a governmental structure should be, actual research describes it under a sphere of strong limitations to political power and the promotion of individual rights (Morgan 1989, 88; Zagorin 1965, 39–41; McLynn 2013, chap. 6; Peacey 2018, 87–91; Brailsford 1961, 537–38; Sargeant 2020, 674; Rees 2016, chap. 13; Cueva Fernandez 2008, 231–35; Braddick 2018, 295). Consequently, their ideas, far from justifying centralized and absolute power, are often related to the weighting of an active and participatory citizenship, associating them with traditions of political thought linked to liberalism, republicanism, or democracy. The aim of my study is not to deny or contradict these positions. In any case, I will intend to show how these radicals proposed a governmental scheme of centralized power as a kind of necessary element for the correct development of those other propositions. To do so, I will consider some classical theories regarding sovereignty and Modern State formation. Although the intellectuals I will take as a theoretical framework have important disagreements on this topic, my aim is not to focus on these discussions, but rather to highlight some topics that can be traced in most of these works, to analyse whether Levellers' thought could be framed within them.

2. POWER CENTRALIZATION

To properly begin with the analysis, I would like to transcribe an extract from the first draft of the “Agreement of the People”, which describes the functions that Parliament should have, considering that the Levellers affirmed that this institution should only be composed of the House of Commons¹. The excerpt in question reads as follows:

That the power of this and all future representatives of this nation is inferior only to theirs who choose them, and doth extend, without the consent or concurrence of any other person or persons, to the enacting, altering, and repealing of laws; to the erecting and abolishing of offices and courts; to the appointing, removing, and calling to account magistrates and officers of all degrees; to the making war and peace; to the treating with foreign states; and generally, to whatsoever is not ex-

¹ While contemporary studies cast doubt on whether this document was produced by the leaders of the Levellers, it is highlighted that it is fully compatible with their ideas and that the real authors would have been strongly connected with them (Robertson 2018, 63; Krey 2017, 147).

pressly or impliedly reserved by the represented to themselves.
(VVAA [1647] 1998, 94)²

Here I would like to primarily consider three points. Firstly, the functions the Levellers ascribe to the representatives are more than compatible with those that Jean Bodin described in relation to sovereign power. Parliament alone has the capacity to make and unmake law (the quintessential attribute of the sovereign according to Bodin), ending in the exclusive monopoly of any kind of policies, whether domestic or foreign. This sovereign legislative capacity is explicitly asserted in other texts (Lilburne [1645] 1998, 5; Overton [1646] 1998b, 63; [1646] 1998a, 37; 1646a, 16). Secondly, Parliament will be solely responsible for these functions, for it is made clear that no other person or entity may share this power. As postulated in one of Skinner's classic works, the State can have no rival within the territory as a legislative power and an object of allegiance (2004, 351–56). This is clearly seen in the Levellers' strong criticism of the king's veto power (Overton 1647, 32; Walwyn 1642b, 15; 1647, 4–5), an issue they shared with coetaneous republican intellectuals (Skinner 1998, 51–56). Not only the monarch, but no other type of institution could have the capacity to interfere with the Parliament's exclusive legislative role. This recreates a Parliament that fits in perfectly with the configuration that Modern State theories project as a monism of power, both in political, legal and military orders (Heller [1934] 1990, 145). The centralized government becomes the exclusive (and legitimate) power that imposes, through the coercion of its apparatus and structures, a series of obligations on the inhabitants, to obtain compliant social behaviours (Simmons 1999, 746–48; Schiera 1994, 18–22). The 1649 Agreement repeats this issue, noting that Parliament should be responsible for relations with other nations, and for safeguarding the “lives, limbs, liberties, properties and estates” of individuals, in a clear anticipation of terms that would later be used by other political authors such as Locke. Interestingly, the document concludes by stating that the functions of Parliament involve “all things” conducive to the aggrandizement of the liberty and prosperity of the Commonwealth (Lilburne et al. [1649] 1998, 173).

The third point I wish to make concerns the last sentence of that first quote. Much of the current research that associates Levellers' political thought with democratic or liberal tendencies would probably focus on the explicitness that government has a strong limit in a series of guarantees that individuals reserve to themselves. In fact, contemporary studies quote this

² The primary sources are to be found in compilations published in recent decades, but I was able to study most of them thanks to the access I had to the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the British Library in London. There I was able to consult original texts (or their digitalizations), most of which form part of the Early English Books Online database (cited in bibliography as EBO).

same paragraph from the Agreement, without referring at all to State sovereignty, but as a knot to understand the topic of representation (Sharp 2001, 182). However, I would like to emphasize the word “whatsoever”, term that appears in other Levellers’ texts in an analogous way (Lilburne 1646c, 3–4; 1646d, 9; Lilburne and Overton 1648, 10–12). The same could be said of “all things” in the 1649 sketch. It is true that Levellers always stress that the people must act as an unavoidable limit against possible government’s tyrannical action. This limit is based both on the role of the people as the true sovereign, as well as on a natural rights theory. However, I believe that the use of terms such as “whatsoever” or “all things” to refer to the functions of government should not be overlooked. At a level of political philosophy, the very idea of a power that can do “all things” implies in essence an omnipotence that does not allow for exceptions, unless that same power agrees to self-impose those limits. Considering the above, this topic opens in some way the discussion about the extent to which the constituted power (in this case the Parliament) could in part emancipate itself from the constituent power (the people), a relevant topic of study in current political philosophy (Barshack 2006, 219; Attel 2009, 45–46; Blom Hansen and Steputat 2006, 299).

The perspective is repeated throughout the Leveller literature, beyond the tone that each text may acquire based on the specific political circumstances. On several occasions, Parliament is presented as the power par excellence and the supreme authority, arguing that this institution should make use of this power precisely because the sovereign people impose it, explaining that any other entity should subordinate itself to it (White 1649; Lilburne et al. [1649] 1998, 170; Walwyn [1647] 1998, 77; 1648, 13; Overton [1646] 1998b, 62; 1646e, 58; 1649b, 3–4; Lilburne and Overton 1647, 14). Lilburne often refers to this supreme authority of the House of Commons when he criticizes the Lords for attempting to judge him (1646a, 3 and 9; 1647a, 1). Sometimes they go even further and describe it directly as the “Sovereign House”, the “Sovereign Power of the Land” and, at a judicial level, “the highest Court of Iudicature” and a “transcendent Tribunal” beyond which no appeal can be made (Overton 1646a, 19–20; 1646d, 1; Lilburne 1646b, 347–51; 1647c, 47). In this way, Parliament would also act as the highest power at a juridical level, although Lilburne in many cases tries to moderate this (1648a, 9; 1648b, 6; 1649b, 12; 1649d, 12; 1653a, 4; 1653b, 5; Lilburne, Overton, and Prince 1649, 7–9). In reference to the contradictions that this topic arises, Rachel Foxley’s exhaustive work postulates that in the Levellers this “constitutional supremacy” must be differentiated from the “ultimate sovereignty” of the people, making Parliament always accountable (2013, 11). From another perspective, what I seek to present is the problem of how the sovereignty of the people, far from being only a limit to power, acts as

the guarantor of a strongly centralized power, a fact that sometimes leads the Levellers to reproach parliamentarians for not properly assuming this power (Lilburne [1648] 1806-1812, 1007; Overton et al. 1645, 1–3)³.

In this way, the Levellers tend to project a conception of political power that is clearly compatible with sovereignty and Modern-State theories. The rational imprint, that contemporary studies place at the basis of these theories to justify citizens' rights, also appears as the foundation of this conceptualization of political power. In Leveller texts, reason, which is at once compatible with divine designs and the natural order that God created, serves to shape political power in accordance with a scheme of justice. This could be associated with the Modern State founded on a rationality that creates a machine of concentrated power operating over a given territory (Miglio [1981] 1988, 808; O'Donnell 1978, 1158). At the same time, this rationality ends up operating on the very art of government, making the state an intelligible principle of what it is and what it should be (Foucault 2006, 120). I believe that the Levellers envisage this conceptualization precisely when they propose that the Parliament can do “whatsoever” and “all things”. Of course, the aim is to ensure individual rights, but without forgetting that this action cannot be challenged by any other institution. It is true that the Levellers could not properly be associated with that way of understanding politics described by authors such as Foucault, sometimes related to reason of State. If one recalls Viroli's renown thesis, the Levellers would be much closer to that definition of politics associated with the reason-justice binomial, and thus opposed to a reason of State whose aim is the mere imposition of control over the population (2005, 1–3 and 286-291). The Levellers' fierce opposition to absolute monarchy would be a major example. However, when they project the structure of the correct political authority, I would not be so categorical in asserting that this projection has no relation to modern reason of State. Levellers wanted to base their idea of government on reason and justice, but once they describe the governmental structure of the new Commonwealth, the result is the recreation of an order of control over people. Nor should it be forgotten that the Levellers present this order as the culmination of a system that perfectly complements the divine plan together with a rationality that seems indisputable. In this sense, any institutional structuring that does not conform to the framework of the Agreement is described as sinful, demonic, irrational, unnatural and unjust (Lilburne [1646] 1998, 31). Government rationality can only be channelled theoretically and practically through their Agreement, document that becomes the only legal-political structure

³ Similar phrases can be found in the famous pamphlet entitled *Light shing in Buckinghamshire*, a text related to Leveller-influenced literature but with a much greater degree of radicalism (Anonym [1648] 2016, n. 118–120).

that can rationally give England a just government in perpetuity for future generations (Lilburne 1649d, 36; 1653c, 5; Walwyn [1647] 1998, 77; Wood et al. 1649; Overton 1646e, 66–68; 1649a, 4; Lilburne, Overton, and Prince 1649, 17). In fact, they explicitly warn that, if not implemented, only chaos or tyranny will remain (Overton et al. 1645, 7).

In view of the above, despite the radical nature of their proposals and their ideas about resistance, some part of Leveller political thought could still be framed as a systematization of politics linked to the implementation of order. If one recalls the religious background of their members, this could be related to Calvinist and other confessional perspectives on order and discipline (Walzer 1965, 310–12; Certeau 2007, 32–33; Como 2004, chap. 4), but also to a very typical tendency of the period linked to the late Renaissance and the Baroque (Bouwsma 2002, 175; Hale 2011, 475). Their proposal never fails to make it clear that the establishment of a government must imply obedience on the part of the citizens. This is sometimes stressed by the Levellers against those who blamed them for wanting to abolish all kinds of authority and religion (Walwyn 1649, 18–19; Lilburne 1645, 5; 1647d, 19; VVAA 1649, 3; Overton 1647, 28). This need for order is sometimes grounded in the idea of political authority and law as a remedy for sin (Walwyn et al. [1649] 1998, 162; Lilburne 1649a, 4–5; 1649d, 67; Overton 1646c, 6), although contemporary studies attempt to dismiss this basis in Leveller political thought (Foxley 2013, 26). Another significant example of this tendency can be seen in their proposals concerning beggary. The Levellers argued that the legitimate government should put an end to this scourge once and for all (Walwyn [1647] 1998, 80; 1648, 5; 1647, 3; Lilburne [1648] 1806–1812, 1009; [1649] 1998, 186; 1653c, 21–22; Lilburne and Overton 1648, 14; Overton [1646] 1998a, 47). Obviously, their intention had religious, moral and even political overtones, since beggary would prevent a free and conscious political participation, an issue that is highlighted by contemporary studies in relation to suffrage extension in Leveller ideology (Hampsher-Monk 1976, 420–22; Macpherson 1963, 126–34). But beyond these intentions, what is certain is that this public policy becomes a clear State function, related to the exercise of a certain moral control over people. This Leveller position could again be associated with Calvinist and Puritan tendencies (Walzer 1965, 211; Weber [1930] 2005, 64–69; Zafirovski 2007, 58–59; Hill 1991, 325–26; Verardi 2013, 250; Taylor 2007, 106–9), but also to policies framed within sixteen century utopias and State formation processes (Hale 2011, 441; Shlapentokh 2007, 37–39). Similar arguments can be said regarding Leveller proposals on education. Contemporary studies point out how in these radicals the State could transform itself into the institution of regulation of civil society, promoting virtue and imposing moral laws in accordance with natural law (Carlin 2018, 32 and 42; Foxley 2013, 134).

Despite their fierce defence of freedom of opinion and expression, examples of this state control can be found in texts where Levellers, or army members linked to them, propose some kind of regulation over printing press or argue in favour of imposing “diligent, faithfull, continued, and powerfull endeavours” to transform the present generation imbued with “great stupiditie” (Wildman 1653, 1–2; Overton 1646a, 3).

The role of a centralized political power can be seen in a topic dear to the Levellers: the relations between the State and the Church (or churches). This issue has been extensively studied, especially with reference to their pioneer ideas on religious freedom and tolerance (Zagorin 1965, 21; Carlin 2018, 35; Richards 2008, 12; Foxley 2013, 142). But these ideas did not hinder them from projecting an official religion, and here it is relevant to investigate what justifications they put forward. In a renowned text, Overton defends the freedom to “worship [God] according to our consciences”, but adding later that the government “may propose” a form that would be considered best for the “information and well-being of the nation” ([1646] 1998a, 43). Under the broad umbrella of religious freedom, it is noted that the good of the nation might need an official church. Freedom of conscience is defended, but the State must assume a certain evangelistic role, using the paradoxical term of “informing” people about God. Walwyn puts it in a similar way when he asserts that, if there were anything to “judge what is agreeable to the Word of God”, this function would certainly fall to Parliament and the ministers appointed for the purpose, though without the power to impose it on the people (1646b, 6–7; 1646c, 4).

These ideas can be analysed through Modern State theories, if we consider that the origin of this political structure is linked to the process of neutralizing religious conflicts, not necessarily to make the religious phenomenon itself disappear, but to incorporate it within a legal and political frame (Forsthoft 1975, 10). Overton expresses this in one of his satires, when one of his characters called “Politicke Power” argues that religious conflicts lead to chaos, and then the character “Mr. State Policie” adds the need to punish any kind of “factious spirit” to ensure peace and *salus populi* (1645c, 28 and 30). In his famous *The compassionate samaritan*, Walwyn uses an almost identical terminology in arguing that the distinction between ecclesiastical and civil government is “inconsistent with the peoples' safety” (1644b, 21–23). The topic is repeated in other Leveller tracts (Walwyn 1646a, 15; 1646d, 3–4; Lilburne 1647b, 5–8; Overton 1645c, 22–24). The centralized political power, in its role as a coercive machine, becomes necessary precisely because religion is projected as a factor to be neutralized (Turco 2011, 325–32). In the Levellers this has a clear application if one recalls their continued appeal for the coexistence between people of different religions, making the State the element par excellence of obedience. Walwyn emphasizes this in

one of his pamphlets using the example of the Roman Empire, where different religions were tolerated as long as they did not “practise nothing against the Politick Laws of the Kingdom” (1642a, 14).

For the Levellers, religion must be developed within the private sphere, forbidding the formation of a religious institutionalization that could recreate loyalties and authorities beyond the boundaries of the Commonwealth and its government. In this sense Overton strongly criticizes Catholics and Presbyterians for attempting to justify a power that could exist in parallel to the civil authorities (Overton 1645a, 19; 1646b, 5 and 14). Already since the late 16th century, a fierce affront to Catholicism had taken root in England, not necessarily on theological grounds, but rather linked to foreign policy (Brad-dick 2004, 306-18). The government projected by the Levellers, as a complement to this historical context, is in accordance with Modern State political essence, which cannot allow, as classical theories dictate, the existence of religious entities that answer to the Pope (or other leadership) and coexist independently from the nation and its norms. References to this appear everywhere in their pamphlets (Overton 1642, 5; 1645b, 4; 1645c, 4–6; Walwyn 1641, 4). The Levellers propose a type of State that clearly falls within theories that describe it as the entity responsible for breaking the universal medieval authorities, such as the Pope and the Emperor, and for undertaking exclusively the task of pacifying the society it governs (Schmitt [1950] 2006, 66), preventing the formation of transnational communities incompatible with certain principles of citizenship (Casanova 2008, 108).

3. POLITICAL CENTRALIZATION AND THE PEOPLE

Now I would like to briefly develop an issue to understand the basis of their ideas related to a centralized political power. The subject I wish to deal with refers to the conception they have of the people (or nation), in the sense of an entity that acquires a high degree of homogeneity, ending in a monistic conformation. By this I mean specifically that the entity “people” is posited as a set of individuals that end up forming an indivisible whole that does not allow for any kind of fragmentation or sectorization. What I would like to present is the problem of defining the community as an exclusive relationship between individuals and the whole they form.

This topic is firstly related to their interpretation of English history. In part the Levellers were followers of a view that had gained prominence in seventeenth century England, alluding to the significance of the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century. This view, in short, postulated that, since William's conquest, the true English people had been subjugated by a ruling class made up of the descendants of those Normans. For several decades,

studies have shown how this perspective was presented in the Levellers and related groups (Hughes 2018, 55; Brailsford 1961, 535-536; Hill 1997, 53-65; Sharp 2001, 186; Pocock 1987, 126). The issue is a complex one because some works probe that the Levellers made use of the past not only within this perspective, but also to find in that past the legal justifications for the regime they were proposing. These radicals dealt with this kind of historical myth in different ways, without having a single opinion among themselves (Dzelzainis 2005, 280-83; Foxley 2018, 14-17; Braddick 2018, 277). On other occasions, they directly rejected history as a justification, focusing on the consolidation of a political philosophy based on abstractions linked to natural rights (Kwiatkowski 2009, 331-32; Romero Gibella 2002, 232; Foxley 2013, 24-25). Beyond these discussions, what I am interested in retaining is the following. Partly because of this Norman myth, a particular representation of the enemy (or enemies) is recreated, which becomes an indispensable basis to their political philosophy and a variable for understanding the role they give to Parliament. As a result of this history of enslavement, the Levellers project a whole series of institutions that are framed as those who oppressed the true English people. This enemy included first and foremost those considered to be the descendants of the Normans: the king, the Lords and the bishops of the established Church. Secondly, it also involved the commercial corporations that obstructed the material development of the common man, the universities that monopolized knowledge, and the judges and lawyers who lived on the legal system recreated in the past.

Considering the above, in the face of a history of oppression and the presence of these enemies, the true English people is conceptualized as the subject of the revolution and at the same time the object of liberation. Consequently, the figuration of State functions based on a strong centralist monism is linked to this representation of the people. Political power must be an accurate reflection of the entity "people", which cannot be thought in a fragmented way. Foreshadowing the discussions present in the context of the French Revolution and in intellectuals such as Sieyès, the Levellers recreate a vision of "people" based on a strong monism and homogeneity. This interpretation has theological, legal and political backgrounds. All individuals who form the "people" are sons of God, all are equal before the law, and all have equal political rights to participate. Any person or entity that attempts to step, even slightly, outside this equality is quickly proclaimed as enemy.

In this context it should be remembered that in medieval England (or at least before the revolution) there were various forms of political participation, but largely through a complex system of institutions that included guilds, companies, corporations, or based on jurisdictions of varied origins, such as wards or parishes (Withington 2015, 315-324; Knights 2015, 520). But Levellers could not accept this. This problem can be studied in reference

to the discussions they had on the composition of Parliament. The Levellers are known for proposing an electoral system in which the number of representatives elected by each jurisdiction should be strictly proportional to the size of the population (VVAA [1647] 1998, 93; Lilburne and Overton 1648, 4). The proposition aimed to create what they thought as a “rational” scheme, in accordance with natural law, putting an end to a system where some counties elected more representatives than they would have been entitled to in a sense of strict demographic proportionality. In this framework, Levellers believed that political participation through those medieval type of entities was the result of an irrational system of privileges. The solution was the implementation of a model that represented total homogeneous equality. Lilburne puts it clearly in one of his first pamphlets, arguing that corporations can exist, but always as a creation of the State, without claiming any kind of specific political representation (1641, 6–7).

In order to further describe this two-way relationship between a homogeneous people and a governmental structure that emulates it, Lilburne asserts in one of his pamphlets that all Englishmen are “all of one nation and people [...], one nation and family”, adding later in reference to Parliament that the “force of your sword rampant is imposed upon the people of this nation” ([1649] 1998, 179–80). Using the words people and nation almost as synonyms, Lilburne indicates that it is upon this whole and undifferentiated body that political power must act, described through a metaphor (“sword”) that associates it directly with coercion. As Rachel Foxley asserts, contrary to the thesis that weights decentralization proposals in Leveller thought, the vision of these radicals was national, and especially in Lilburne the status of the individual is defined by his or her belonging to a people or nation and not by a local community (Foxley 2013, 71–72). This essential relationship between the individual and the people is embodied in a direct correlation in reference to a centralized governmental power. Another clear example of this perspective can be seen in a text by Lilburne from 1649, where he indicates that the term “Commonwealth” can be understood as “all the good & legall People of England” or “the essentiall and fundamentall Government of England” (1649c, 2–6). The basis of the community can only be two entities: the people understood in a moral (*good*) and juridical (*legall*) sense, or else the governmental structure that legislates and acts upon that people. Returning to Modern State theorems, these texts by Lilburne fit well with an idea of nation that is intertwined with the State tending towards a homogenizing scheme (O'Donnell 1978, 1190–93). Such theories argue that sometimes the State itself would be responsible for recreating this homogeneity, principle that the Levellers would not accept because the English people is a pre-existing entity. But regardless of the origin, the result is the same: a people and a central power correlated in a symbiotic bi-directional relationship, and

where any other institutional option is seen as perverse, irrational and sinful.

This brings us to another, not minor, issue. In this framework, only this centralized political State institutionalization could be the legitimate instance that acquires the functions of a public power. Levellers can thus be associated to that process where the State, through the conceptualization of sovereignty, configures a personification of the public in an apparatus that ensures the continuity of governmental processes, claiming with exclusivity the essence of the public sphere, and leaving the individuals merely the private one (Gentile 2008, 16–17; Borrelli 1993, 16 and 81; Negro Pavón 2003, 276–81). The figure of Modern State impersonality is central in this scheme, where its offices cease to belong to the will of a personal government, becoming the channels through which power imposes order throughout the territory, without any other type of external interference (Mansfield 1983, 850–56; Burns 1980, 494; Jackson 2003, 790). In the Levellers this is a natural consequence of their critique to monarchical government, but in their texts the topic is also posed in a way that acquires tones of a solid State theory. This can be seen in a rather curious way in a text by Lilburne which is aimed at delegitimizing the official Church of England, and in which he justifies what the essence of an officer is. He explains that a person cannot legally be considered an officer by virtue of fulfilling the duties of that office, but by being appointed by the king, noting that, when this happens, the individual changes from being a “private man” to a “publicke person”, who can legally perform certain actions (Lilburne 1644, 12–14). Although in this pamphlet he still respects the figure of the king, what I want to highlight is the emphasis he places on the role of political authority as the only legitimate entity to determine that a person can exercise an action that may truly be understood as public.

In this framework, the centralized power must respect the internal privacy of individuals (in the Levellers this is essential, for example regarding religious tolerance), but this same power must absolutely enforce actions to maintain order (Schmitt [1938] 1990, 61). Lilburne goes so far as to make explicit that without a “declared law” on the part of government it would be impossible to find any kind of “rule of obedience” ([1645] 1998, 5). Overton makes a comparable statement when he justifies religious freedom but warns that for non-spiritual acts “humaine and naturall weapons” must be used (1647, 24–25). Similar phraseology can be found in Walwyn, for example when he asserts that the very policy of religious freedom leads people to be “obedient to the State and temporall laws” (1641, 7). The existence of various religious confessions that should be tolerated does not prevent these radicals from remembering that, in civil and military matters, every individual must submit to an “absolute supreme power” (Walwyn 1644a, 6). Following this line of reasoning, in *The compassionate Samaritane*, a text praised for

its defence of tolerance, Walwyn argues, however, that this policy seems to have a paradoxical limit, since no man should be punished for his opinions “unless it be dangerous to the State” (Walwyn 1644b, 5). I do not intend to deny Walwyn's staunch struggle for freedom of worship and expression, but quotes such as these cannot be overlooked. One might ask what “be dangerous” could mean and whether the government would then have the ability, perhaps in exceptional circumstances, to prohibit freedom of opinion.

The Agreement they proposed for the reconfiguration of England's political system is of vital importance in this scheme. Through this document, individuals would recreate a just governmental structure, but the result of this ends up in a machinery of monopolistic power. Society, now posited as completely distinct from the private-familial sphere, is strictly correlated with the government, the legal system and territory of the nation-state, process that could still be analysed as a certain type of alienation (Arendt [1958] 1998, 256). Monism must be embodied at every level. The sovereign people recreate a government that represents it, and that government with maximum exclusivity appropriates all political functions through its state agencies. And this cannot be obstructed by any kind of entity, be it legal, economic, religious or cultural. Once again, it should be repeated that the Levellers proposed that this public subject, embodied mainly in Parliament, should be strongly controlled by the people. But this control can only be developed based on the unique relationship between government and people, without any kind of mediation. Within this logic, the structuring prevents these radicals from thinking in any kind of mixed government as a possibility of a republican control of power, such as the one seen in ancient Rome or their contemporary Venice. Not even the classical constitution of England itself might be considered. Walwyn makes this clear when he states emphatically that the existence of two or three “Estates equally supreme is an absurd nullity”, which would impede the very functioning of government, and so it is imperative to define the House of Commons as the supreme authority (Walwyn 1648, 9–10). A quote of a similar tone can be found in Lilburne ([1648] 1806-1812, 1007). The Leveller's affront against mixed government does not only refer, as current studies point out, to the need of reinforcing the sovereignty of the people (Fernández Llebreg 2014, 42). The problem also lies in how power is transferred from the people to the government. That passage must be unidirectional from the people to a single entity, so that an analogous monism between the represented and the representatives is maintained.

To conclude, it should be noted that the strong imprint of a centralized governmental structure does not necessarily constitute a kind of contradiction with Leveller ideas of guaranteeing individual rights. In accordance to descriptions of modern sovereignty's essence, the political authority is pre-

figured as a mediator (the only one) between the sovereign community and the plurality of individuals, and its main function is to impose the order that comes from the sovereign people, but at the same time enabling the very existence of that sovereign people (Palti 2017, 27–28). The historical context of the revolution and the very preaching of groups such as the Levellers led precisely to the existence of only one mediator, because, as Pocock argues in a classic book, it became necessary for individuals to reconstitute a sword in the face of the disappearance of all other entities, and that sword would thus become not only a power of coercion, but the element par excellence for the grouping of individuals who subscribed to it (Pocock 1987, 326–27). It is the Modern State that concretizes its purpose in a formal legal framework, aimed at defending a regime that allows the coexistence of individual freedoms (García de Entrerría 1972, 14–22). Some of the first systematic researches on Leveller thought have sketched this, arguing that for this group the primary function of government was precisely to create a system where law would be enforced for the security of property, to create the conditions necessary for individuals to develop their capabilities and to abolish any kind of institution that impeded economic development (Macpherson 1963, 142–44; Petegorsky 1940, chap. 2). Although my article is not framed within the theoretical and ideological basis of these researchers, I believe this assertion to be largely true. In any case, I would add that the governmental structure promoted by the Levellers has more varied foundations than the consolidation of a proto-capitalist system. It is justified in a broader framework, linked to the conceptualization of Modern State institutions and functions.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The article focused on showing how Levellers' political thought projected a centralized power that could be assimilated to Modern State characteristics. On the one hand, the aim was to study this perspective within Leveller tracts, given that it is a subject that is not thoroughly developed within the state of the art. This movement tends to be particularly praised for pioneering ideas linked to religious tolerance, citizen participation, representative government, and the defence of individual rights. But there are not many works that emphasize the possibility that, to ensure these proposals, a governmental structure can be recreated where power is strongly concentrated. Regarding this first objective, the aim was not only to examine a series of quotes, but also to investigate some of the variables underpinning such a structuring. For this reason, it was necessary to briefly describe some specific topics, such as the Levellers' conception of English history, their ideas about political enmity and their definitions of the terms people and nation.

Secondly, the aim of the paper was not only to provide a new approach to these specific political writers, but to investigate how this was framed within a series of discussions in current political theory. Thus, the issue of power centralization in Leveller literature was examined based on disquisitions on the relationship between constituted and constituent power, the ways of understanding the dialectic between people and government, or the dangers these projections could entail, among others. Leveller political ideas are often related to the foundations of liberal, republican, and democratic traditions. Contemporary studies do this by analysing their proposals on the defence of individual liberties, religious tolerance, citizen participation, universal suffrage, etc. Part of the aim of my work was to show that all these important topics should be examined in the light of a political projection which tends to recreate a strongly centralized political power. Far from displaying a probable contradiction, I set out to show that this kind of government structure appears in their texts as a necessary element to ensure those rights and freedoms. The problem in any case may arise in the possible emergence of an omnipotent power that could be able to emancipate from its supposed creator.

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