Respecting the Order and Liberty of Deliberations

Continuity of Meeting Practices in the Dutch States General (c. 1750-1830)

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Between 1815 and 1830 Northern and Southern members of the States General clashed over how to behave as political representatives. This article presents this conflict as evidence of the continuity of the meeting practices employed in the States General since the Dutch Republic. Examples from three different periods show the continuity of three elements of the Northern meeting practice. Pragmatic, secluded and dignified meetings aimed at achieving consensus among the provinces or among members, Chamber, king and government. Deliberations on a resolution or a bill had to take place in an orderly and harmonious manner to ensure the willingness of the provinces or the Dutch people to obey the law. Hence, the political legitimacy of the state was constantly at stake during sessions of the States General and directly connected with correct procedure and behaviour. The continuity of the three practical elements nuances the impact of the constitutional ruptures which on first sight clearly separate the States General of the Dutch Republic from its successor in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Tussen 1815 en 1830 botsten Noordelijke en Zuidelijke Leden van de Staten-Generaal over hoe zij zich als volksvertegenwoordigers dienden te gedragen. Aan de hand van de weergave van deze botsing toont dit artikel de continuïteit aan van een vergaderpraktijk die ontwikkeld werd in de Staten-Generaal in de Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden en die ondanks verschillende constitutionele verschuivingen gangbaar bleef. Voorbeelden afkomstig uit drie politiek verschillende tijdvakken tonen de continuïteit van drie elementen in de dominante
During budget talks in December 1821, H.A.J. Liefmans (1781-1851), a lawyer from the Southern half of the Netherlands, asked rhetorically why it was impossible to criticise certain elements of a bill without immediately being accused of rebellion against king and country. In an earlier intervention in the Second Chamber the year before, Liefmans had defended his style of fierce and open opposition. By no means was his choice of words the product of an oppositional spirit. Had he formulated his opinion this sharply as a common citizen, it would have been out of place. As a representative of the nation, however, Liefmans could not contain himself and felt obliged to speak out vigorously. His Southern colleague Charles le Hon (1792-1868) was equally well aware that the code of conduct required him to refrain from detailed and passionate reasoning and instead urged Le Hon to display restrained detachment in order to enhance the solemnity of discussions. Nevertheless, Le Hon could not believe his ears when his Northern colleague Van Alphen complained about the heated atmosphere during debates on the budget.
in 1829. Le Hon fumed over how vigorously defending the rights and dignity of the Second Chamber could be regarded as anything but respecting the order and liberty of deliberations. Liefmans’ and Le Hon’s remarks directed at the hostile attitudes of their Northern colleagues provide the research question for this article. Why did Northern members find vigour and passion harmful to the dignity and legitimacy of the meeting of the States General?

After the Congress of Vienna, the Kingdom of the Netherlands came to include the former Austrian territories. The Restoration States General had to accommodate the additional 55 members representing the citizens living in the Southern Provinces. The Constitutional Committee mainly looked at French and British examples to arrange the parliament for the enlarged Kingdom of the Netherlands. When the Restoration States General met in their new constitutional setting, Northern and Southern members clashed over how to behave.

The reason for this conflict should be sought in the early modern roots of the States General. This feels counterintuitive because at first sight the divide between the Old Regime States General and its Restoration namesake seems absolute. The Restoration States General represented the entire Dutch people in a constitutional monarchy. It served as a legislative assembly which could only approve or reject bills proposed by the king or his ministers. The States General of the Dutch Republic comprised a meeting of delegates bound by instructions of their sovereign Provincial States. Lacking a written constitution, meetings of the early modern States General provided the stage where the delegations of the seven sovereign provinces performed their main task: negotiating common policies on matters concerning war, peace, foreign affairs and finance.

Dutch historians have, however, already nuanced the idea of clean political ruptures following the regime changes since the abolition of the Dutch Republic in 1795. The Restoration States General was neither an

5 HTK 1828-1829, 14 May 1829, 687. ‘L’irritation a été grande, oui, mais n’était-elle pas légitime? […] Défendre avec chaleur les droits et la dignité de la Chambre, n’est-ce pas respecter et vouloir qu’on respecte l’ordre et la liberté de ses délibérations?’


entirely new institution, nor was it an exact copy of its historical namesake. Instead, since 1815 the Restoration States General combined old elements – such as its name – with undeniable new elements, such as bicameralism, public debates of the Second Chamber and elected members who represented both the Northern and Southern provinces of the Low Countries. In order to grasp the composite political culture of the Restoration States General, it is necessary to understand which early modern elements of the States General survived the regime changes, why those elements survived, and what the consequences were of this continuity of practices.

Early modern political meetings

The European early modern political world was hierarchical and fundamentally unequal. Early modern political meetings represented the correct distinctive order of society. Physical presence, be it through participation or observation, was a prerequisite for the correct order to be acknowledged as an existing reality. This explains why early modern society was about ‘communication among those who were present’. The repetitive gathering in an early modern political meeting presented the state as an objective and legitimate political reality. Inappropriate behaviour in this

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Charles le Hon (1781-1851), member of the States General on behalf of Limburg. Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels.
symbolically charged setting was immediately linked to disrespect for the political dignity that the political meeting and its participants represented.\textsuperscript{14}

Since the cultural turn in political history the question of why people performed their political actions in a certain way has intrigued political historians.\textsuperscript{15} Human actions, habits and communication are the core of every political space, regardless of the time period.\textsuperscript{16} There has been within political history a shift of attention away from short-term political events and towards the underlying layer of political culture which is characterised much more by continuity.\textsuperscript{17} In recent years, historians of political culture have started to consider parliaments as communicative spaces in order to do justice to the symbolically charged political communication taking place during sessions.\textsuperscript{18} Parliamentary politics in particular revolved around unspoken conventions or ‘rules of the game’.\textsuperscript{19} Existing studies on the Dutch parliament in later periods have shown the importance of paying attention to the deeper layer of unspoken political mores in the political culture of this institution.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, these studies have proven that studying this institution’s political culture is necessary for understanding the political events embedded in this culture. This article combines these notions on early modern political meetings and the political culture of parliaments in general and applies them to the long-term history of the States General.

This means that the way members of the States General behaved (or at least were supposed to behave) contributed to the political legitimacy


\textsuperscript{16} Wilbert van Vree, Manners and Civilisation. The Development of Modern Meeting Behaviour (Leicester 2001); Norbert Elias, Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie (Darmstadt 1969).


\textsuperscript{20} Oddens, Pioniers in schaduwbeeld; Jouke Turpijn, Mannen van gezag. De uitvinding van de Tweede Kamer, 1848-1888 (Amsterdam 2008); Erie Tanja, Goede politiek. De parlementaire cultuur van de Tweede Kamer, 1866-1940 (Amsterdam 2011); Carla Hoetink, Macht der gewoonte. Regels en rituelen in de Tweede Kamer na 1945 (Nijmegen 2018).
of the Dutch state. Every political regime partly relied on meetings of the States General for its legitimacy, irrespective of the historical period. Meeting practices in turn supported the legitimacy of the States General’s claim to function as the prime meeting in government. This interplay between political practices and legitimacy explains why the States General paid close attention to its meeting practice in the first place, but even more why meeting practices mattered for a Restoration regime in pursuit of legitimacy. Participants in meetings did not passively inherit a set of meeting practices. Instead, members of the States General consciously chose to act and to behave in a certain way even though they had alternative options. An institutional tradition requires human action in order to be handed down. That is why shifting the perspective towards meeting practices reveals continuity rather than change between early modern and modern practices of political representation.

Moments of conflict forced participants to address the otherwise unspoken rules of the game. Traces of conflict situations are scarce, however, in the official archives of the States General because of the nature of the surviving records. Since the assembly always sought to give the impression of harmonious conduct, the resolutions of the States General contain minimal information on the preparation of the decisions that were eventually adopted. No official evidence remains of the debates prior to that point. This omission of conflict in official records was typical for early modern administration. Valuable exceptions exist where the meeting’s secretary – griffier – documented two situations of conflict verbatim and kept the records in his personal archive. These conflicts are presented here to reveal the unspoken norms and values guiding the behaviour of the provincial delegates. The Restoration States General continued to keep session records to a minimum and, above all, the meeting stuck to the principle of not recording personal opinions despite multiple requests to do so. Hence, after 1814 the official archive of the States General shows little evidence of discord. Fortunately for the historian, during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Jan Noordziek (1811-1886)

24 The Nationaal Archief Den Haag (hereafter nL-HaNA), Collectie Fagel, nummer toegang 1576-1796, 28 December 1815, 47; Ibidem, 4 January 1816, 58-59; Bijl. xx, 105.
undertook the impressive task of meticulously reconstructing the debates between 1814 and 1847 based on official documents, newspaper reports and personal parliamentary papers.\footnote{Carla van Baalen and Eric Tanja, ‘In dienst van de Kamer. De ambtelijke ondersteuning van de volksvertegenwoordigers’, in: Aerts, In dit Huis, 193-222, 198-199, 209.}

In order to illustrate that the meeting practices of the States General in the Dutch Republic continued after 1795, I will focus on the idea of symbolic political quality: meetings functioned as a resource for the political dignity and legitimacy of the Dutch state as a whole because sessions were the place where the right power balance between personal honour and political dignity and legitimacy had to be maintained. I have identified three elements that served to fulfil this objective of the States General. The first element is the state of mind, or style, which accommodated the meeting’s laborious task. The desired atmosphere of the meeting is best described as pragmatic. Divergent opinions were acceptable although opposition was regarded as fruitless in negotiations.\footnote{Frederik Krämer (ed.), Gedenkschriften van Gijsbert Jan van Hardenbroek. Werken uitgegeven door het Historisch Genootschap. Derde serie, nr. 14 (Amsterdam 1901) Deel ii, 150, 160, 163, 185. See also: Jeroen van Zanten, Schielijk, Winzucht, Zwaarhoofd en Bedaard. Politieke discussie en oppositievorming 1813-1840 (Amsterdam 2004) 274-295.} Small committees brokered majorities before the deciding plenary sessions.\footnote{Jos Gabriëls, De heren als dienaren en de dienaar als heer. Het stadhouderlijk stelsel in de tweede helft van de achtste eeuw (The Hague 1990) 307-308.} Delegates who brought reasonable arguments to the table, presented in a quiet manner, were better able to gather a majority than those who defended their position with vigour and passion. The strong voice of one provincial delegate could hardly have the common interest of the Republic at heart. Secondly, seclusion and small-scale settings best fitted the purpose and mind-set of the States General, even though a secluded meeting might seem to provide for the opportunity to disagree on something out of the public eye. Yet, even behind closed doors Dutch regents aimed for calm and effective deliberations, rather than lively debates. Through his physical attendance of the States General, every delegate represented both his provincial and personal dignity.\footnote{Ibidem, 321.} The third element therefore concerns what was at stake for delegates and members: properly fulfilling their tasks as representatives contributed to their personal honour.\footnote{Jörg Feuchter and Johannes Helmrath, ‘Oratory and Representation: The Rhetorical Culture of Political Assemblies, 1300-1600’, Parliaments, Estates and Representation 29:1 (2009) 53-66, see 62-65; compare with Joanne Freeman, Affairs of Honor. National Politics in the New Republic (New Haven and London 2001).} The remainder of the article discusses examples taken from meeting practices in the Old Regime States General, the Batavian parliaments and the Restoration States General to demonstrate this continuity.
Dutch Republic

The States General sanctioned resolutions in a secluded plenary session.\footnote{31} The assembly wanted to convey unity and harmony outside its quarters at the Binnenhof in The Hague. In any pre-modern representative assembly adhering to correct procedure of decision-making ensured that all parties acknowledged the final decision and that they would obey it in the future.\footnote{32} This assurance of obedience was especially important for the Dutch Republic. The cooperation among the provinces rested on their voluntary accession to the Union of Utrecht.\footnote{33} Conflict situations nevertheless occurred and they illustrate the kinds of procedures the States General was looking for in its everyday business. The first conflict presented here illustrates how a calm atmosphere (1) and personal honour (3) supported the balance of power in the States General.

Harmony and unity disappeared when a deputy dared to question the procedure surrounding a resolution, drafted on 19 May 1744, following a proposition by Holland.\footnote{34} Frisian deputy Adrianus Bergsma claimed that \textit{griffier} François Fagel’s draft did not fully reflect all seven provincial positions. To prove his point Bergsma requested the original proposition. The reactions to his request illustrate its inappropriateness. Grand Pensionary Anthonie van der Heim (1693-1746) attempted to protect the formal atmosphere. He reminded Bergsma to speak on behalf of his provincial States.\footnote{35} Friesland had to authorise Bergsma to request Holland’s proposition. But after this attempt to dismiss the matter, the other delegates lost their composure. Twice the president had to use his hammer to restore order among the deputies. Finally, the president asked each provincial speaker for his position on this matter to put an end to the discussion and to allow deputies to restore the provincial order. During this round Holland’s deputies employed their authority to frustrate Bergsma’s efforts. They called on the Frisian deputation to keep their fellow deputy in check.\footnote{36} Faced with this forceful display of hierarchy,
Bergsma grudgingly withdrew his request. He did regret, however, that his questioning of the resolution had put Fagel’s reputation in jeopardy. For that reason he wrote an extensive apology which Fagel carefully kept in his archive as testimony to his professional and personal honour. In his reply, Fagel entrusted Bergsma with his thoughts on the incident. Of course, his good name was not irrelevant to him. But it had hurt Fagel more to see how, needlessly, Bergsma’s conduct had caused dispute and discord among the deputies, had aroused passion and had harmed the commonweal as a result.  

Even though Bergsma’s question seemed at first sight to be merely an inappropriate personal request, it immediately gave rise to a reaffirmation of the hierarchy among deputies and to a display of their composure. Personal wishes and passionate pleas were out of place in meetings of the States General. Besides dealing with matters of state, deputies were constantly preoccupied with observing each other’s gestures and weighing every word and phrase on the scale of personal honour and political dignity.

The second known incident occurred shortly after the unexpected death of stadtholder William IV of Orange (1711-1751) and was caused by Frisian deputy Tjerd van Aylva. Van Aylva was a merry man with a habit of lavish dining and drinking in the company of prostitutes and actresses, or so Utrecht deputy Gijsbert Jan van Hardenbroek recorded in his diary. The incident shows that composed behaviour mattered even in the everyday secluded confines of the States General’s preparatory sessions. Additionally, the incident sheds light on the all-encompassing importance of personal honour and how the plenary session was the place where the balance between personal honour and political stability was at stake.

Shortly before he died, Stadtholder William IV had sent a proposition to the States General concerning financial support for the military. The deputies of Overijssel refused to give their consent. Frisian deputy Tjerd van Aylva reacted to this refusal in unacceptably common and careless language. Encouraged by the familiar atmosphere during the meeting, Van Aylva equalled Overijssel’s refusal to mutilating the late stadtholder’s face.

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37 Ibidem. Letter from Fagel to Bergsma, 23 June 1744. ‘Maar het smert mij tot in mijn herte, dat ick sie dat buijten noodsaeckelijk, door dusdanige maniere van doen, disputen en twisten werden veroorzaakt, die de passien gaende maecke ende tot nadeel van het gemeene beste komen te strecken.’


39 Gedenkschriften van Gijsbert Jan van Hardenbroek, Deel 1, 111.

40 NL-HANA, Fagel, 1.10.29, inv. nr. 583, ‘voorval met van Aylva’ in de vergadering der Staten-Generaal, 1751, 1 omslag. ‘[A]ls men die [onderhandeling] niet accordeerde, het soude wesen als of men Sijne Hoogheid een snee door de tronie gaf. […] [H]ebbende misschien onder het familiair discours de gewoone spreek manier van snee in het aangesigt gebruikt […]’
This phrase constituted a severe insult to a man’s honour and must have caused shocked reactions. Van Aylva had compared Overijssel’s refusal to the violent practice of permanently scarring a man’s face – bek opensnijden or rood lintje bezorgen – in this case, to visually and permanently damaging the late stadtholder’s honour. Overijssel filed a complaint against Van Aylva’s grave insult, which included a clear description of the atmosphere they expected to prevail in any meeting of the States General. The gentlemen in the States General were to present the position of their principals boldly and fearlessly, without being subjected to insults. In the end, Van Aylva apologised for his words, and the conflict was omitted from the minutes to bury the discord between Friesland and Overijssel.

How could a slip of the tongue of one delegate trigger a conflict between the States of Overijssel and Friesland? In addition to Van Aylva’s allusion to a practice of damaged male honour the political context added gravity to his words. The incident occurred in the tense political moment of an unexpected dynastic discontinuity in the Dutch Republic. In 1747, the hereditary Orange stadtholder had been reinstalled to protect the Republic against invading French troops. William’s heir was still a minor in 1751. Now more than ever the provinces needed to maintain harmony in the States General to uphold the political stability of the Dutch Republic. This political context explains why Van Aylva’s careless choice of words threatened the harmony and power balance of the Republic as a whole. On a more general level, the incident affirms that the seclusion of the States General enabled a familiar and harmonious atmosphere. But at the same time, this atmosphere did not appropriate the language of the common people in meetings. Deputies in the States General had to maintain their composure at all times.

These two incidents reaffirmed the unspoken norms and values in meetings of the States General. Bergsma’s inappropriate request

42 NL-HANA, Fagel, 1.10.29, inv. nr. 583. ‘[D]e Heren Gedeputeerden ter generaliteit [mogen] onbeschroomd de ordres en advisen van de Heren Staten hunne competenten vrijmoedig en onbeschroomd […] uitbrengen, sonder ge-exponeerd te zijn aan sodane insultes […]’; Tegenwoordige staat i (Generaliteit) 256-257. ‘Als alles afgelezen is, worden de Provincien verzogt, zig gereed te maaken, tot het geven van haare Stemmen. Elk heeft vryheid, om zyn gevoelen te uiten.’
43 Gabriëls, De heren als dienaren, 59.
45 NL-HANA, Fagel, 1.10.29, inv. nr. 583. ‘[Friesland] houdende sig […] onschuldig, aan alle verwijderingen die over deese handelwijze onder het bondgenoodschap mogten ontstaan, bijsonder in deese tijd daar de harmonie en eensgesintheijt, soo ooit ten uittersten nodig sijn, om gesamentlijk het welzijn van de gemeene staat weesentlijk te behartigen.’
triggered attacks on both his personal honour and that of secretary Fagel. A reconfirmation of honour and the correct hierarchy among the provincial delegates ensued in order to retain the political dignity and legitimacy of the States General’s session. Van Aylva’s faux pas produced another affirmation of composure during all sessions. Delegates had to refrain from personal, passionate pleas because these endangered the vital political equilibrium between the provinces. Dealing with government business meant that delegates in the States General needed to keep an eye on provincial, personal and general interests and do so in the most respectful manner. Personal honour and political dignity were as much intertwined as they were at stake during meetings of the States General. The plenary sessions of the States General involved not only the process of political decision-making, but also a constant and careful legitimising of the balance among various political and personal interests. Therefore, meetings of the States General were concerned with transmitting political authority as well as with exercising political power. 

**Batavian parliaments**

The Batavian Revolution brought about major constitutional change. The production and implementation of the first modern constitution significantly changed the nature of political representation. The National Assembly set out to deal with matters of state in a fundamentally different fashion from the States General. Elected deputies should avoid an all too orderly and quiet meeting, proclaimed Leiden lawyer George Hahn (1761-1822). As representatives of the sovereign Batavian people the National Assembly advocated a lively, public debate instead of the secretive commissions and plenary sessions of the States General. The voice of the people should resonate in the Assembly hall. For that reason, the ideal deputy was vocal. Due to the enlarged setting and the presence of the public, the Binnenhof accommodated lively and vigorous political debates on an unprecedented scale. At the same time, however, the three elements characterising meetings

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49 Oddens, Pioniers in schaduwbeeld, 114-115.
of the States General proved resilient. Calmness, harmony and dignity continued to be regarded as favourable qualities of the meeting practice. Safeguarding personal honour remained of the utmost importance. No matter how lively and passionately a deputy might speak in the interest of the people, his words could never harm the honour of another deputy. The Reglement van Orde gave the president official authority to silence an insulting speaker. After the adoption of the Staatsregeling in April 1798, the National Assembly split up into two Chambers as ‘the warm defenders of order’ had wished for. After eighteen months of hard work on the first modern Dutch constitution, the changed setting was marked by statements on the desired modus operandi. They show the resilience of the other two elements characterising the old States General’s meeting practice.

First of all, representatives still favoured a subdued atmosphere during meetings to serve the new state properly. They questioned the need for grand gestures and rhetorical elements deployed and advocated by vehement speakers like Hahn. One backbencher remarked that although elaborate rhetorical figures were pretty to see and to listen to in a spectacle, in a representative legislative assembly simplicity alone possessed the grandeur which surpassed all splendour and pomp. President Pieter Leonard van de Kasteele hoped that the adoption of the Staatsregeling would put an end to ‘extensive disputes and personal defences’ that had wasted so much time of the National Assembly. Plain, dignified detachment continued to be seen as the best attitude to deal with matters of state. To be composed and to know when to remain silent were advocated as signs of virtuous behaviour of a true representative of the people, behaviour that was preferred to being overly vocal, passionate, personal or stubborn in representing the people’s interest.

51 Reglement van Orde voor de Nationale Vergadering, art. 19 [25 March 1796].
52 De Gou, Dagboek van een patriot, 144.
53 Dagverhaal, no. 803, 4 January 1798, 302. Bromet: ‘[S]choonklinkende figuuren der Retorica, fraay zyn te zien en aantehoren in een spectacul, maar niet in eene representative Wetgevende Vergaderinge, alwaar in de discussien en het uitbrengen der advysen de eenvoudigheid alleen behoorde plaats te hebben, welke eenvoudigheid eene grootseheid bezit, die alle pracht en opsmuk te boven gaat.’
54 Dagverhaal Vertegenwoordigend Lichaam [vl], no. 85, 31 July 1798, 4. ‘[…] geene uitbundige redentwisten zullen ons vermoeijen, en geen personele verdediging onzen tijd verspillen.’
55 Dagverhaal [vl], no. 560, 30 July 1799, 3. Lublink de Jonge: ‘Doch het is niet alleen de arbeid zelve, maar vooral de wijze, waarop gy dien hielp verrichten, die u in de oogen uwer Landgenooten eerwaardig moet maaken. Ja, hoe dikwerf zag ik u onder elkanderen wed-yveren […] in het oeffenen van een wys zelfbedwang, om wat u persoonlyk zou hebben kunnen grieven, gelaten overtestappen.’ See also: Dagverhaal [vl] no. 100, 10 August 1798, 124; Dagverhaal [vl], no. 115, 21 August 1798, 245.
Secondly, although the plenary meetings of the two Chambers remained accessible to the public, delicate matters were discussed behind closed doors in so-called ‘comités-generaal’ (2). Plenary public sessions sometimes were nothing more than a repetition of what had been discussed and decided earlier in a ‘comité-generaal’. In 1801, after 38 months in business, French interference ended this bicameral, public parliament prematurely and replaced it with a much smaller, unicameral Wetgevend Lichaam that deliberated behind closed doors until the Incorporation in July 1810.

Despite the National Assembly’s wish to go about matters of state in a radically different way than the States General had done, the characteristic elements – reaching political legitimacy through a calm atmosphere (1), secluded sessions (2), and guarding personal honour (3) – of their predecessor continued to characterise the norms regarding the desired meeting practice after 1796. The National Assembly struggled to harmonise its aim for constitutional innovation while respecting the States General’s tradition of negotiation. The Restoration regime worked hard to omit or deny everything the Batavian revolution and French Incorporation had achieved from living memory and history. The regime restored the States General to its former quarters at the Binnenhof. Using the same name, the same rooms, the small and secluded setting all pointed to the purpose of this meeting: appeal to the calm, sober and honourable meeting practice of the States General of the Dutch Republic.

**Restoration States General**

Theoretically, the Restoration States General had to have a radically different meeting practice than its namesake in the Dutch Republic. In 1814 the States General returned as a unicameral legislative meeting in a constitutional monarchy. Fifty-five members represented the entire Dutch people instead of their provincial constituencies. They deliberated behind closed doors in such silence however that their sessions equalled venerating Harpocrates. In 1815 the contrast between the States General of the Dutch Republic and its Restored version became more visible. A bicameral States General that deliberated independently of provincial constituencies replaced the secluded meeting of a small group of representatives of seven sovereign provinces. The

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56 Maurits Cornelis van Hall, *Herinneringen van Mr. Maurits Cornelis van Hall (1787-1815)* (Amsterdam 1867) 67.

57 Lok, ‘“Un Oubli Total Du Passé”’, 43, 52-55.


Second Chamber consisted of 110 members, who deliberated in both French and Dutch and in public.

While the old States General had sought consensus between the provinces to sanction resolutions, the Restoration States General searched for majorities in order to turn royal or government bills into laws. Up until 1795, resolutions had concerned common policies among members of the Union. After 1815, the king and his government proposed bills that were intended to bind the two parts of the realm together. In turn, visible unity among members of the Second Chamber regarding these proposals was believed to have the capacity to unite the new kingdom. The Restoration States General’s approval, or polite refusal, signified their trust in the quality of the bills proposed by the king and his government.60 Mps from the Northern half of the realm wanted to give their consent to a bill in a solemn atmosphere: to treat a bill with respect enhanced the respectability of the laws in the eyes of the people.61 Harmony among members and between Crown and Chamber had replaced harmony among the provinces as the key to assuring obedience of the law or, in other words, to ruling the country effectively and legitimately.

Again, the minutes of the meeting had to be a reflection of the consensual (1) and respectful (3) atmosphere of agreement, rather than a record of various opinions, let alone outright opposition. For that reason, the Second Chamber kept its minutes to itself.62 Recording debates would only encourage ambitious members to protest any government proposal, just to have their names inserted in the minutes and to have their chances of re-election increased.63 Notwithstanding the availability of modern techniques such as stenography, the States General opted to reinstall the griffie and griffier as their recording officer. The following examples further demonstrate the
continuity of the three elements. Confined, constructive and composed negotiations and protection of personal honour remained preconditions to achieve the objectives of the States General.

In 1827, Northern member Bijleveld described his duties as representative in almost the exact same words the States of Overijssel had used in 1751. As a member of the Second Chamber he felt obliged to express frankly his feelings in plenary discussions, awaiting the better judgement of his colleagues. In other words, every deputy should be able to speak his mind without fear of being insulted or ridiculed. For the same reason, Northern member De Jonge had felt the urge to speak up in the plenary session in 1821. In a secluded preparatory session, a colleague had condemned De Jonge's position as foolish and miserable. De Jonge used the public session to demand that this fellow MP treat him with more respect, no matter how their views might differ. These examples show that – like the preparatory sessions of the Old Regime States General – the secluded, small-scale sessions (2) were perhaps more familiar in atmosphere, yet members had to maintain their composure (1) in order to show respect (3). Frankness and composure, personal and political interests were still intertwined in the States General after 1815. Furthermore, the plenary session continued to be the place where the required harmonious and honourable atmosphere could be reaffirmed. In any other setting, the ideal tone of voice for an MP was also frank and honest, but at the same time straightforward and polite.

Prior to 1815, the Southern and Northern provinces had witnessed different constitutional developments. These divergent trajectories can explain why the Southern members had other views on what and how they
should represent in the Second Chamber.\textsuperscript{68} Since 1794 the former Austrian Netherlands had been part of the French state. No Southern member entering the Second Chamber had been part of the Estates Assembly that met with the Habsburg overlord. The Belgian Revolutions (1787-1793) had not led to the establishment of a National Convention.\textsuperscript{69} Instead, Southern members had gained experience in office from their employment in the French Departmental administration. Moreover, twelve Southern members had been members of the French Assemblée Nationale.\textsuperscript{70} Their Northern colleagues’ experience with national political representation was of a different sort. Eight members had been deputies in the Old Regime States General.\textsuperscript{71} After 1795, the Batavian Revolutionaries had had the liberty to form their own political institutions, within the boundaries set by their French ‘custodians’.\textsuperscript{72} The Second Chamber counted eight former members of the secluded and unicameral \textit{Wetgevend Lichaam} (1801-1810).\textsuperscript{73}

Southern members of the Second Chamber differed from their Northern colleagues on how they went about their business as representatives. No doubt inspired by the French parliamentary orators, Southern members used passion and vigour in their speeches to convey the voice of the people.\textsuperscript{74} In contrast, Northern members preferred calm, detached and reasonable discussions to rhetorical theatre.\textsuperscript{75} Southern members made it very clear to their Northern colleagues that it was the voice of the people that should...
resonate in their speeches. Perhaps Southern members’ closer proximity to revolutionary France and to the people in general – as officials working in departmental, rather than national, administrations – made them more prone to represent the people’s voice in the Second Chamber. They were certainly much less interested in simply giving consent to a bill. Instead they considered it their duty to assess publicly and critically whether a bill matched the people’s wishes. An overly calm and quiet Second Chamber even brought back memories of despotism and the Old Regime. Southern members were seriously annoyed by Northern members who constantly disqualified their criticism of bills as blunt attacks on the authority of King William I. Southern mayor Ange Angillis for example explained that an MP who vigorously defended the people’s interests would necessarily become an equally dauntless defender of the throne.

The young Charles de Brouckère, Jr. (1796-1860) was the most rigorous, passionate and eloquent Southern member of the Second Chamber. Amidst the mass petition waves in late November 1828, this fierce liberal proposed to abolish the existing restrictive press regulations. The proposal
triggered chaotic and vehement debates, which alienated Northern and Southern members and hence jeopardised the unity of the realm. Equally eloquent but less vehement, Le Hon tried to restore harmony among the members in a dignified speech. All members supported the freedom of press despite the opposing views between North and South regarding De Brouckère’s proposal. But apart from Leopold van Sasse van Ysselt, Northern members voted unanimously against De Brouckère’s proposal. In Northern eyes, their refusal to abolish an existing law was seen as a display of apt composure (1) and genuine independence, whereas the Southern supporters were dismissed as being driven by their longing for popularity or by their fear of newspapers’ retaliation.

Southern members in the First Chamber, or Senate, did not support the behaviour of their compatriots in the Second Chamber. On the contrary, in 1821 President of the First Chamber Charles Count de Thiennes de Lombise (1758-1839) complained about the lack of ‘knowledgeable moderation’ in the Second Chamber. According to De Thiennes, the habit of members responding to encouragements from the public stands was evil. His colleague F. F. de P. H. J. Baron d’Anéthan (1743-1824) added that his lack of oratorical talent did not prevent him from fulfilling his duty as a member of the First Chamber. Eloquence was superfluous because simply telling the truth sufficed to touch the heart and enlighten the spirit of the meeting.

Liefmans and other Southern members of course felt unjustly accused by De Thiennes’ and d’Anéthan’s denunciations of passionate debate in the Second Chamber. The conventions of appropriate behaviour followed by the high nobility in the First Chamber stood in contrast to the Southern members’ conventions in the Second Chamber. The latter saw no harm in letting the public in the Chamber inspire them to speak up as their representatives. In general, therefore, Southern members in the Second Chamber disliked the fact that the Second Chamber regularly converted itself into ‘comité-generaal’, which meant that the public had to leave the assembly hall. They wondered why those sessions could not be open to the public as well, since – according to Southern standards at least – those sessions were as decent and calm as plenary meetings. Nevertheless, the majority of members present preferred to discuss behind closed doors (2). After the Southern members had left the Second Chamber in 1830, the States General could once again give in to their inclination to support government stability in meetings characterised by the

83 H(tk 1828-1829), Bijlagen xii, 650; De Bosch Kemper, Staatkundige geschiedenis, 649, 661.
84 Brieven van Falck, nr. 163, letters to D.J. van Lennep. 12 January 1829, 279.
85 H(tk 1820-1821, 30 June 1821, 505.
86 Ibidem, 508.
87 H(tk 1821-1822, 22 December 1821, 48; See also H(tk 1821-1822, 14 May 1822, 157.
88 H(tk 1820-1821, 10 February 1821, 160; Ibidem, 12 February 1821, 168.
RESPECTING THE ORDER AND LIBERTY OF DELIBERATIONS

Charles de Brouckère Jr. (1796-1860), member of the States General on behalf of Hainaut. Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels.
Conclusion

When the Southern members entered the States General in 1815, they met in a Second Chamber that cherished a composed, secluded, pragmatic, governmental way of fulfilling its duty as representative assembly. This article presents the clash regarding conventions of proper behaviour between members representing Northern and Southern provinces as evidence of continuity in the meeting practices the States General had witnessed since the Dutch Republic. The long-term history of meetings in the States General reveals the continuity of the Northern ideal of pragmatic, secluded, and dignified representation aimed at consensus among members, Chamber, king and government that dominated the code of conduct in the States General after 1815. The predominantly Northern mores and habits aimed at consensus did not accommodate the critical remarks and elaborate style of Southern representatives.

The passionate and critical tone of Southern members would have fitted perfectly with the conventions of the National Assembly. However, unfortunately for Southern members like Le Hon and Liefmans, the appreciation for passion and vigour in the National Assembly was not something their Northern colleagues were keen on restoring. The introduction of the first modern Dutch constitution had not changed the norms supporting the practices of how representatives at the Binnenhof should deal with government business in order to support the legitimacy of the regime. The desired meeting practice the Dutch States General had cherished since the Dutch Republic again proved resilient despite the apparent changes to the States General in the constitution of 1815. Not surprisingly, the first Belgian parliament developed a radically different style of meeting than that of the States General after 1830. The disparity in the

89 HTK 1835-1836, 11 December 1835, 91. ‘Na den opstand (1830, ll) heeft hij altijd voor de budgets gestemd, omdat hij begreep, dat wat het zwaarste was, het zwaarste moest wegen; dat eensgezindheid van binnen ontzag van buiten zoude verwekken; see also HTK 1836-1837, 9 March 1837, 67 (Van Dam van Isselt); HTK 1842-1843, 2 October 1843, 673. Van Panhuys: ‘[…] het gevoelen dier meerderheid eerbiedigen. Hij acht zuks parlementair en nuttig voor het land; hij gelooft dat daardoor de eensgezind in deze Vergadering bevorderd en het aanzien en gezag buiten de Kamer voor hetgeen hier wordt tot stand gebracht vermeerderd zal worden.’

90 HTK 1841-1842, Bijl. III, ‘Herziening van het Reglement van Orde (Memorie van Luzac over de werking van het nieuwe Reglement)’, 62.

way members of the Second Chamber treated bills undermined the legislative efforts to consolidate the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Therefore, understanding why this clash occurred adds perhaps another reason to the complex set of factors contributing to the disintegration of this Restoration state. Future research could compare how other Restoration parliaments dealt with their Old Regime tradition and investigate the consequences for modern political history and politics.

The governmental attitude of the Dutch parliament is what struck foreign observers of meetings of the States General. But now that we have seen the long tradition of meeting in the Dutch States General, we understand better why the Dutch parliamentarians – up to the present day – have been preoccupied with cementing broad coalitions, which ensure consent for government proposals. This article has shown why meetings of the States General – prior to and after 1795 – deliberately chose to deal with government business in a composed manner and in a secluded environment. Deliberating over consent on either a resolution or a bill had to take place in an orderly manner in order to ensure the willingness of the provinces or the Dutch people to obey it. The continuity of this meeting practice in turn ensured the States General’s ability to support the legitimacy of the Dutch government. This principle of government and the matching attitude of deputies ensured the States General’s remarkable continuous existence during the Dutch Republic and the moderate meeting practice entertained by its members. With these preconditions of an orderly discussion as its guiding principles the States General lived through revolutionary storms and constitutional shifts without radically changing its style or practice of representation after 1795.


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