

What Role Did Hobbes and Locke Play in Government?

Who played a major role in England's power struggle during the 1600s? During the struggle for power that dominated English life in the 1600s, the differing political views of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke played significant roles in reinforcing, as well as inflaming, the attitudes of the two sides of the conflict: the monarchy and Parliament.

PRIMARY SOURCE

This excerpt from Hobbes's *Leviathan* was published in 1651.

There is a sixth doctrine, plainly, and directly against the essence of a commonwealth, and 'tis this, that the **sovereign**¹ power may be divided. For what is it to divide the power of a commonwealth, but to dissolve it? for powers divided mutually destroy each other. And for these doctrines, men are chiefly **beholding**² to some of those, that making profession of the laws, endeavour to make them depend upon their own learning, and not upon the legislative power.

Lastly, when in a warre (forraign, or intestine,) the enemies got a final Victory; so as (the forces of the Common-wealth keeping the field no longer) there is no farther protection of Subjects in their loyalty; then is the Common-wealth DISSOLVED, and every man at liberty to protect himself by such courses as his own discretion shall suggest unto him. For the Sovereign, is the publique Soule, giving Life and Motion to the Common-wealth; which expiring, the Members are governed by it no more, than the Carcasse of a man, by his departed (though Immortal) Soule.

¹ **sovereign**: politically independent

² **beholding**: looking upon

What happened in England as a result of this political discourse? At the heart of the issue was the ongoing dispute over what kind of monarchy would rule England. Simply put, Hobbes supported an absolute monarchy, in which the king had complete and sole power. Locke believed in a limited monarchy, in which the king and parliament shared power. These different views of government and the political conflicts that resulted from them were very complicated, but the eventual outcome of the dispute was clear and uncomplicated. With the ascension of William and Mary to the throne in 1689, supporters of a limited monarchy had won a permanent victory.

PRIMARY SOURCE

This passage is from Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, which was published in 1690.

People have not appointed so to do, they make Laws, whom the People have not appointed so to do, they make Laws without Authority, which the People are not therefore bound to obey; by which means they come again to be out of **subjection**³, and may constitute to themselves a new Legislative, as they think best, being in full liberty to resist the force of those, who without Authority would impose any thing upon them. Everyone is at the disposal of his own Will, when those who had by the delegation of the Society, the declaring of the publick [sic] Will, are excluded from it, and others **usurp**⁴ the place who have no such Authority or Delegation. . . . When such a single Person or Prince sets up his own Arbitrary Will in place of the Laws, which are the Will of the Society, declared by the Legislative, then the Legislative is changed.

³ **subjection**: to force under one's control

⁴ **usurp**: to seize and hold by force or without the right to do so