



The Fight Against Absolut Power

¿Fuenteovejuna vs. Hobbes?

Jenelle Dunstan

jrdunsta@syr.edu

In this image of Thomas Hobbes, Thomas Hobbes writes about the social contract and the need for a strong central authority to prevent the evil of discord and the civil war. Hobbes believed that without authority, all the people

would be entitled to everything in the world. He thought that this would lead to the war of all against all. Also, according to Hobbes, the people needed to waive their rights to have protection: any abuse of power by this authority must be accepted as the price of peace.

For many centuries, the power of a leader has been a problem for people. There are times that the powerful used for the benefit of society. On other occasions, when someone receives a prominent place in a hierarchy, abuses his position on others. There are those who think that the leader has too much power and abused, or not used, their power for the good of the citizens. Many have wondered about the ethics of these leaders. Are they are working for the benefit of society?

During the medieval period, the monarchs controlled the government. Decisions were made without the rights of the citizens in mind. For this reason, many people began to rebel against injustice.

An example of this: in the XIV and XV centuries in France and England, many farmers began a peasant uprising. They were opposed to the tax rise. King Richard II and his officers were manning the system of workers. The people thought that the officers in charge of these taxes were corrupt, and were taking advantage of the power they had received from King Richard II. They could do so because the king was just 14 years old. People thought that the officials of Richard II were abusing their power to take the taxes for your benefit. Another problem arose when the lords of the peasants not enabled workers to leave the village.

There was also a reduction of the work. After the black plague in 1348-1350, workers who survived wanted more money for fewer hours of work. In 1351, King Edward III granted these orders to the people in a law, the Statute of laborers. This law established a maximum salary, which was

proportional to salaries prior to the plague. He demanded that men and women will work equally. The people could not earn more money, and therefore, the people rebelled against the injustice of the king.

Many authors of this time took news of these events and illustrated these struggles in their works. Lope de Vega, a playwright of Spain of the seventeenth century, wrote *Fuenteovejuna* toward 1613. The work is based in the village of Fuente Ovejuna Cordoba, Spain, during 1476. This work entails many events that really happened. When the Princess Isabella I of Castile was married to Prince Ferdinand II of Aragon, the kingdoms were joined. Isabel was crowned after the death of his half-brother Enrique IV. In the battle of Toro, two years before the coronation of Elizabeth, the forces of Fernando and Isabel destroyed the advances of Afonso V and Juana of Portugal.

In 1474, Ciudad Real was attacked by knights of the Grand Master Rodrigo Téllez Girón. Girón was a supporter of the throne of King Afonso V of Portugal and Juana, Princess of Castile. In the battle of Toro, two years before the coronation of Elizabeth forces of Isabel and Fernando defeated Afonso V and Jane. They wanted this city because it was on the border of Castile. It was during this invasion of the city that the locals rebelled against the commander Gomez.

In the work, Fernán Gómez de Guzman suggests to Girón that they need to take Ciudad Real for the throne of Juana and Afonso V of Portugal. Girón agreed with this plan. Gomez used his power as commander to mistreat the people of Fuenteovejuna, especially women. He likes a woman, Laurencia, but she is in love with a local farmhouse, leafy. For this reason, Gomez tries to violate Laurencia. Also he asks his father, Esteban, if he could have Laurencia in marriage. Esteban does not allow it and decides that Frondoso and Laurencia can marry.

Upset with this decision, Gomez interrupts the wedding and imprisons Frondoso, Laurencia and Esteban. Tired of the abuses of Gomez and his knights, men of Fuenteovejuna decide to kill Gomez. When they kill Gómez, the official of Fernando and Isabel questioning them, and they all say: "Fuente Ovejuna did". Although the knights the tormented them, the people all supported the cause "all for one". And they were pardoned by the king himself, who did not want to make enemies among the people that sustains it.

This work shows the oppression of the people in hierarchal societies who do not respect the rights established between the persons. Hobbes believed that without the absolute authority, the society falls down. But perhaps the society is always going to counter-attack the abuse of the authority to demand a change.

In fact, nowadays the struggle against the injustices of the authority continues. Can you think about movements today that follow the same motives?

References

Britannica Online Encyclopedia. "Lope De Vega." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Web. 14 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/624545/Lope-de-Vega>>.

Froldi, Rinaldo, [Introducción a Lope de Vega. Fuenteovejuna](#), Alicante, Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2002.

Fuenteovejuna, Compañía Antonio Gades. YouTube. 14 June 2010. Web. 9 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQ0blk4oGjM>>.

Trueman, Chris. "Peasants Revolt." History Learning Site. 2012. Web. 14 Mar. 2012. <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/peasants_revolt.htm>.

"The Power and the Piety: The World of Medieval and Renaissance Europe,"
Exhibit