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**Fronde, Early Modern French Social
Revolt – I**

Lead: From 1648 through 1653, early modern French society was in turmoil that in its various phases was known as the Fronde.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The Fronde is a “slingshot” a device with which the urban French broke the windows of the city and the status quo of early modern France. It was both the symbol and the name of the mayhem that gripped France late in the

transition years between the death of Louis XIII and the consolidation of power by his son King Louis XIV, the Sun-King.

For the sake of clarity some scholars have divided the period into three distinct outbursts, the Fronde Parlementaire, the royal family Fronde, and the religious Fronde, but in reality the Frondes constituted a far more complex phenomenon. They animated a variety of resistive impulses and directed open public anger and rebellion against the oligarchic institutions of French society, but most especially, the absolutist tendencies of the monarchy. The Frondes struck out against a monarchy that was reaching for

absolute power, authority without constitutional or social restraint.

As late as the high medieval period, the French monarch was pretty much a joke with little direct power beyond *Domaine Royal*, the lands he actually controlled. In an era when land was power, the French monarch was relatively weak, often holding less land than some of his vassals, France's most powerful nobles. This began to change in the 1400s and by 1600 the power of the French monarch was formidable. Under Louis XIII and his minister Cardinal Richelieu, the French King position's was approaching that of absolutist. This lust for royal power in part tossed up opposition from all

quarters.

The first outburst emerged from a conflict between the regent, Anne of Austria, young King Louis XIV's widowed mother, and the nation's top judicial body, the Parisian Parlement. The continuing war with Spain was sucking the royal coffers dry and she needed revenue. She proposed to reduce the paulette, the tax that supported the Parlement. All edicts were registered by the Parlement, a judicial system and check to royal power: they could choose to register or not, thereby rendering edicts invalid. In spite of historical tension, the Parlement supported absolute rule: the king was the head and they a limb

of the body politic. Their task was to prevent abuse of royal power.

Now they were squeezed—on one side, the people, in distress and regularly rioting with bakeries being a frequent target; on the other, Anne, diluting their income power. They decided to side with the people. They objected to this particular edict and earlier ones and insisted on constitutional reform. Anne responded by arresting a leader of the Parlement, Broussel.

In turn, the people closed city streets and menaced with stones and clubs those who supported Mazarin, who was seen as responsible for both the edict and the arrest. They thronged

around the Palais Royale, frightening Anne. To appease the crowds, Broussel was released, even though she said she'd rather strangle him than do so. Mazarin and the royal family fled Paris, but eventually, in January, 1649, the French army returned and quelled the insurrection. On April 1, Anne and the Parlement signed the Peace of Rueil. Next time: more of the Frondes.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

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