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## Chapter 11

# Local Particularism Challenged, 1795–1813

*Thomas Poell*

As the previous chapters have shown, the political structure of the Dutch Republic differed from those of the larger states of Western Europe such as France, England, Austria, and Prussia. These states became relatively centralized in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when part of the political power of the Church, cities, and aristocracy was transferred to the central state. In this centralization process, the medieval corporate institutions, such as independent civic militias, local citizenship, and the guilds, were largely suppressed.<sup>1</sup> The Republic differed from the states mentioned above in that local and provincial autonomy remained fully intact up to the end of the eighteenth century. The city patricians and the aristocracy together ruled the Dutch state through the provincial estates and the States General, and the local corporations and citizenship arrangements continued to operate as they had done in the past. The Republic did have a military leader, the Stadholder, who also wielded substantial political authority. However, this ruler cannot be compared to a king as he was appointed by the provincial states, and his authority was based on local and provincial privileges.<sup>2</sup>

This local particularistic state structure collapsed during the revolutionary period at the turn of the nineteenth century (1795–1813). After indigenous revolutionaries took control of the state, the Dutch Republic quickly became more unified, similar to other decentralized city-dominated states of early modern Europe, such as Switzerland, and the German and Italian states. Moreover, in the first years of the Batavian revolution the Republic rapidly became more democratic. Thus it would appear that the Dutch state was taking major steps toward becoming a modern unitary democracy. However, upon closer scrutiny, this transformation was far from straightforward. In 1801, six years after the revolution of 1795, the processes of centralization and democratization were again reversed; the democratic procedures which were introduced by the constitution of 1798 were abolished, the provincial and local governments regained part of their traditional autonomy, and the local corporations were again partly restored.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Cambridge, 1990); Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change* (Princeton, 1992); Wolfgang Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt* (München, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> A.J.C.M. Gabriëls, *De heren als dienaren en de dienaar als heer* (Den Haag, 1990); Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic* (Oxford, 1995); Maarten Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid, democratisch enkelvoud* (Nijmegen, 1999).

Significantly, a similar reversal took place in the other decentralized city-dominated regions of Europe. Democratic institutions everywhere were eliminated and centralized state structures again fell apart. Thus, instead of a straightforward development of unitary democracy, we can observe strong reversals in the process of revolutionary change. This is not to say that city-dominated states all experienced the same revolutionary changes in the late eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. In fact, the transformation process of the Dutch state differed in at least one important respect from the development of the Swiss, Italian, and German city-dominated states. After the Dutch centralization process had collapsed in 1801, it was revived again in the years between 1805 and 1813. During this period, the Dutch state became financially unified, and important advances were made in the abolishment of the local system of privileges. Although this centralization process met with strong local resistance, it did establish the basis for the construction of a fully unified state in the following decades.

This chapter investigates how the local particularistic state structure of the Dutch Republic was challenged during the late eighteenth century revolutionary period. In particular, it examines why the transformation of this state was characterized by almost as many retreats from as advances in the processes of centralization and democratization. Until now, the oscillating character of the revolutionary transformation process has not been systematically researched by historians of the Dutch revolutionary era. Instead, current approaches to the revolution have concentrated on the question of what motivated the Dutch revolutionaries to change their political and cultural landscape.

For example, the proponents of the "bourgeois revolution" thesis, such as Robert Palmer and Simon Schama, have argued that the revolutionary changes were the result of the rise of bourgeois democrats, who wanted to create a more liberal democratic state.<sup>3</sup> In turn, cultural historians, such as Niek van Sas and Wijnand Mijnhardt, have claimed that the late eighteenth-century revolution must be examined in the context of the Enlightenment process, during which new ideas on freedom and citizenship were developed.<sup>4</sup> Finally, state formation analysts, such as Jan Luiten van Zanden, and Tom Pfeil, have asserted that the revolution should principally be seen as an attempt by the political elite to solve the financial, economic, and military problems, which confronted the Republic during the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> None of these approaches, however, can explain the twists and turns in the Dutch state formation process.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution* (Princeton, 1959–1964); Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators* (New York, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Jacob and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1992); Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *1800: blauwdrukken voor een samenleving* (Den Haag, 2001); N.C.F. van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland*, (Amsterdam, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Tom Pfeil, "Tot redding van het vaderland" *Het primaat van de Nederlandse overheidsfinanciën in de Bataafs-Franse tijd 1795–1810, Neha-Series Iii* (Amsterdam:

To explain the specific advances in, as well as the reversals of, the process of centralization and democratization, this study focuses on the revolutionary process itself. Following the theoretical work of Anthony Giddens, and more recently Doug McAdams, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, I want to stress that even though political actors clearly operate within a specific political, cultural, and economic setting, their actions are not necessarily determined by this setting.<sup>6</sup> Political interests and actors are always constructed through processes of political interaction. Moreover, in these processes of interaction, actors not only clash with each other, but they also enter into strategic coalitions. To understand how specific political changes take place, it is crucial to analyze the construction of these coalitions because individual political actors are usually not powerful enough to bring about political change on their own. Consequently, political actors tend to work together to consolidate or transform political institutions.

Thus, to examine how the local corporate organization of the Dutch Republic was challenged, we must analyze how political interests, actors, and coalitions were formed which combined to transform the political relations of the early modern Republic. This study will do so through an examination of the Amsterdam elite, which played an important role in local, provincial and central state politics. By focusing on the Amsterdam political elite, we can observe first-hand the struggles over the transformation of the Dutch state.

### The democratic coalition

Prior to the transformation of the Dutch state in the late eighteenth century, two political coalitions dominated public life. On the one hand, there was the cooperation between aristocrats and regents in local, provincial, and central state institutions.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand a coalition existed between the local elite and privileged citizens, which constituted one-third of the urban population. These two groups cooperated through particularistic corporations in the administration of the cities. Each group clearly benefited from these alliances: they allowed the elite to hold on to its political power, and they guaranteed the citizens privileged access to the guilds, social welfare institutions, and the educational system.<sup>8</sup> To understand how the political organization of the Republic was challenged in the course of the revolutionary period, we must investigate how these early modern coalitions became overruled by new alliances.

NEHA, 1998); Jan Luiten van Zanden and Arthur van Riel, *Nederland 1780–1914* (Amsterdam, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge, 1984); Doug McAdams, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Gabriëls, *De heren als dienaren*.

<sup>8</sup> Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid*; Maarten Prak, "Citizen Radicalism and Democracy in the Dutch Republic", *Theory and Society*, 20/1 (1991): 73–102.

The first revolutionary coalition to effectively challenge the local particularistic organization of the early modern Republic was created in the years between 1795 and 1798. This coalition constituted a sharp departure from the revolutionary activity of the 1780's, which had largely reinforced the decentralized corporate state structure. Although the revolutionaries of the 1780s, or *Patriotten* as they called themselves, were clearly motivated by the ideals of the Enlightenment and determined to solve the economic, financial and military crises, they did not consider the centralization of the state a viable option.<sup>9</sup> Instead they were mainly focused on the democratization of the political regime. In their pamphlets, the patriots constantly stressed that the only way to solve the crisis, which in the 1780s was deeply felt because of the disastrous war with Great Britain (1780–1784), was to increase popular political influence.

For example, the *Leids Ontwerp*, a prominent patriot pamphlet, proposed a representative system in which the burghers would be able to elect the regents. Such a “beneficial union of interests between regents and burghers” should make the Republic, as the title page of the pamphlet claimed, “internally happy and externally feared.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, this call for democratization was not linked to the ideal of a unitary state. In fact, the opposite was the case. The patriots associated political centralization with absolutism, which was exactly what they suspected the Stadholder of wanting to achieve.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the patriots claimed that popular political influence and true freedom was based on local autonomy, and the preservation of the privileges of the citizens.<sup>12</sup> To accomplish this, the relationship between the regents and the privileged burghers, who “because of their property and occupation have an immediate interest in the maintenance of the constitution,”<sup>13</sup> needed to be strengthened. Thus, during the 1780's, the local particularistic coalition was reinforced instead of weakened. Moreover, in the minds of the patriot revolutionaries, centralization and democratization were diametrically opposed to one another.

Political ideology only started to change after the failure of the Patriot Revolt, which ended in 1787 with the invasion of the Prussian army, and more importantly after the French Revolution of 1789. The example of the French Revolution was crucial because it showed the Dutch that centralization and democratization could indeed be combined. The ideal of a unitary democratic state, which was

<sup>9</sup> Stephan Klein, *Patriots republikanisme* (Amsterdam, 1995); Prak, “Citizen Radicalism”.

<sup>10</sup> “heilzaame vereeniging der belangen van regent en burger” [...] “van binnen gelukkig en van buiten gedugt” (Johan Hendrik Swildens, *Ontwerp, om de Republiek door eene heilzaame vereeniging der belangen van regent en burger, van binnen gelukkig en van buiten gedugt te maaken* (Leiden, 1785), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Klein, pp. 140–51.

<sup>12</sup> Prak, “Citizen Radicalism”, pp. 93–6.

<sup>13</sup> “die door hunne bezittingen en betrekkingen een weezenlijk en onmiddellijk belang hebben in de handhaving der Constitutie” (Swildens, *Ontwerp, om de Republiek*, p. 49).

promoted by the French Revolution, promised to bring universal freedom and equality. And, as the French revolutionary state was militarily quite successful, this ideal also held the promise that the economic, financial and military problems of the Republic could be solved as well. Consequently, the Dutch revolutionaries began to reconsider how they could solve the crises and at the same time realize the ideals of the Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> This reevaluation process had potentially far-reaching consequences for the form of the state, as it opened up the possibility of creating new coalitions that overruled the early modern particularistic alliances.

The prospect for such coalitions greatly increased when the revolutionary movement took control of the Dutch state after the French invasion in 1795. Not all revolutionary politicians embraced the ideal of a unitary democratic state, but crucially an influential minority did. Prominent examples of such unitary-minded politicians (henceforth: unitarists) were merchant Isaac Gogel (1765–1821), cloth producer Pieter Vreede (1750–1837), and lawyer Samuel Wiselius (1769–1845). These men saw the local particularistic Republic as an old fashioned and highly unjust state, which very much needed to be reformed on the basis of the ideals of the Enlightenment.<sup>15</sup> Gogel, for example, envisioned:

A One and Indivisible Commonwealth [...], in which no longer one city or region, governed through particular laws or self-interested aristocrats, seeks to subordinate the other city or region. [A state] in which all inhabitants form one people of brothers.<sup>16</sup>

To this, he added that this goal could only be reached through a national assembly, which represented the entire people.<sup>17</sup> For Gogel the unification and democratization of the state was the only way to abolish local privileges and liberalize society.

However, the majority of the revolutionary elite did not fully embrace the unitary democratic state model. Most of the revolutionary politicians only adopted particular aspects of this model, while continuing to hold on to crucial features of the early modern federalist state. Clear examples of such federalist-minded politicians (henceforth: federalists), were the regents Johan Pieter Farret (1744–1822), Jan

<sup>14</sup> oost Rosendaal, *Bataven!* (Nijmegen, 2003), pp. 499–536.

<sup>15</sup> P. van Limburg Brouwer, *Het Leven van Mr. Samuel Iperuszoon Wiselius* (Groningen, 1846); J.A. van Sillem, *De politieke en staathuishoudkundige werkzaamheid van Isaac Jan Alexander Gogel* (Amsterdam, 1864); Samuel Iperuszn Wiselius, *Tafereel van de staatkundige verlichting der Nederlanden* (Brussel, 1793); Pieter Vreede, *Mijn Levensloop* (Hilversum, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Een Een en Onverdeelbaar Gemeenebest [...], waarin niet langer de eene stad of streek volgens verschillende wetten bestierd, of door belangzoekende Aristocraten beheerscht, de andere stad, de andere streek zoekt te onderdrukken. Waarin alle inwoonders een Volk van broeders uitmaken. (NA, arch. Gogel (arch.nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 2 Proposition of Gogel in neighborhood assembly no. 20 on 17 August 1795).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Bernd Bicker (1746–1812), and the lawyer Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck (1761–1825). These men were not interested in a completely centralized state. As Farret argued:

The unity of this Republic should only exist in those matters without which the safety and the happiness of the entire Republic cannot be promoted. [...] Yet, all that does not belong to the general interest, but to the domestic affairs of the provinces, the cities and villages, should not be centralized.<sup>18</sup>

Although the majority of the revolutionary politicians were aiming for something between the decentralized early modern Republic and a fully unified state, during the years of 1795 to 1798, the United Provinces, at least on paper, were transformed into a unitary democratic state. To understand how this was possible, we need to examine the construction of alliances between the various political actors.

### The Clubs and the French

It is important to realize that in the Dutch Republic there were no political parties or social movements as we know them today. Traditionally, the regents and noblemen cooperated with each other through informal contacts, while the burghers were organized in corporations. Research by cultural historians has shown that in addition to these traditional forms of social organization, new societies and magazines were created which played an important role in the mobilization and organization of the Dutch revolutionary movement. Particularly in the 1780s and 1790s, numerous politically oriented societies and magazines were established. Many of the political societies were officially registered as reading clubs. In total, an estimated 300 of these reading clubs existed in the Republic in the last decades of the eighteenth century, although it is not clear whether all were politically active. Moreover, after the revolution of 1795, neighborhood assemblies sprang up in various cities with the express objective of discussing political matters.<sup>19</sup>

These new forms of social organization were a crucial element in the struggle over the reform of the state, as they were used in particular by unitarists to organize themselves, and to mobilize the support of middle-class revolutionaries

<sup>18</sup> De eenheid derhalven deeser Republicq behoort alleen te bestaan in alle zulke zaaken zonder welke de veiligheid en het geluk der geheele Republicq niet kan bevorderd worden. [...] Edog al wat tot de algemeene belangen niet behoort, maar het privatif huishouden der gewesten aangaat behoort hun zo min ontnoomen te worden als aan de onderscheide steden en dorpen van ieder gewest en aan ieder ondeeligen in dezelve de beheering in hunne huishoudelijke zaaken behoort ontnoomen te worden (Leonard de Gou, *Het plan van Constitutie van 1796* (Den Haag, 1975), pp. 32, 54).

<sup>19</sup> Wijnand Mijnhardt, *Tot heil van 't menschedom* (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 80–113; Kloek and Mijnhardt, 103–39; Van Sas, pp. 195–221.

for the creation of a unitary democratic state. This support was not self-evident. In fact, during the 1780s, the middle-class revolutionaries had fought for the democratization of local government, which they continued to do after 1795. These demands for local democracy were in direct competition with the ideal of a unitary democratic state.<sup>20</sup> Yet, local democratic struggles did work to the advantage of the unitarists, as they led to clashes between the clubs and the new local governments, which were established after the revolution of 1795.

In Amsterdam the clubs and neighborhood assemblies strongly petitioned for a direct form of local democracy in which the voting population would have the right to issue proposals to the municipality. Primarily in the first year after the revolution of 1795, the Amsterdam municipality, like many other local governments across the Republic, rejected these petitions for direct democracy. The Amsterdam governors argued that the changes proposed by the assemblies and clubs would seriously undermine their ability to govern, and would lead to anarchy.<sup>21</sup> This subsequently gave the unitarists the opportunity to promote the unitary democratic state as an attractive alternative to the limited representative systems that were created at the local level.

Several of the leading unitarists were personally linked to the clubs and neighborhood assemblies. Gogel as well as the Reformed preacher Bernardus Bosch (1746–1803) – later one of the main unitarists in the National Assembly – were prominent members of the Amsterdam neighborhood assemblies.<sup>22</sup> They worked within these clubs, and through their favorite magazines, to mobilize support for their cause. For example, the unitarist-minded magazine *De Democraten*, which was edited by Gogel, Wiselius, and the Reformed preacher Willem Ockerse (1760–1826), maintained that true friends of the people would “promptly establish a constitution that introduces unity and indivisibility, the sovereignty of the people, the human and burgher rights, and a representative democracy.”<sup>23</sup> By linking democratization to unification, *De Democraten*, and other unitarist magazines such as the *Telegraaph*, *De Politieke Blixem*, and the

<sup>20</sup> This was made very explicit in the unitarist-minded periodical *De Democraten* of 22 September 1796. (NA, arch. Gogel (arch.nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 73, *De Democraten*, no. 15, 22 September 1796).

<sup>21</sup> Johan Breen, “De regeering van Amsterdam gedurende den Franschen tijd,” *Jaarboek Amstelodamum*, 12 (1914): 19–32, 47–68; Renger de Bruin, *Burgers op het kussen* (Zutphen, 1986); Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid*, pp. 216–23; GAA, arch. NSB, (arch. nr. 5053), inv.nr. 1075, Minutes of the General Assembly, of 16 April 1795.

<sup>22</sup> GAA, arch. NSB, (arch.nr. 5053), inv.nr. 1075, Minutes of the General Assembly of the neighborhood assemblies in Amsterdam.

<sup>23</sup> “zoo spoedig mooglyk eene constitutie te verkrygen, die, op eenheid en ondeelbaarheid geground, de oppermacht des volks, de rechten van mensch en burger huldigende, en eene democratie by vertegenwoordiging invoerde” (NA, arch. Gogel (arch. nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 73, *De Democraten*, no. 44, 9 maart 1797).

*Advocaat der Nationale Vrijheid*, tried to mobilize the revolutionary middle-class groups for the centralization of the state.<sup>24</sup>

These activities paid off. In August 1795, the Amsterdam neighborhood assemblies officially declared their support for the efforts of the unitarist government of Holland to establish a strong National Assembly, which should replace the old States General.<sup>25</sup> Many other clubs and assemblies across the Republic did the same thing.<sup>26</sup> In September 1795, the clubs and assemblies even created a national organization to help move the unification process forward.<sup>27</sup> On 5 October 1795, this organization wrote to the government of Holland that it was happy to cooperate with the effort "to destroy the seven headed federalism<sup>28</sup> and turn Bato's Yard<sup>29</sup> into an indivisible country," and "to ensure the people, through the introduction of wise laws, that they will be free and independent."<sup>30</sup>

The political influence of the unitarists grew further when they started organizing their own network of local clubs. On 27 March 1797, the first *Society for One and Indivisibility* was established in Amsterdam, by, among others, Gogel, Wiselius, Ockerse, journalist Wibo Fijnje (1750–1809), and professor Jan Konijnenburg (1758–1831).<sup>31</sup> These men swore that they would do everything in their power to establish a constitution based on the sovereignty of the one and indivisible Dutch people.<sup>32</sup> Soon the Amsterdam society had a large number of members, who came from a middle-class background. A reconstruction of the membership shows that 36 out of the 73 members whose occupation could be determined were craftsman, 17 were merchants, five were shopkeepers, and three were clerks. Moreover, there were 17 (23 percent) merchants, some of whom were

<sup>24</sup> Leonard de Gou, *Het ontwerp van constitutie van 1797* (3 vols, Den Haag, 1983), vol. 1, p. XXVI; Van Sas, pp. 287–91.

<sup>25</sup> GAA, arch. NSB (arch.nr. 5053), inv. 1068 Minutes of the neighborhood assemblies of 11 October 1795.

<sup>26</sup> P. Brood, P. Nieuwland, and P. Zoodsma, *Homines Novi* (Amsterdam, 1993), pp. 64–5; Jacob Roelof Kuiper, *Een revolutie ontrafeld* (Franeker, 2002), p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *De Bataafsche Republiek* (Amsterdam, 1908), p. 78.

<sup>28</sup> The seven headed federalism refers to the seven sovereign provinces of the early modern Republic.

<sup>29</sup> Bato was considered as the mythical forefather of the Batavians, which were thought to have been the original inhabitants of the Low Countries.

<sup>30</sup> "door het vernietigen van het zevenhoofdige foederisme, Bato's Erf tot een onverdeelbaar land te brengen." [...] "om, door het invoeren van wyze wetten, eenmaal aan het volk te verzekeren dat het vry en onafhangelijk is." (NA, Rijksarch. Zuid-Holland: Provisionele representanten 1795–1796 (arch.nr. 3.02.01), inv. 8.)

<sup>31</sup> NA, arch. Gogel (arch.nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 2 List of the members of the secret bureau of the *Society of One and Indivisibility*.

<sup>32</sup> Wetten der Sociëteit voor Eenheid en Ondeelbaarheid, opgericht in Amsterdam (Library of the University of Amsterdam); NA, arch. Gogel (arch.nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 2, Oprichtingsvoorstel voor de Sociëteit van Eenheid en Ondeelbaarheid.

probably middle class as well.<sup>33</sup> The large presence of the middle classes in the unitarist movement is confirmed by a similar study of Renger de Bruin on the *Society of One and Indivisibility* in Utrecht.<sup>34</sup>

Once established in Amsterdam, branches of the *Society of One and Indivisibility* were created all across the Republic.<sup>35</sup> Contemporary observers claimed that the Society functioned as a political action network: "the presidents of the [society] formed a bureau of correspondence, which was connected to a provincial bureau. In turn, these provincial bureaus held contact with the central office in Amsterdam."<sup>36</sup> In the summer of 1797, when the National Assembly was about to bring a constitutional proposal to a public vote, the *Society of One and Indivisibility* organized a resistance movement. The proposal contained various elements that were not to the liking of the unitarists, such as substantial provincial political autonomy and limited parliamentary influence over the executive power. In response, the *Society* created a petition to the National Assembly, which it distributed to all its branches. Soon petitions were pouring into the National Assembly from all over the Republic.<sup>37</sup>

In terms of organizational and ideological resources, the federalists were strongly disadvantaged in the first years after the revolution of 1795. Although they were supported by a few clubs and magazines, they lacked a widespread integrated network of societies.<sup>38</sup> Yet, the success of the democratic coalition did not depend on revolutionary assemblies and clubs alone; of particular importance was also the disposition of the French regime. Although the French had promised, in return for a "liberation fee" of one hundred million guilders and the maintenance of their occupying troops, not to interfere in the internal affairs of the Republic, they did influence the political struggle, as we will see, at crucial points. Their policy, at least in the first years, was not based on systematic ideological assumptions. Their main interest was financial: they were primarily concerned that the Republic make its payments of the "liberation fee."<sup>39</sup>

During the Thermidorian regime, which lasted until September 1797, the French government was in favor of a more centralized Dutch state, but it showed

<sup>33</sup> GAA, Burgher Books; GAA, arch. NSB (arch.nr. 5053), inv. 228a, nr.526, petition of the *Society of One and Indivisibility* to the municipality of Amsterdam, 15 April 1798.

<sup>34</sup> De Bruin, pp. 196–7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>36</sup> "presidenten derzelve in eene stad maakten te zamen een bureau van correspondentie uit; deze bureaux van correspondentie stonden weder in verband met centrale bureaux in de provincie, en deze met het bureau generaal te Amsterdam gevestigd" (Van Limburg Brouwer, p. 88).

<sup>37</sup> (NA, arch. Gogel (arch.nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 73, *De Democraten*, no. 56 and 59 of 1 and 22 June 1797.

<sup>38</sup> De Gou, *Het ontwerp van constitutie van 1797*, vol. 1, pp. XXIV–XXV.

<sup>39</sup> Annie Jourdan, "Les Gaulois en Batavie," in Annie Jourdan and Joep Leersen (eds), *Remous révolutionnaires* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 99–102; Pfeil, pp. 126–7.

no real preference for a particular group of federalists or unitarists. Only after the Fructidor coup in September 1797 did the French government start to show a clear preference for the creation of a unitary democratic Dutch state. In turn, this allowed the unitarists to ask for assistance in their conflict with the federalists.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the unitarists were able to form a broad coalition with the revolutionary clubs and the French, a coalition that was held together by the ideal of unitary democracy. This ideal was crucial in divorcing middle-class groups from the local corporate coalition, which they had tried to strengthen during the 1780s. The new coalition could now begin to create a unitary democratic constitution.

### The centralization of authority

The first stage of the centralization and democratization of the Republic in the years 1795–1798 revolved around the transfer of authority from local to provincial governments. Although the unitarists were a minority in most municipalities, the backing of revolutionary clubs and the French authorities enabled them to control a few provincial governments. Crucial was their control of the States of Holland, exercised by unitarists like Samuel Wiselius and Wibo Fijnje from Amsterdam.<sup>41</sup> As Holland was by far the largest and richest province, the control over the government of this province gave the unitarists the opportunity to pressure individual cities and other provinces into cooperating in the centralization process.

The weight carried by the revolutionary clubs and the French authorities became clear when the government of Holland clashed with the Amsterdam municipality over the centralization of authority. On 9 March 1795, the provincial government demanded an oath of allegiance from the municipalities and their civil servants to the people of Holland and its representatives.<sup>42</sup> This demand was immediately rejected by the Amsterdam municipality which included, among others, lawyers Schimmelpenninck and Jan Willem Irhoven van Dam. The Amsterdam governors claimed that no legitimate change in the structure of the state had yet taken place. Consequently, they refused to “attribute more rights or authority to [the provincial government], than has been enjoyed by its predecessors.”<sup>43</sup> To ensure

<sup>40</sup> Leonard de Gou, *De staatsregeling van 1798*, (2 vols, Den Haag, 1988), vol. 1, pp. XIII–XXXVIII.

<sup>41</sup> NA: Rijksarchief Zuid-Holland: Provisionele representanten 1795–1796 (arch. nr. 3.02.01), introduction inventory; list of representatives of Provisional Representatives from January 1795 until March 1796.

<sup>42</sup> GAA, arch. NSB (arch. nr. 5053), inv. 13–15, Correspondence between the provisional deputies of Amsterdam in the provincial assembly and the Amsterdam government 19 Jan.–16 Juni 1795.

<sup>43</sup> “geen meer recht noch gezag toekennen, dan dat voorheen door derzelve predecesseuren genoten is geweest.” (NA, rijksarchief Zuid-Holland: Provisionele representanten 1795–1796 (arch.nr. 3.02.01), inv. 98, Letter of the Provisional

that the Amsterdam municipality would nonetheless cooperate, the provincial government constructed a temporary alliance with the Amsterdam clubs and the French.<sup>44</sup> This alliance allowed the provincial governors to simply imprison the resisting part of the Amsterdam municipality, including Schimmelpenninck and Irhoven van Dam, and to make a compromise with the remaining members of the municipality, who agreed that the municipality would swear its loyalty to the people of Holland.<sup>45</sup> More importantly, the cooperation between the Amsterdam clubs and the provincial government represented the first revolutionary blow to the traditional alliance between the local elite and the privileged citizens, which had previously formed the basis of the decentralized state.

The coup in Amsterdam in 1795 became the blueprint for the unitary democratic revolution in the following years. The same coalitions and tactics were again employed in the establishment of the National Assembly. In the summer of 1795, the government of Holland had proposed to establish a National Assembly based on the sovereignty of the united Dutch people. This assembly would have the authority to formulate a new constitution that would settle disputes between the local, provincial, and central state. This proposal was strongly resisted by the provincial assemblies of Friesland, Zeeland, and Groningen, while the other provinces were willing to cooperate.<sup>46</sup> At this point, the unitarists from Holland again started to work together with the French and the revolutionary clubs to ensure the proposal's success.

In January 1796, the Committee of Public Safety<sup>47</sup> of Holland, of which among others Wiselius and Wibo Fijnje were members, planned in close cooperation with the French representative, Noël, and the French General, Jean Moreau, a coup in Friesland. The governors of Holland agreed with the French that they would bring about a political change by using a conflict between the provincial assembly and the revolutionary clubs of Leeuwarden to their advantage.<sup>48</sup> The governors of Holland were more than willing to lend their support to the clubs. It was agreed with Noël and Moreau that the French would temporarily withdraw all troops from Friesland, thereby allowing the clubs and civic militias of Leeuwarden to take control of the provincial government. This operation took place on 26 January 1796. After the provincial governors had been dismissed, a provincial assembly of Friesland was appointed which was prepared to join the National Assembly.

Representatives of the People of Amsterdam to the Provisional Representatives of the People of Holland of 16 March 1795.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. 97 and 98, Minutes of the committee of the provisional representatives of Holland.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*; GAA, arch. NSB (arch. 5053), inv.nr. 1, Acts of the Revolutionary Committee of 20 March 1795.

<sup>46</sup> Brood, Nieuwland and Zoodsma, *Homines Novi*, pp. 17–19; Colenbrander, *De Bataafsche Republiek*, pp. 77–9.

<sup>47</sup> Comité van Waakzaamheid.

<sup>48</sup> Kuiper, p. 113.

This coup proved to be a turning point, since it convinced the provincial states of Zeeland and Groningen to join the National Assembly as well.<sup>49</sup>

The actions and ideals of the governors of Holland were clearly aimed at combining the processes of democratization and centralization. As men like Gogel and Wiselius made clear, only in a unitary democratic state would the Dutch be free and equal. However, in practice the actions of the unitarists were far from democratic. Paradoxically, the coups in Amsterdam and Friesland effectively undermined the representative institutions which had been created. Thus, although the unitary democratic ideal made it possible to create a broad coalition for centralization, it did not necessarily lead to the consolidation of democratic institutions. This again became clear when the revolutionary politicians clashed with each other in the National Assembly over the proposal for a new constitution.

The debate over the new constitution started in March 1796, when the National Assembly was established. Since the unitarists formed a minority in the National Assembly, the constitutional proposal which was created by the assembly, in the course of 1796 and 1797, retained a substantial degree of provincial political autonomy. Moreover, the organization of the representative system was not as democratic as the unitarists had wanted it to be: the parliamentary supervision over the executive power was limited and the electorate only had indirect voting rights. The constitutional proposal did include the abolition of the privileges of the guilds and the Reformed Church, and it contained (as will be discussed in the second part of this chapter) the financial unification of the state, which was supported by many of the representatives of the heavily indebted provinces of Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht, irrespective of their unitarist or federalist inclinations.<sup>50</sup> Although the National Assembly's constitutional proposal accomplished many things that were important for the unitarists, it did not establish the ideal of a unitary democratic state. Consequently, they again mobilized the revolutionary clubs and the French authorities to achieve this goal by force.

Through the clubs and magazines the unitarists started a veritable publicity war against the constitutional proposal and for the creation of a unitary democratic state. As mentioned already, the *Society for One and Indivisibility* organized a nation-wide petition campaign in which they urged the members of parliament to reconsider the constitutional proposal. Moreover, the society composed negative reports about the plan. For example, a report of the Amsterdam *Society for One and Indivisibility* maintained that the plan was "not based on popular representative government," but on "an elected aristocracy."<sup>51</sup> The periodical *De Democraten* argued, in addition, that the proposal revived the "old provincial sovereignty," and left the municipalities considerable autonomous power concerning their internal

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 113–37; Colenbrander, *De Bataafsche Republiek*, pp. 80–81.

<sup>50</sup> De Gou, *Het ontwerp van constitutie van 1797*; Pfeil, pp. 175–80.

<sup>51</sup> "niet op eene volksregeering bij representatie gegrond" [...] "eene verkiesbaare aristocratie" (GAA, library, B (1797) 7, Notes of the Amsterdam *Society of One and Indivisibility* on the constitutional proposal.

affairs.<sup>52</sup> Some of the unitary-minded periodicals, such as *The National Batavian Newspaper*, not only delivered critique, but also encouraged their readers to take physical action against potential supporters of the plan.<sup>53</sup>

In the mean time, the unitarists in the National Assembly also did their part. In July 1797, 12 representatives, among them Bernardus Bosch and Pieter Vreede, published a pamphlet in which they advised the population to vote against the constitutional proposal. They declared that "the constitutional proposal does not correspond with the demand of a popular government by representation."<sup>54</sup> When the proposal had been rejected by an overwhelming majority of the voters in August 1797, the unitarists continued their publicity campaign.<sup>55</sup> On 12 December 1797, 43 representatives published a manifesto in which they declared that "the government should be both politically and financially One and Indivisible from within as well as without, so that there is just one representative assembly, and all other powers should be purely administrative."<sup>56</sup> The efforts of the unitarists, societies, and periodicals were reinforced by many more petitions issued to the National Assembly.<sup>57</sup> Thus, as with the struggle over local and provincial political autonomy, the unitarists employed the national democratic ideal to mobilize the popular revolutionary groups in support of unification.

In addition to influencing public opinion and mobilizing the revolutionary clubs in support of the centralization of the state, the unitarists also secretly asked the French regime to support a military coup. A few national representatives, including Vreede, and Ockerse, contacted the Amsterdam club the *Uitkijk* for this purpose. Whether this club was linked to the *Society for One and Indivisibility* is unclear. At any rate, after several delegations of members of the *Uitkijk* to Paris as well as a large financial donation to one of the French ministers, the government

<sup>52</sup> "oude provinciale oppermacht" (NA, arch. Gogel (arch.nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 73, De Democraten, no. 54, 18 May 1797).

<sup>53</sup> I.J. van Manen and Vermeulen, "Het lagere volk van Amsterdam, 1780–1800," *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis*, 7 (1981), pp. 14–15.

<sup>54</sup> "het ontwerp niet overeenstemt met de vereischten van een volksregeering bij vertegenwoordiging" (NA, arch. Gogel (arch. nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 177, Manifest of the 12 apostles, 1 Juli 1797).

<sup>55</sup> No less than 108,781 people voted against the plan, while only 27,955 were in favor. Not in one single province did the proposal obtain a majority (Colenbrander, *Bataafsche Republiek*, p. 106).

<sup>56</sup> "Dat 'er eene volkomen Een- en Ondeelbaarheid der Republiek behoore plaats te hebben in bestaan en bestuur, zo na binnen als na buiten, in het politieke en finantiële, zodanig, dat 'er slechts één Vertegenwoordigende Vergadering bestaat, en alle andere aangestelde Machten zijn louter Administratief" (NA, arch. Dumont Pigalle (arch. nr. 2.21.057), inv. 124, Manifest of 43 representatives of the National Assembly to the Batavian nation of 12 December 1797).

<sup>57</sup> De Gou, *De staatsregeling van 1798*, vol. 1, p. XXII.



in Paris responded to the wishes of the unitarists.<sup>58</sup> The French regime, which was also becoming impatient with the slow pace of the Dutch reform process, appointed Charles Delacroix as the new French representative. Delacroix was given the express instruction to stimulate the creation of a "constitution based on freedom, and a stable and powerful central government."<sup>59</sup>

Again ensured of the support of French regime and the middle-class clubs, the unitarists were ready to take the final step toward a centralized state. This took place in several phases. First, the National Assembly was reformed on 22 January 1798. With the assistance of the French army, the group of Vreede and Ockerse reformed the National Assembly, leading to the departure of 61 representatives.<sup>60</sup> Having eliminated the federalist-minded opposition, the unitarists continued to proclaim a series of resolutions which turned the Republic in a matter of days into a centralized state. All the provincial sovereignties were invalidated, and a sovereign central executive body was created.<sup>61</sup> Subsequently, the reformed National Assembly produced a constitutional proposal that built on the existing plan, but also permanently transferred provincial sovereignty to the central state.<sup>62</sup>

To ensure that the population would approve the proposal, the new regime purged the local governments and the voting assemblies. This was done with the assistance of the revolutionary clubs, which provided personnel and information on the local governors and voters.<sup>63</sup> In Amsterdam, the purge of the municipality took place on 15 March 1798. Approximately half of the new Amsterdam governors had been active in the neighborhood assemblies, or was a member of *The Society of One and Indivisibility*, or of *Virtuousness and Skills*, the other important unitary-minded club in the city. After the reform of the Amsterdam government, a special committee with far-reaching authority purged the voting assemblies of potential dissidents.<sup>64</sup> Similar purges took place all over the Republic. Although these purges made the regime of Vreede and Ockerse highly unpopular with the

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. XI–XVIII.

<sup>59</sup> "l'établissement d'une constitution libre, d'un gouvernement digne dont la force ne soit point illusoire" (H.T. Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken der algemeene geschiedenis van Nederland van 1795 tot 1840*, (22 vols, Den Haag, 1906), vol. 2, p. 142).

<sup>60</sup> For a detailed account see: De Gou, *De staatsregeling van 1798*, vol. 1, pp. XI–LXVI.

<sup>61</sup> Pfeil, pp. 187–8.

<sup>62</sup> De Gou, *De staatsregeling van 1798*.

<sup>63</sup> Breen, pp. 72–76; See for example the address of the Society of *One and Indivisibility*, which delivered a list of 909 Orangist officials (GAA, arch. NSB (arch. nr. 5053), inv. 225, Minutes of the Administrative municipality of Amsterdam of 5 April 1798).

<sup>64</sup> Breen, pp. 74–5; GAA, arch. NSB (arch.nr. 5053), inv. 1075, "Minutes of the General Assembly of the neighborhood assemblies in Amsterdam," GAA, arch. NSB (arch.nr. 5053), inv. 228a, nr.526, petition of the "*Societeit voor Een en Ondeelbaarheid*" to the municipality of Amsterdam of 15 April 1798; GAA, arch. NSB (arch.nr. 5053),

general population, they accomplished their goal. The constitution was approved by a majority of 153,913 against 11,597 votes.<sup>65</sup>

### The reversal of the centralization process

In the spring of 1798, the Dutch state seemed to be moving firmly in the direction of unitary democracy. The alliance between the unitarists, the clubs, and the French regime had made it possible to eliminate the resistance against the unification process. However, as we have seen, this coalition was held together by the ideal of unitary democracy, but it did not proceed by democratic means. In fact, the unitary democratic constitution could only be achieved by overruling political opponents and representative procedures. The revolutionary politicians quickly discovered that the democratic procedures of representation and consultation formed an obstacle for change, as they gave a broad range of political groups the opportunity to resist the elimination of their traditional political, economic, social, and religious privileges.

Between the years of 1795 and 1798, these contradictions did not obstruct the state transformation process, as the unitarists were able to overrule representative procedures and eliminate political opponents in the name of the national democratic ideal. However, the situation changed once this ideal had been achieved through the creation of the new constitution. If the unitarists would continue in the same authoritarian fashion, they would undermine their own constitution and the legitimacy of their regime. Alternatively, if they were to begin to play by the rules of democracy, they would give the opponents of the new constitution the opportunity to resist the transformation of the state. The unitarists failed to solve these contradictions; hence the unitary democratic alliance eventually broke down and the constitution of 1798 was reversed.

The first blow to the unitary democratic coalition occurred immediately after the new constitution had been established. The regime of Vreede and Ockerse decided to continue down the authoritarian path and not organize general elections as prescribed by the constitution. Instead, it ruled on 4 May 1798, that only one-third of the members of parliament would be replaced through elections. The other two-thirds would be reinstated as representatives in the Legislative Assembly.<sup>66</sup> The unitary-minded parliament justified its decision by arguing:

inv. 233, nr. 798 Petition of the "*Societeit voor Deugd en Kundigheden*" to the municipality of Amsterdam, 5 June 1798."

<sup>65</sup> Colenbrander, *De Bataafsche Republiek*, pp. 132–4.

<sup>66</sup> Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken*, vol. 2, pp. 673–84.

It is possible that a large portion of the people, in this time of political conflict, will be misled by intriguers and choose the false over the true patriot, (...) which will have disastrous consequences for the Republic as a whole.<sup>67</sup>

The decision undermined the legitimacy of the central government and immediately caused a split within the unitary democratic coalition. A few days later, the Executive Council received reports from Amsterdam that some of the "most determined patriots were highly dissatisfied with the decree of the Constituting Assembly."<sup>68</sup> It was said that the decision was publicly cursed and that the step of the Assembly was seen as a direct violation of the constitution, an aristocratic action, and an assault on the rights and power of the people. It turned out that the critique came from the members of the *Society for One and Indivisibility*.<sup>69</sup>

The unitarists split into two factions: those who wanted to maintain the representative system, and those who were mostly interested in the survival of the unitary-minded regime. This split occurred in various parts of the country.<sup>70</sup> Significantly, the actions of Vreede and Ockerse created a rift within the central government itself. Gogel, the minister of finance, together with the ministers of marine, warfare, justice, and internal police were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the decisions of the Executive Council and the Legislative Assembly. Subsequently, these ministers organized a coup to overthrow the regime of Vreede and Ockerse, restore the democratic process, and reinstate the authority and legitimacy of the central government, which had been severely undermined by the authoritarian measures of the Vreede group. Eventually the efforts of the ministers were successful, as they were able to mobilize the support of the French government, which had been informed about the growing resentment against the Vreede regime.<sup>71</sup> With the backing of the French, Gogel and the other four ministers were able to take control of the central state government.

<sup>67</sup> 't is moogelyk, dat een groot gedeelte des volks, in dit tydftip, waar in de woelingen der partyschappen alomme zo meenigvuldig zyn, (door intriguanten misleid) weder in zyne keuze mistaste, den schynpatriot boven den waaren de voorkeur geven, [...] en daardoor de rampzaligste gevolgen voor de geheele Republiek berokkene (*Dagverhaal der handelingen van de Nationaale Vergadering representeerende het Volk van Nederland* (9 vols, Den Haag, 1796-1798), vol. 9, p. 618).

<sup>68</sup> "de fermste patriotten zeer ontevreden waren over het decreet der Constituerende Vergadering" (GAA, arch. NSB (arch. nr. 5053), inv. 225, Minutes of the Administrative municipality of Amsterdam of 9 May 1798).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Kuiper, pp. 452-60; Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid en democratisch enkelvoud*, pp. 251-2.

<sup>71</sup> Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken*, vol. 2, p. 681.

After the coup, the ministers immediately made clear that they wanted to maintain the constitution and restore the democratic process.<sup>72</sup> Yet, despite the unitary democratic intentions of its instigators, the coup dealt a major blow to the coalition. Firstly, the group of unitarist politicians, already weakened by the ideological split, lost some of its most determined members as a result of the coup.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, most of the unitary-minded clubs were discontinued. This was partly the result of restrictive measures of the new government; the new regime abhorred the populist tactics of its predecessors. But it also had to do with the lack of enthusiasm of club members themselves, who were no longer actively involved in the political game.<sup>74</sup> Finally, although the restoration of the democratic process restored the legitimacy of the central government, it also enabled some of the opponents of the constitution to return to national politics. After the elections of July 1798, the composition of the Representative Body again strongly resembled that of the National Assembly before the revolution of January 1798.<sup>75</sup>

In the course of 1799 to 1800, the unitary democratic coalition was further undermined when it became clear that the implementation of the constitution was indeed hampered by time-consuming democratic procedures. Consequently, many Dutch politicians started to reevaluate the constitution.<sup>76</sup> For example, in December 1800, the unitarist-minded politician Gogel wrote:

The present constitution is completely unsuitable to ensure the Dutch people of lasting happiness. (...) Provincial and city interests, expedience, personal relationships, favoritism, and whatever else have replaced the general interest. (...) The Legislative Body does not know what it wants. (...) Such a body is not capable of doing something good, something great.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> *Dagverhaal der handelingen van het Vertegenwoordigend Lichaam des Bataafschen volks* (13 vols, Den Haag, 1798-1801), vol. 1, pp. 357-60.

<sup>73</sup> A.M. Elias and P.C.M. Schölvinck, *Volksrepresentanten en wetgevers* (Amsterdam, 1991).

<sup>74</sup> De Bruin, pp. 198-9; Henk Reitsma, "Lesegezelschappen und bürgerliche Revolution in Amsterdam," in Otto Dann (ed.), *Lesegezelschappen und bürgerliche Emanzipation. Ein europäischer Vergleich* (München, 1981), pp. 159-80.

<sup>75</sup> Before January 1798, the juridical professionals and regents had constituted about 40 percent of the total number of representatives in the National Assembly. In the Representative Body, which held its first session on 31 July 1798, they formed 50 percent of the members (Elias and Schölvinck).

<sup>76</sup> Leonard de Gou, *De staatsregeling van 1801* (Den Haag, 1995), p. XV.

<sup>77</sup> De tegenwoordige staatsregeling is geheel ongeschikt om immer het Bataafsche volk een duurzaam geluk te verzekeren. (...) Provinciale en stedelijke belangen, eigenbaat, personeele betrekkingen, gunst en wat dies meer is vervangen de plaats van het algemeen belang. Dit alles leert de dagelijksche ondervinding: zie de dagverhalen van 1798-1800. (...) Het Wetgevend Lichaam weet zelf niet wat het wil. (...) Zodanig lichaam is niet in staat iets goeds, iets groots te verrigten. (Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken*, vol. 3, pp. 643-4.)

Gogel along with various other unitarists came to the conclusion that influence of the legislative assembly should be severely limited and the power of the executive strengthened. Although many other unitarist politicians continued to hold on to the democratic ideal, this cognitive shift further weakened the democratic coalition, which could hardly be called a coalition anymore. Not only had the unitarists become internally divided, their former coalition partners, the clubs and the French regime, had distanced themselves as well. In fact, after the authoritarian coup of Napoleon in 1799, the French no longer supported the democratization of the Republic.

From the spring of 1801, the federalists in the Executive Council and the Representative Body started to exploit the collapse of the unitary democratic coalition in an effort to reverse the constitution. These politicians not only wanted to diminish the influence of the legislative power, but also to refederalize the state. For example, the regent Augustijn Besier, who was a member of the Executive Council, maintained that above all he wanted to restore the authority of the departments to oversee their domestic affairs. He emphasized that in doing so, the departmental administrations would again have sovereign control over their internal politics, the form of its government, the civil legislation, and taxation.<sup>78</sup> The other federalists in the central government shared the opinion of Besier. In the course of 1801, and in cooperation with the French regime, they took control of the Dutch state and revised the constitution according to their own vision.<sup>79</sup> Thus, precisely what the Vreede and Ockerse regime had feared would happen, did happen. The representative system allowed the federalists to return to politics and subsequently reverse the national democratic revolution.

Although the central state remained sovereign under the constitution of 1801, several key reforms of the previous constitution were reversed. The authority of the Representative Body was greatly reduced, and the authority of the Executive Council enhanced. This effectively ended the democratization process, which was not again revived until the 1840s. Moreover, the plan to create a national tax system was abandoned, and part of the political autonomy of local and provincial authorities was restored. This suggests among other things that these governments again had the authority to make new legislation concerning domestic affairs.<sup>80</sup> The Amsterdam government, which was appointed in November 1801, immediately used this authority to restore the political autonomy of the city. The municipality even established a committee to investigate the "affairs that have unjustly been withdrawn from the authority of the city and should again be brought under its

<sup>78</sup> De Gou, *De staatsregeling van 1801*, pp. 546–7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. XXVI–XXVII.

<sup>80</sup> *Dagverhaal der handelingen van het Vertegenwoordigend Lichaam des Bataafschen volks*, vol. 13, pp. 600–606; Pfeil, pp. 309–21.

control."<sup>81</sup> The efforts of the municipality paid off as it regained the authority over the civic militias and the appointment of the local officials.<sup>82</sup>

The restoration of the early modern practices and institutions was above all visible in the organization of the economy. Despite the fact that the constitution of 1801 reaffirmed the abolishment of the guilds, the Amsterdam government and its successor did everything in their power to reinstate the central features of the guild system. On 8 January 1802, the municipality decided to reinstate the rule that anyone who wanted to set up a shop or work as a craftsman in Amsterdam was obligated to become member of one of the former guilds. Moreover, it ruled that one had to be a citizen of Amsterdam to become a member of a former guild.<sup>83</sup> In January 1803, the municipality added that only people who had taken the appropriate examination, or who had been an apprentice for a certain period of time, as stipulated in the guild regulations, could become guild member. Finally, new members had to pay an examination fee and a certain amount of money to enter a guild.<sup>84</sup>

The ruling of the municipality was an open invitation to the craftsmen, small merchants and shopkeepers of the city to cooperate in the reinstatement of the guild system. Soon various occupational groups responded and effectively revived the local corporate coalition between the privileged burghers and the local governors. New restrictive regulations were created against peddling, and the traditional guild regulations of the bakers, shipyard workers, mast makers, small merchants, shopkeepers, shoemakers, and tar salesmen, among others, were restored.<sup>85</sup> The restoration of the guilds was certainly not restricted to Amsterdam; other cities, such as Den Bosch, Rotterdam, and Den Hague also started to reinstate guild regulations.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, in the years after 1801, the guilds experienced a strong revival. The local corporate alliance became popular again once the democratic ideal had been abandoned and the unitary democratic coalition had collapsed. The

<sup>81</sup> "zodanige meerdere zaken, welke, uithoofde van de van tijd tot tijd plaats gehad hebbende omstandigheden, ten onrechte aan de beheering van het stedelijk bestuur zijn onttrokken, en waaromtrent dus, uit kragte van het gemelde art. der staatsregeling, redres behoorde te worden gedaan." (GAA, arch. NSB (arch. nr. 5053), inv. 522, nr. 294 Supplements of the minutes of the intermediary municipality of Amsterdam: report of the personal commission of the municipality.)

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. 573 Minutes of the Council of Amsterdam of 15 January and 26 February 1805.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. 511, "Minutes of the intermediary municipality of Amsterdam of 5 and 7 January 1802."

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. 530, nr. 7 Supplements of the minutes of the intermediary municipality of Amsterdam: Ordinances to restore the businesses in Amsterdam.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. 511, 571, 572, 573 Minutes of the intermediary municipality of Amsterdam of 30 April 1802, Minutes of the Council of Amsterdam of 6 September, 25 November 1803, 4 September, 4 December 1804, 2 July 1805.

<sup>86</sup> Cornelis Wiskerke, *De afschaffing der gilden in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 1938).

corporate middle classes, which were previously active in revolutionary clubs, now actively cooperated with the old regime elite in promoting local autonomy and the restoration of the corporations.

### The Financial Coalition

By 1801, the centralization process seemed dead. Yet, in 1805, it was again revived. As a result of this revival, the state finances could be unified, the central state strengthened, and the assault on the local corporations renewed. But what caused this revival? It was certainly not due to a rebuilding of the unitary democratic coalition. After 1801, the group of unitarists drifted further apart and the revolutionary clubs were not resurrected either. The cause of the revival was the construction of a financial coalition between central state politicians from Holland and the French regime.

Although the financial coalition was effectively established in 1805, the first attempts to create such a coalition dated back to the first National Assembly in 1796. From the beginning of the revolution, the state finances had been a major concern of the politicians from Holland. By 1795, the debt of Holland, which had financed the lion's share of the Dutch wars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had massively increased. At an amount of 455 million guilders, which represented no less than 70 percent of the annual provincial tax revenue, Holland was on the verge of financial bankruptcy while the landed provinces, Gelderland, Overijssel, Brabant, Friesland, Groningen, and Drente, had very few or no debts at all.<sup>87</sup> Given this distribution of debts, it is not surprising that many of the representatives from Holland, along with those from Zeeland, and Utrecht, which also had relatively large debts, shared a strong interest in the financial unification of the state. Thus, already at the start of the revolutionary period the call for financial unification could have provided a political basis to challenge the decentralized particularistic organization of the early modern Republic.

But although the representatives of the indebted provinces shared a common interest in financial unification, the attempt to create a financial coalition failed, in the first years after 1795. The problem was that some of the advocates for financial unification were not in favor of unitary democracy while others were. This can clearly be observed in the case of lawyer Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck. For him, financial and political unification were two separate issues. In 1795, as discussed above, he resisted the transfer of authority from the Amsterdam municipality to the provincial government. Furthermore, when the National Assembly had to decide whether the central state should become fully sovereign, he contended that this would be a sure road to despotism.<sup>88</sup> Yet, when it came to the amalgamation of the

<sup>87</sup> Van Zanden, and Van Riel, pp. 53–4.

<sup>88</sup> De Gou, *Het ontwerp van constitutie van 1797*, vol. 2, p. 141.

provincial debts, Schimmelpenninck had no problems with centralization. In fact, he maintained that such an amalgamation was only fair because:

The majority of the provincial debts and especially those of Holland have been incurred to uphold the interests of the entire country. Moreover, it seems to me that the relations between the various provinces, which have for a long time now been united through a common bond, so tender and vested with common interests that the amalgamation of the provincial debts cannot be compared to the uniting of debts between nations.<sup>89</sup>

In the National Assembly, Schimmelpenninck was vigorously supported in this view by among others the Amsterdam merchant banker Nicolaas van Staphorst (1742–1801) and the former pensionary of Haarlem Pieter Leonard van de Kastelee (1748–1810). Kastelee even threatened the representatives of the other provinces that Holland would no longer contribute to the state budget, if no financial union were to take place.<sup>90</sup>

By contrast many of the representatives of the landed provinces rejected financial unification and the amalgamation of the provincial debts. The federalist-minded representatives from these provinces in particular were against the amalgamation. For example, lawyer Herman Vitringa from Gelderland argued that it was:

Unjust, unconstitutional, and very harmful for most provinces, since its collective inhabitants would be deprived of their property without their express consent. Moreover, they would be burdened with debts, which neither they nor their ancestors had incurred.<sup>91</sup>

However, not only the federalists from the provinces with small debts were against amalgamation, many unitarists from these provinces also had their reservations. Like Schimmelpenninck, they made a distinction between political and financial

<sup>89</sup> Verre het grootste gedeelte der provinciale schulden en wel bijzonder der Hollandsche, zeer zeker tot behoud der algemeene zaake des geheelen Vaderlands zijn gemaakt en het kooft mij bovendien voor, dat men toch nimmer zal kunnen ontkennen, dat de betrekking tusschen de onderscheidene Gewesten, zints zulk een geruime tijd door een bondgenootschappelijken band vereenigd, dermaten teder en wederzijdsch belang en elks bloei, welvaart en bestaan zo groot is, dat de algemeenmaking deezer gewestelijk schulden tusschen zodanige geweene bondgenoten niet kan gelijk gesteld worden met eene ineensmelting van de schulden tusschen volken. (De Gou, *Het ontwerp van constitutie van 1797*, vol. 1, p. 216.)

<sup>90</sup> De Gou, *Het plan van Constitutie van 1796*, pp. 66–7.

<sup>91</sup> “onrechtvaardig onstaatkundig en ten hoogsten verderfelijck voor de meeste gewesten, omdat men aan de collective ingezetenen hunne eigendommen, zonder hun voorafgegaan expres consent zou ontnemen en hen met schulden bezwaaren, die zij noch hunne voorouderen nimmer gemaakt hebben” (De Gou, *Het ontwerp van constitutie van 1797*, vol. 1, pp. 17–18).

unification. For, example, doctor Petrus Guljé from Brabant was a strong supporter of the unitary democratic ideal. Yet, at the same time, he argued that a financial amalgamation would be particularly unjust for the people of Brabant, who in the early modern Republic were ruled by the States General.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, financial unification cut right across the federalist-unitarist divide. The financial issue had the potential of allowing a coalition to form between the politicians from Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht. Yet, in the first years after the revolution of 1795, no such coalition could be formed because the struggle over unitary democracy overruled all other issues of contention, including the debate over financial unification. Only when the unitary democratic coalition collapsed in 1801, and the political relations between the federalists and unitarists depolarized, did it become possible to form a financial coalition. This is not to say that there were no attempts to create a financial alliance before 1805. From 1796 onwards, there were continuing efforts to establish such a coalition. Although these attempts failed, they were important because they laid the foundations for the successful creation of such a coalition in 1805 and in subsequent years.

#### The construction of the financial coalition

The first attempt to create a financial coalition took place in the National Assembly in 1796 and 1797. Schimmelpenninck in particular was very active in rallying support for the establishment of a national tax system and the amalgamation of the provincial debts.<sup>93</sup> His primary concern was to convince the federalists from Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht that the financial advantages would offset the loss of political autonomy that accompanied the centralization of the financial institutions. They had to be convinced that the central state would be able to manage the public debt, collect taxes, and make financial policies. For example, the wealthy regent Jan Bernd Bicker from Amsterdam asked in 1796:

What would be the consequences, if after the principle of financial unity had been established, it became clear that it was impossible to implement such unity? This would put the cart before the horse. Moreover, it is important to note that the people who have argued for financial unity and an amalgamation of the provincial debts have not yet made clear how such unification should take place.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 204–8.

<sup>93</sup> De Gou, *Het plan van Constitutie van 1796*, pp. 66–8; Ibid., *Het ontwerp van constitutie van 1797*, vol. 1, pp. 8–9, 21, 212–20.

<sup>94</sup> “Wat doch zoude de gevolgen zijn, als men eerst het principe decreeteerde, van het finantieele geheel op onbepaalde eenheid te vestigen en men zag bij het nader discutiëren van het plan dat het onuytvoerlijk was, zou dit niet zijn, de paarden agter den wagen spannen. Ook verdient bij mij, veel opmerking, dat die leeden welke het meest ijveren voor

Thus, Schimmelpenninck had to prove that the financial union was indeed feasible.

Together with the unitarist politician Pieter Vreede, Schimmelpenninck subsequently proposed, in December 1796, to establish a special committee to investigate how the state finances should be organized. The creation of this committee was a first attempt to create a coalition that crossed the divide between federalists and unitarists. This special financial committee, which included Schimmelpenninck, Vreede, and Van de Kastele, produced a favorable report on financial unification. The detailed report showed that an amalgamation of the provincial debts would be the best strategy for solving the financial difficulties of the Republic as a whole. The report also concluded that for such an amalgamation to be successful, it was essential that the general needs of the state be financed through national taxation and a uniform system of tariffs.<sup>95</sup> The report and the pleas of Schimmelpenninck, and Van de Kastele eventually convinced many federalists-minded politicians from Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht to support the project of financial unification. Among others Jan Bernd Bicker was now prepared to vote in favor of the amalgamation of the provincial debts and the creation of a national tax system.<sup>96</sup>

Although Schimmelpenninck and Vreede had convinced the majority of the National Assembly to support the project of financial unification, their coalition did not last very long. Once it became clear that the federalists, including Schimmelpenninck and Bicker, were not willing to support the political unification of the state, the unitarists withdrew their support from the constitutional plan.<sup>97</sup> Vreede along with various other unitarists started his own propaganda campaign against the plan (cf. supra). This campaign, combined with protests of the Reformed Church and the guilds resisting the elimination of their specific privileges, led to the public rejection of the constitutional proposal in August 1797.

For Schimmelpenninck the failure of the constitutional proposal was a major disappointment. Consequently, he decided to withdraw from the National Assembly.<sup>98</sup> In the following years, he worked behind the scenes to accomplish the reform program laid down in the constitutional plan of 1797. His position as Dutch ambassador in Paris (1798–1800; 1803–1805) and London

eene onbepaalde eenheid in het finantieele en voor een amalgame van de ouden schulden, geen plan hebben uytgewerkt, op welk men de uytvoerlijkheid daarvan kon bereekenen” (GAA, arch. Bicker (arch.nr. 195) inv. 374, My advice on the first plan of constitution.)

<sup>95</sup> NA, arch. Wetgevende Colleges 1795–1810 (arch.nr. 2.01.01.01), inv. 565, Report of special financial committee, 9 January 1797.

<sup>96</sup> *Dagverhaal der handelingen van de Nationaale Vergadering representeerende het Volk van Nederland*, vol. 4, pp. 579–80; Elias and Schölvink.

<sup>97</sup> De Gou, *Het ontwerp van constitutie van 1797*, vol. 2, pp. 56–61.

<sup>98</sup> Gerrit Schimmelpenninck, *Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck, en eenige gebeurtenissen van zijnen tijd* (2 vols, Den Haag, 1845), vol 1, pp. 141–5.

(1802–1803) greatly helped to accomplish this task.<sup>99</sup> In particular when the democratic coalition collapsed in 1801 Schimmelpenninck tried to forge a broad coalition between the federalists and unitarists. To win the support of politicians from the landed provinces, he proposed to tone down the goals of financial unification. In order to gain the support of these politicians, Schimmelpenninck argued that the establishment of a full-blown national tax system should be postponed. This system could, he believed, be partly centralized, which would leave the departmental governments in control of the taxation for infrastructure.<sup>100</sup> In effect, his plan still entailed a major step toward a financial union. Schimmelpenninck cautiously tried to find the middle ground. He proposed a state that was less centralized than that which was envisioned by unitarists such as Vreede and Gogel, but it was clearly not as decentralized as federalists, such as Farret and Besier, had desired.

Despite these ideological differences, Schimmelpenninck was confident that members of both sides would be happy with his compromise. In a letter to Gogel, he argued that:

The Unitarist would be content because the Republic would still be one and indivisible with a general government and a chosen representative Legislative Body, which represents the entire undivided nation. (...) Concerning finances, he would rather have seen that all of the departmental systems of finances were immediately abolished and replaced by general national taxes, but the opportunity for such a reform has been refuted by many sensible and reasonable people. (...) He, who is more prone to a moderate federalism, will also join this state of affairs because his departments will have sufficient constitutional power to organize local affairs and domestic economic interests without being dependent on a strange and far away power, which is less familiar with the details.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Elias and Schölvinck, p. 208.

<sup>100</sup> De Gou, *De staatsregeling van 1801*, p. 544.

<sup>101</sup> De Unitarist zou met zijne eene en ondeelbare Republiek met een niet geëntrevereerd algemeen gouvernement met een welgekozen representative Wetgevende Vergadering, de geheele onverdeelde Natie representerende. (...) Hij zou, ten opzichte van het finantieele, ja wel liever gezien hebben dat dadelijk alle departementale stelsels van finantie konden zijn afgeschafft en alles door algemeene nationale heffingen konde gevonden worden, maar de mogelijkheid daarvan door zeer veele verstandige en redelijke menschen gecontesteerd wordende. (...) Hij, die meer naar een gemodereerd federalismus overhelde, zou zich insgelijks met die order van zaaken vereenigen, omdat aan zijne departementen genoegsame constitutioneele macht gereserveerd wordt om de huishoudelijke oeconomische belangen, de dagelijksche locale aangelegenheden te kunnen beredden zonder daaromtrent van een vreemde en op verre afstand werkende magt, minder met die details bekend, af te hangen. (Ibid., pp. 544–5)

To achieve this coalition, Schimmelpenninck wrote a great number of letters to leading men of both factions and to the French regime.<sup>102</sup> But it was all to no avail, since the federalists took control of the central government through a coup in the fall of 1801. They simply eliminated the proposal for financial unification.

Only when the ideological relations had become further depolarized in the years after 1801, and Schimmelpenninck had obtained the personal support of Napoleon, did it finally become possible to create a coalition for financial unification. This brings us back to the vital role played by the French in the transformation of the Dutch state. Just as the unitarists could not have established a unitary democratic constitution without French support, the Schimmelpenninck faction would not have been able to pursue a financial union. Napoleon's backing was particularly crucial because Schimmelpenninck and his advocates did not have the popular support which the unitarists enjoyed in 1798. Yet, French support was by no means a given or constant. Even after Napoleon took control of the French regime in 1799, the attitude of the French government toward the Dutch had undergone important changes. In the Napoleonic government, the Republic became, even more so than before, instrumental in the European power politics of the French state. Consequently, the construction of a financial coalition, or any coalition for that matter, came to depend on European political developments.<sup>103</sup>

In 1801 this worked to the advantage of the federalists from the landed provinces, who opposed financial unification. France had just made a peace agreement with its main rivals, England and Austria. At the time, Napoleon was primarily interested in consolidating the French military advances of previous years. Hence, he wanted to stabilize the political relations in France and in the Dutch Republic by supporting the return of the old administrative elite. The federalists from the landed provinces in particular jumped at the opportunity, and proceeded to decentralize the state and abolish the plans for financial unification. Thus, the coup of 1801 was not only directed against the unitary democratic constitution, but also against the interests of Holland, whose weakened position was reflected in the central government. Of the 12 members of the Executive Council only two came from Holland. Based on the size of its population it should have been entitled to four or five members. In financial terms, the representation of Holland was even more disproportionate, as the province continued to provide 60 percent of the state's revenue.<sup>104</sup>

In 1804, the prospects of the revolutionary elite of Holland dramatically improved, when Napoleon came to the conclusion that a federalist Republic could not effectively assist him in the new round of European warfare into which France had entered. Napoleon wanted to maximize the revenue extracted from the Republic, and he called on Schimmelpenninck to achieve this. In the course of 1804 and the beginning of 1805, Schimmelpenninck constructed, in close cooperation with Napoleon, a new constitution, which was even more authoritarian than the

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 504–10, 530–36, 543–5.

<sup>103</sup> Pfeil, pp. 310–12.

<sup>104</sup> Van Zanden and Van Riel, pp. 32, 54.

constitution of 1801, but which included the financial unification of the state. Subsequently, Napoleon appointed him head of state.<sup>105</sup> Schimmelpenninck now had the authority to form his own government and finally to realize the financial coalition he had been striving for since the beginning of the revolutionary period. In his government, both federalists and unitarists from Holland were appointed to prominent positions. Gogel became minister of finance, while Van de Kastelee received a seat in the State Council. The Jewish Amsterdam insurer Johannes Goldberg, and the Reformed Amsterdam merchant Willem Six – both exponents of the Amsterdam financial elite – were appointed to Schimmelpenninck's advisory committee.<sup>106</sup>

### The financial union

Once the Schimmelpenninck government was in place, it immediately went to work on the implementation of a national tax system. The new system, designed by Gogel, was based on the principles of universal freedom and equality, which entailed that all citizens were burdened in the same way and had the same rights. To accomplish this, Gogel proposed to discard all the old urban taxes and prohibit any local regulations concerning the production, transport, storage, and delivery of goods. The new law on taxation potentially had a large effect because it contained the leading principles on which other legislation could be based. To ensure that the local administrators would comply with the new regulations, the Schimmelpenninck regime issued a law that regulated the municipal governments. Local commissioners would supervise the collection of taxes and control the financial dealings of local and provincial governments.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to the implementation of tax reforms the new regime once again attempted to abolish the guilds. Gogel issued a proposal for a patent law, which introduced a tax on the free practice of most businesses, occupations, and trades. Anyone who wanted to create a new firm or start a practice would have to obtain a license from the municipality. The law gave everyone who had bought such a license, the freedom to start any occupation of their choosing anywhere in the Republic, without the obstruction of guilds or city regulations.<sup>108</sup> This effectively ended the monopoly of the guilds over the regulation of economic life. Thus, although the struggle for democracy was abandoned after 1801, the enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality still informed the politics of men like Gogel.

In 1806, Schimmelpenninck was replaced by the brother of Napoleon, Louis Napoleon, as head of state. Even though this officially transformed the Republic

<sup>105</sup> De Gou, *De staatsregeling van 1805 en de constitutie van 1806* (Den Haag, 1997), pp. IX–XXVII.

<sup>106</sup> Pfeil, pp. 405–7.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 409–15.

<sup>108</sup> Wiskerke, p. 158.

into a kingdom, it did not affect the financial coalition, which continued to serve as the basis for central state politics after 1806. The relationship between the French and the central state politicians from Holland was still one of collaboration.

Meanwhile, the unification process did meet with strong opposition. Without the ideal of national democracy, it turned out to be very difficult to obtain the cooperation of either the burghers or the local governments. In fact, the local corporate coalition between the urban governors and the privileged members of the population, which had been revived in the years after 1801, formed a strong basis of resistance against the centralizing measures of the governments of Schimmelpenninck and Louis Napoleon. Although politicians from very different ideological backgrounds worked together in the financial coalition, this coalition did not include any local political groups. Consequently, the central government soon came into conflict with the municipalities when it tried to abolish the guilds and exercise stricter control over the local administrations.

In particular, the financial coalition clashed with the Amsterdam municipality. In 1805, the Amsterdam government, in which Johan Pieter Farret played a prominent role, wrote an extensive memorandum in defense of local autonomy and the guild system. The city administrators emphasized that the abolishment of the guilds would reduce their ability to regulate the urban community.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, they insisted that the appointment of financial commissioners would have a very negative effect on Amsterdam “because governments within governments lead to troublesome clashes.”<sup>110</sup> The resistance of the Amsterdam municipality, which was soon joined by other municipalities, turned the state transformation process into a continuous struggle between central and local governments over the organization of the state and the economy.

Although the centralization process was strongly opposed after 1805, it did change the organization of the state and the economy. Despite the resistance of the municipalities, Gogel made some progress with the elimination of the guilds, many of which had ceased to function by the end of the French occupation in 1813. Moreover, in spite of local opposition, the civic militias had been integrated into a national armed burgher force. Perhaps the most important achievement was the financial subordination of the local governments. The establishment of the national tax system, based on Gogel's design, can be considered a major success.<sup>111</sup> Although the construction of this system was resisted by the Amsterdam municipality, there were also signs that it set off self-reinforcing mechanisms.<sup>112</sup> After the public finances had been centralized it became attractive for the local governors to turn to the national state for financial support. In fact, central state support became

<sup>109</sup> GAA, NSB (arch.nr. 5053), inv. 689 Secret minutes 1805 September 24–1808 Januari 20.

<sup>110</sup> Door regeeringen in regeeringen ontstaan zeer verdrietige en zeer nadeelige botsingen. (*Ibid.*)

<sup>111</sup> For a detailed account see Pfeil.

<sup>112</sup> GAA, NSB (arch.nr. 5053), inv. 574 Minutes of Council of 16 December 1806.

vital, since the freedom of the Amsterdam governors to seek alternative financial sources had disappeared. For example, in 1809, when the Amsterdam municipality was faced with a large deficit of half a million guilders, the city council proposed to demand larger contributions from the central government to the city's finances.<sup>113</sup> Even though the municipality did not obtain the larger central state subsidies, its actions do reveal that, at least in financial terms, it no longer attempted to be completely independent. Thus, in the absence of obstructive democratic institutions, significant advances in the centralization process were able to take place, which in turn laid the foundation for the development of a unified Dutch state in the decades to come.

The dismissal of democratic ideals and the effective abolishment of representative procedures, however, did come at a price. It became much more difficult to obtain the cooperation of local political groups. Consequently, each centralizing measure met with strong local resistance. This resistance became especially strong in the years between 1810 and 1813, when the Dutch state was incorporated in the French empire. At this point, the relationship between the Dutch and the French changed from collaboration into domination. Even the central state politicians from Holland lost their enthusiasm for the state transformation process. For example, Elias Canneman, one of the financial experts of Holland, wrote about the annexation to Gogel: "the beginning is misery, the blow has been too generally felt and has overthrown too much, to find medication that can revitalize the weak and decrepit woman from her miserable state."<sup>114</sup>

The politicians from Amsterdam and Holland were particularly shocked by the decision of the French regime to reduce the interest payments on the national debt to one third.<sup>115</sup> This measure dealt a major blow to the Dutch public finances, and severely damaged the private finances of the Amsterdam elite. However, it was not only the elite who felt the adverse effects of the French measures. The press was censored; strict border patrols to enforce the Continental System damaged trade; and the civic militias were turned into a conscription army, and were employed in France's wars.<sup>116</sup> As a result, the Dutch population started to protest. In Amsterdam, there were several revolts against the French authorities.<sup>117</sup> By this point, the central government had completely lost control. Only after the French had left in 1813, and new political alliances were constructed under the reign of the King William I, did the centralization process gain momentum again.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., inv. 716 Minutes of vroedschap of 27 January 1809.

<sup>114</sup> de aanvang is ellende, en de trilling is te algemeen gevoeld en heeft te veel omvergesmeten dan dat het mogelijk zijn zoude geneesmiddelen te vinden om de zwakke uitgeteerde vrouw uit dien ellendigen staat op te beuren. (NA, arch. Gogel (arch.nr. 2.21.005.39), inv. 80, Letter of Canneman to Gogel of 11 Augustus 1810)

<sup>115</sup> H. Smitskamp and L.C. Suttrop, *Historische teksten* (Zwolle, 1959), pp. 181–3.

<sup>116</sup> Johan Joor, *De adelaar en het lam*, (Amsterdam, 2000), pp. 340–42, 425–7; Van Zanden and Van Riel, pp. 89–90.

<sup>117</sup> Joor, pp. 799–807.

## Conclusion

As the late eighteenth century Dutch revolutionaries discovered, it was very difficult to eliminate the early modern local corporate state structure. Rapid advances in centralization and democratization in the first years after the revolution of 1795 were followed by a partial restoration of local particularism. The centralization process was eventually revived in the years after 1805, but it continued to face strong local resistance. To explain the setbacks in the state transformation process, this investigation has focused on the process of revolutionary struggle, rather than on the socio-economic, financial, or cultural background of the revolution. This examination has led to three observations, which help to explain not only the sudden advances and reversals in the processes of centralization and democratization in the Netherlands, but also those in other parts of Europe during the late eighteenth century revolutionary period.

Firstly, the relationship between the processes of centralization and democratization was far more complicated than has previously been portrayed. On the one hand, the struggle for democracy clearly strengthened the centralization process, as the ideal of unitary democracy could be used to create a broad coalition for the centralization and democratization of the state. On the other hand, the democratic institutions which had been created served to obstruct the efforts to reform the state, in that they were time consuming and they allowed the various political groups to resist political change. In the Republic these competing forces ultimately led to a sharp reversal in the transformation process in 1801. Similar patterns of revolutionary change in other European countries would seem to suggest an equally difficult relationship between democratization and centralization in other late eighteenth century revolutions.

Secondly, the creation of a financial coalition between the central state politicians from Holland and the French regime eventually made it possible to revive the centralization process from 1805 onwards. Although this coalition had only a small political basis and met with strong local resistance, it was able to facilitate the unification of the financial system, thereby making it possible to renew the assault on the local corporations. To date, there is no evidence that such financial coalitions were also formed in other decentralized European states around the turn of the eighteenth century. This suggests that finances were the main reason why the Republic centralized relatively quickly compared to the other decentralized European states.

Finally, the arguments presented here call for a reevaluation of the role of the French in the revolutionary transformation of the Dutch state. Thus far, theorists have wavered between giving the French all the credit or giving them no credit at all. By focusing on the revolutionary process, it has been possible to qualify the role of the French. They were above all an essential coalition partner, but they certainly did not dictate the revolutionary changes. The Dutch state became more centralized because unitary democratic and financial coalitions had been created. The advances in the state transformation process only occurred because Dutch



politicians were willing to cooperate with the French. The latter could not simply impose political reform, which became abundantly clear in the years after 1810. This causal link is also supported by the failed attempts of the French to establish centralized state structures in Switzerland and Northern Italy, where the political elite and the population were not as willing to cooperate with them.