

Conflict and Absolutism in Europe 1550-1715

THE STORY MATTERS...

In seventeenth-century Europe, absolutism was a reaction to instability. In England, the desire of King James II to practice his Catholic faith openly was opposed by Parliament, ending in the creation of a constitutional monarchy under the joint rule of William III and Mary II. Mary's life mirrors the conflicts of her time. Raised as a Protestant, she reluctantly overthrew her own Catholic father, James II.

Lesson 18-2

War and Revolution in England

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

commonwealth restoration convert

Content Vocabulary

divine right of kings Puritans
Cavaliers Roundheads natural rights

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

• What effect might social, economic, and religious conflicts have on a country?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The seventeenth century was a period of great social and political change in England. These changes raised important questions about how to balance the power of government with the need to maintain order. England's answers eventually formed the basis of many modern democracies, including that of the United States.

Revolutions in England

GUIDING QUESTION *How did disagreements over rule between the Stuarts and Parliament lead to the English Civil War? What were the causes and effects of the Glorious Revolution?*

In addition to the Thirty Years' War, a series of rebellions and civil wars rocked Europe in the seventeenth century. By far the most famous struggle was the civil war in England known as the English Revolution. The war was between king and Parliament to determine what role each should play in governing England. It would take another revolution later in the century to finally reach a resolution.

The Stuarts and Divine Right

The Tudor dynasty ended with the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. The Stuart line of rulers began when the king of Scotland, Elizabeth's cousin, ascended the English throne and became James I. James believed that he received his power from and was only responsible to God. This is called the **divine right of kings**. Parliament did not think much of the divine right of kings. It had come to assume that the monarch and Parliament ruled England together. Religion was an issue as well. The **Puritans** – Protestants in England inspired by Calvinist ideas – did not like the king's strong defense of the Church of England. While they were members of the Church of England, the Puritans wished to remove any

remaining resemblances to Catholicism from their church. Many of England's gentry, mostly well-to-do landowners, had become Puritans. The Puritan gentry formed an important part of the House of Commons, the lower house of Parliament. It was not wise to alienate them.

The conflict that began during the reign of James came to a head during the reign of his son, Charles I. Charles, like his father, believed in the divine right of kings. In 1628, Parliament passed a Petition of Right. The petition placed limits on the king's ability to tax, imprison citizens without cause, quarter troops, and institute martial law. Although Charles initially accepted this petition, he later ignored it after realizing the limits it put on his power.

Charles also tried to impose more ritual on the Church of England. Thousands of Puritans went to America rather than accept his policy. Thus the struggles of the English Reformation influenced American history.

Civil War and Commonwealth

Complaints grew until England slipped into a civil war in 1642 between the supporters of the king (the **Cavaliers** or **Royalists**) and the parliamentary forces (called the **Roundheads**). Parliament proved victorious, due largely to the New Model Army of Oliver Cromwell, who was a military genius.

The New Model Army chiefly consisted of more extreme Puritans, known as the Independents. These men believed they were doing battle for God. As Cromwell wrote, "This is none other but the hand of God; and to Him alone belongs the glory." Some credit is due to Cromwell. His soldiers were well-disciplined and trained in the new military tactics of the 1600s.

The victorious New Model Army lost no time in taking control. Cromwell purged Parliament of any members who had not supported him. What was left—the so-called Rump Parliament—had Charles I executed on January 30, 1649. The execution of the king horrified much of Europe. Parliament next abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords and declared England a commonwealth, a type of republic.

Cromwell found it difficult to work with the Rump Parliament and finally dispersed it by force, exclaiming, "I have been forced to do this. I have sought the Lord, night and

day, that He would slay me, than put upon me the doing of this work.” After destroying both king and Parliament, Cromwell set up a military dictatorship.

The Restoration

Cromwell ruled until his death in 1658. The army, realizing how unpopular it had become, restored the monarchy in 1660 in the person of Charles II, the son of Charles I.

The restoration of the Stuart monarchy, known as the Restoration period, did not mean, however, that the work of the English Revolution was undone. Parliament kept much of the power it had won and continued to play an important role in government. The principle that Parliament must give its consent to taxation was also accepted. Charles, however, continued to push his own ideas, some of which were clearly out of step with many of the English people.

Charles was sympathetic to Catholicism. Moreover, his brother James, heir to the throne, did not hide the fact that he was a Catholic. Parliament’s suspicions about their Catholic leanings were therefore aroused when Charles took the bold step of suspending the laws that Parliament had passed against Catholics and Puritans after the restoration of the monarchy. Parliament would have none of it and forced the king to back down. Driven by a strong anti-Catholic sentiment, Parliament then passed a Test Act, specifying that only Anglicans (members of the Church of England) could hold military and civil offices.

Arousing more suspicion, on his deathbed Charles II had decided to convert to Catholicism. After Charles died without a son, James II became king in 1685. James was an open and devout Catholic. He named Catholics to high positions in the government, army, navy, and universities. Religion once more became a cause of conflict between king and Parliament.

Parliament objected to James’s policies but stopped short of rebellion. Members knew he was an old man and his Protestant daughters, Mary and Anne, born to his first wife, would succeed him. However, in 1688, James and his second wife, a Catholic, had a son. Now the possibility of a Catholic monarchy loomed large.

A Glorious Revolution

A group of English nobles invited the Dutch leader, William of Orange, to invade England. In their invitation, they informed William that most of the kingdom’s people wanted a change. The invitation put William and his wife Mary, the daughter of James II in a difficult position. It would be appalling for Mary to rise up against her father. However, William, a foe of France’s Catholic king Louis XIV welcomed this opportunity to fight France with England’s resources.

William began making preparations to invade England in early 1688. It was not until early October that James realized William’s intentions. In November 1688, William’s forces landed at Torbay and began their march toward London. James responded by sending forward his army. Following the desertion of many of his soldiers and the

defection of his daughter Anne and her husband, James retreated to London. There he made plans for his wife and son to flee to France where James later joined them.

With almost no bloodshed, England had undergone a “Glorious Revolution.” The issue was not if there would be a monarchy but who would be monarch.

In January 1689, Parliament offered the throne to William and Mary. They accepted it, along with a Bill of Rights, which contained many of the same ideas as the Petition of Right. The Bill of Rights set forth Parliament’s right to make laws and to levy taxes. It also made it impossible for kings to oppose or to do without Parliament by stating that standing armies could be raised only with Parliament’s consent. The rights of citizens to keep arms and to have a jury trial were also confirmed. The Bill of Rights helped create a system of government based on the rule of law and a freely elected Parliament. This bill laid the foundation for a limited, or constitutional, monarchy.

Another important action of Parliament was the Toleration Act of 1689. This act granted Puritans, but not Catholics, the right of free public worship. It did mark a turning point in English history because few English citizens would ever again be persecuted for religion.

By deposing one king and establishing another, Parliament had destroyed the divine-right theory of kingship. William was, after all king by the grace of Parliament, not by the grace of God. Parliament had asserted its right to be part of the government. Parliament did not have complete control of the government, but it now had the right to participate in affairs of state. Over the next century, Parliament would gradually prove to be the real authority in the English system of constitutional monarchy.

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

The English Bill of Rights

“King James the Second having abdicated the government and the throne being thereby vacant, his Highness the prince of Orange (who it hath pleased Almighty God to make the glorious instrument of delivering this kingdom from popery and arbitrary power) did (by the advice of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and divers principal persons of the Commons) cause letters to be written to the Lords Spiritual and Temporal ... in order to such an establishment as that their religion, laws and liberties might not again be in danger of being subverted ...”

— from *English Bill of Rights*

INTERPRETING

This document states James II abdicated the government. What does this mean, and how do the events of the Glorious Revolution support or not support this statement?

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying Central Ideas In what important way was the monarchy of William and Mary different from the previous Stuart monarchy?

Legal and Political Thought

GUIDING QUESTION *How did the English Revolution influence political thought?*

Concerns with order and power were reflected in English legal and political thought. William Blackstone, a judge and professor of law, wrote *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, arguing that political stability could be achieved by a revived emphasis on English common law. Two English political thinkers, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, provided their own responses to the English revolutions of the seventeenth century.

Thomas Hobbes was alarmed by the revolutionary upheavals in England. In 1651, he published the political work *Leviathan* to try to deal with the problem of disorder. Hobbes argued that before organized society, humans were guided not by reason and moral ideals but by a ruthless struggle for self-preservation. To save themselves from destroying one another, people made a social contract and agreed to form a state. Hobbes called the state “that great LEVIATHAN... to which we owe... our peace and defense.” People in the state agreed to be governed by an absolute ruler with unlimited power in order to suppress rebellion and to preserve order.

John Locke viewed the exercise of political power quite differently. His *Two Treatises of Government*, published in

1690, argued against the absolute rule of one person. Unlike Hobbes, Locke believed that before society was organized, humans lived in a state of equality and freedom rather than in a state of war. As a result, all humans had certain **natural rights** – rights with which they were born. These included rights to life, liberty, and property.

Like Hobbes, however, Locke believed people found it difficult to protect their natural rights. Thus, they agreed to establish a government to ensure the protection of their rights and to judge those who violated them. Government would protect the rights of the people, and the people would act reasonably. However, if a government broke the contract—for example, if a monarch failed to protect citizens’ natural rights—the people would be within their rights to alter or remove and form a new government.

To Locke, *people* meant the landholding aristocracy. He was not an advocate of democracy, but his ideas proved important in the eighteenth century. These ideas were used to support demands for constitutional government, the rule of law, and the protection of rights. Locke’s ideas can be found in both the American Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Drawing Inferences Did Hobbes or Locke have more trust in self-governance? Why?

REVIEWING VOCABULARY

divine right of kings the belief that the king gets his power from God and not from his subjects

Puritans English Protestants who believed that the Church of England needed further reform and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship

Cavaliers supporters of King Charles I in the English Civil War

Roundheads supporters of Parliament in the English Civil War

commonwealth a nation, state, or other political unit founded on law and united by agreement for and by the people

natural rights rights with which all humans are born, including the rights to life, liberty, and property