

Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England: A Narrative History* (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming, 2003)

Chapter 8: Civil War, Revolution, and the Search for Stability, 1642-60

At first glance, twenty-first century Americans should be well-suited to understand Britain's mid-seventeenth century crisis. Their own civil war exposed them to fighting that pit brother against brother, as well as the long-lasting resentments and unsettled issues inherent in such a conflict. But Americans might be surprised by how little the British Civil Wars are remembered officially today in Britain. Compare Gettysburg, littered with monuments to the combatants of both sides, victors and vanquished, survivors and fallen, to the absence of so much as a marker for most English battlesites of the 1640s before the nineteenth century, and the misplacement of both the nineteenth and the twentieth-century obelisks for the battle of Naseby! For Britain has never embraced the revolutionary actions that resulted from its Civil Wars. Margaret Thatcher even claimed, during bicentenary festivities for the French Revolution in 1989, that Britain was great precisely because it had never **had** a revolution. If British attitudes to the events of the 1640s and 1650s are conflicted and ambiguous it may be because, unlike the American Civil Wars, there was no clear "right" side for politically correct moderns to embrace. Rather, most participants, whether Royalists or Parliamentarians, soldiers or clergymen, were attempting to uphold some version of the Great Chain of Being. Nearly all claimed that they were defending traditional values and the core of the English constitution in Church and State. They just could not agree on what those values and core were.

When the Long Parliament met in 1640, the political nation--nobility, gentry, and urban oligarchs--had been almost unanimous in their desire to undo the policies of the Personal Rule. But over the course of the next two years, as the parliamentary leadership grew more radical in pursuit of that goal, a remarkable transformation took place. In the months following the king's departure from London some 236 MPs followed him, leaving 302 in the capital. The political difference between these two groups was that, while both agreed that Charles had gone too far in the 1630s, the former felt that Pym and his supporters had gone even farther in the opposite direction, and thus become the greater danger to the English constitution in Church and State. Put simply, this group of MPs was less worried about royal tyranny and Popery than they were about civil disorder and anarchy. They were unwilling to sanction a fundamental readjustment of the constitution in order to enhance Parliament's power at the expense of the king's. Nor did they want to see godly reform of the Church if it meant tampering with beloved ceremonies and repudiating uniformity and discipline. They would go to war to defend a traditional order which they knew to be flawed, but which, in their view, still represented the best interests of themselves and the nation. During the ensuing conflict these men would come to be known as Royalists or Cavaliers.¹

Even among their opponents, there were very few in 1642 who wanted to depose the king and establish a republic. Most believed that they, too, were fighting for the proper balance of the English constitution and some went so far as to say that they were opposing the king in order to defend him from the malevolent advisors who were

manipulating him into Popery and tyranny. In any case, most on this side were committed so fully to the gains made over the previous two years by the Long Parliament, believed so fully in the existence of a Catholic plot to subvert their religion and liberty, and distrusted Charles so completely, that they saw their only recourse in taking up arms against him. This group of MPs would come to be known as the Parliamentarians or Roundheads.²

Still, it takes more than 538 people to make a war. Most English men and women were reluctant to take a stand, let alone fight. Ordinary people often failed to see this as their feud: “what is the cause to me if my goods be lost?,” was the sentiment of many.³ Others tried to opt out on principle. In at least eleven counties by 1645 lesser gentry and yeomen, armed with clubs and farming implements, formed anti-war groups to stop troops and tax assessors from both sides despoiling their county. Generals from both sides found themselves having to parley with these “Clubmen”: “[t]hey conceive themselves able to keepe off[f] both the Parliament’s forces and the Kings alsoe from contribution and quarter in their County. That is their vaine hope.”⁴ But eventually, many were forced to abandon that hope and, so, choose a side. When that moment came, on what bases did the English people choose?

This was a civil war, not a war between states nor a class war. It therefore was--and is--difficult to predict who would support which side. Certainly more peers and clergy supported the Royalists, but these groups were insignificant proportions of the total population. In any case, there were parliamentarian peers and clergy as well. The gentry split almost evenly, with over half avoiding choosing either side openly. London merchants and lawyers probably opted more for Parliament than the king, but their bread and butter lay in London, and so material interest probably influenced their decision. Artisans in the many cloth-working towns also sided with Parliament. But probably as many town councils supported the king as supported his opponents. At the lowest level, historians used to assume a lack of choice: tenants would simply do what they were told by their landlords in support of one side or the other. But recent research suggests that ordinary people at the parish level knew what the war was about and followed the political, military, and religious changes closely. Thus, both sides could call on unfeigned support up and down the social scale. Geographically, the king’s strength lay to the West and the North, Parliament’s to the East and South, but this had as much to do with the location of their respective headquarters as anything else. Theologically, those with “godly” or Puritan religious values became Parliamentarians, whereas Laudians and those loyal to the conservative liturgy became Royalists. Catholics may have sympathized with the king, but they, understandably, sought to stay well out of the fighting. Overall, then, religious belief had the greatest perceptible influence on which side one chose, but since we have no religious census for the 1640s, we must still be cautious.

Nevertheless, it should be obvious from this analysis that, whatever the motivations behind these choices, however heterogenous the two sides, one of them had all the long-term material advantages. By controlling the Southeast, Parliament had access to the wealthiest and most populous part of the country. This gave it the larger tax

base and recruitment pool for its armies. More particularly, in seizing control of London, Parliament possessed the nation's greatest port, its administrative and financial nerve center, and the metropolis' substantial trained bands. The capital's administrative and fiscal infrastructure would make it easier to collect taxes, solicit loans, raise armies, and keep them supplied. Moreover, in controlling the ports, the navy, and that part of England closest to Europe, Parliament was able to block the king from receiving aid from other European monarchies, all of whom paid lip service to his cause but, in the end, little more. The only question was whether the parliamentary side could survive long enough for these factors to come into play. This was uncertain because, as in the American Civil War two centuries later, while most of the nation's fiscal, industrial, and naval capacity was on one side, most of its experienced military talent fought on the other. That is, at first, all the best soldiers were the king's. So, in one sense, the First English Civil War was a race to see if royalist military experience could win the day before parliamentary fiscal and demographic might proved overwhelming.

Rebellion, 1642-46

It should therefore come as no surprise that the first campaign, in the autumn of 1642, began well for the king. The earl of Essex, who led the parliamentary army, had allowed the Royalists to get between him and London when both armies met and fought the first set-piece battle at Edgehill, in north Oxfordshire, on 23 October (*see Map 11*). The king's nephew, Prince Rupert of the Rhine (1619-82), leading a wing of the royalist cavalry, smashed through the parliamentary horse on his side and pursued them for miles. By the time his men and their worn-out horses returned to the battle, however, the parliamentary infantry had stood firm at the push of pike in the center and both sides retired. The battle was, therefore, technically a draw, but it left the Royalists controlling the West Midlands, with a clear path to London. The king's army raced for the capital; only a massed defense by soldiers and the trained bands halted Rupert's troops just north of London at Turnham Green. Subsequently, Charles retired to winter at Oxford, which would be his headquarters for the duration of the war.

Edgehill showed that there would be no quick fix to this war. Both sides had to prepare for the long haul along a broad front. Yet, traditional English military organization, the militia, was temporary and local. When, for example, Norfolk first raised money and troops for Parliament, one gentleman specified they were "for the defence of the county, not to be sent out."⁵ Troops tended to grumble and desert if they fought too far from home. Parliament dealt with this by reorganizing county-based armies into regional ones: the Eastern Association, comprised of East Anglia and surrounding counties, was one of the strongest. But no one region was exclusively loyal to one side or the other. Even Kent, solidly controlled by Parliament, experienced a royalist uprising. Clearly, localism, the lack of a sense of national purpose, would hamper both sides.

Further, paying and outfitting vast armies required massive organization. Here, Parliament proved the most innovative, thanks, once again, to the realistic leadership of John Pym. In order to man the parliamentary armies, he convinced Parliament to agree to the forced impressment of soldiers. In order to supply and pay them he secured parliamentary approval for the sequestration (*i.e.*, confiscation) of land owned by Royalists, compulsory weekly (later monthly) county assessments, and a new tax called the Excise (today, we would call it a sales tax) on those necessary and popular commodities ale, beer, cider, perry, and tobacco. Ultimately, these measures would mock earlier concerns about Charles's illegal taxation. As one Lancashire man noted, parliamentary assessment was "illegal, and the Earle of Strafford lost his life for the like act."⁶ Parliament's Excise commissioners had unlimited search powers, which had been one of the great complaints against the early Stuart monopolists. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Charles was more inclined to operate within the confines of traditional institutions--transferring Chancery, Exchequer, and the Court of Wards to Oxford--and local assessments. But as these broke down, his field officers resorted to free quarter and plunder. Counting the costs of this war is impossible: who records pillaging? But a single example gives some idea of the scale: Kent's **yearly** payment for ship money in the 1630s barely equaled that county's **monthly** payment to Parliament in 1645-46. England's tax burden, as a proportion of the gross national product, was probably heavier in the 1640s than it had ever been or would be until the world wars of the twentieth century.

Despite Parliament's financial superiority, the campaigning season of 1643 saw royalist victories in the North, west Midlands, and South-west, in particular the capture of the port of Bristol. This made it easier for the king to maintain communications with, and eventually employ, troops from Ireland. That year, he ordered the royalist commander there, James Butler, marquess of Ormond (1610-88) to come to terms with the Catholic Confederates of Kilkenny for the purpose of raising troops for England. Parliamentary seizure and publication in 1645 of the king's private correspondence on this matter--in which he promised the Catholics not only religious toleration, but that their bishops could sit in the Irish House of Lords!--further discredited him with his Protestant subjects. But Parliament, too, sought outside reinforcements from a Celtic kingdom. Early in 1643, Pym, dying of cancer, worked feverishly for an alliance with the Scots, whose army was the most battle-hardened in the British Isles. The Covenanters put a high price on their friendship: £30,000 a month (here, Parliament's new taxation was crucial) and a parliamentary commitment to establish a strict Presbyterian settlement on England. As we shall see, the religious settlement worked out by the Westminster Assembly of (largely Presbyterian) Divines pleased few. But the military settlement worked: early in 1644 the Scottish Covenanters marched south in support of Parliament, threatening the king's control of the North. Rupert rushed to relieve the Royalists at York and, late in the day on 2 July 1644, met the parliamentary forces, which included the Scots and armies from Yorkshire and the Eastern

Association. The battle of Marston Moor (*see Map 11*) was the bloodiest of the entire war.⁷ The turning point came when the Eastern Association cavalry, led by a little-known gentleman from Huntingdonshire named Oliver Cromwell, charged and routed Rupert's flank. In the center, the Scots infantry stood firm and, when Cromwell turned his horses back to help them, the battle turned to a rout. Some 4000 Cavaliers were killed: as Cromwell noted, "God made them as stubble to our swords."⁸

Marston Moor was a shattering blow to the Royalists, but not the decisive victory for the Parliamentarians that it could have been. This is because there seemed to be no consistent war strategy and precious little military competence on the parliamentary side. In 1644, for example, Essex was lured into Devon and Cornwall only to be surrounded on a tiny peninsula, from which he and his staff managed to escape by boat, leaving their infantry and artillery to surrender! In the face of such disasters, the parliamentary coalition began to fall out over war aims. For example, Cromwell attacked the Eastern Association commander, Edward Montagu, earl of Manchester (1602-71) for failing to pursue energetically the king's troops in several indecisive battles in the Midlands. Manchester's response indicates the ambivalence on the parliamentary side: "if we beat the King ninety and nine times yet he is King still, and so will his posterity be after him, but if the King beat us once we shall be all hanged, and our posterity made slaves." Cromwell, who often saw things with crystal clarity, replied, "My Lord, if this be so, why did we take up arms at first? This is against fighting ever hereafter; if so, let us make peace, be it never so base."⁹ Their exchange exemplifies the emerging struggle among the parliamentarians between a peace party and a war party, between those who fought in order to get the king back to the bargaining table, and those who fought to defeat the king, and then bargain. The former tended to be moderate Puritans who were attracted to the order and discipline of a Presbyterian religious settlement. At great risk of over-simplification, therefore, the peace group, led by Essex in the Lords and Denzil Holles in the Commons, will be referred to as parliamentary Presbyterians. Ranged against them was a group of MPs who fought the war with greater enthusiasm and who increasingly favored a more radical religious agenda which would leave individual congregations free, or independent, to make their own decisions about governance and ritual within a loose national Church. This group, led by Saye and Sele in the Lords and Oliver St. John in the Commons, will be referred to as parliamentary Independents.

While the Scottish option temporarily solved Parliament's military difficulties, it proved ruinously expensive, not to mention offensive to Independents who had no intention of trading religious oppression by Laudian bishops for that by an English version of the Kirk. A fresh start was necessary. In the spring of 1645, Parliament passed a Self-Denying Ordinance, which ordered that all current peers and MPs surrender their military commands. This neatly excluded such under-achievers as Essex and Manchester, though at least one exception was made for Cromwell, the most successful general. At the same time, it was proposed to "new model" the army, *i.e.*, reorganize

Parliament's various county and regional units into one centralized force, with unified command and promotion through the ranks, without regard to social standing, birth, or connection. In other words, Parliament was abandoning the traditional militia model--county-wide musters of farmers, serving locally, under the command of their landlords--upon which most previous English armies had been based. This army's soldiers would be full-time, well paid, and ready to march anywhere--within England, at least. Their captain-general, Sir Thomas Fairfax (1612-71) and their general of horse, Cromwell, were men of proven ability.

The New Model Army proved itself at Naseby, in Northamptonshire on 14 June 1645, by defeating a more experienced royalist force in the last decisive battle of the war (*see Map 11*). Cromwell commanded the right wing of cavalry, his son-in-law, Henry Ireton (1611-51), commanded the left, and Fairfax the infantry in the center. Rupert's royalist cavalry pushed through Ireton's horse only to meet heavy resistance at the baggage train. The infantry at the center was evenly matched. But when Cromwell's forces charged down the flank, they overwhelmed, first, the royalist cavalry on his wing, and then the infantry in the center: 4,500 royalist officers and soldiers surrendered. It was only a matter of time until Charles's last western strongholds fell. The first English Civil War ended within a year. Before turning to its aftermath, it is important to note the impact of the war itself. In four years of continuous fighting (as we shall see, hostilities persisted throughout the British Isles off and on through 1651), about one in eight adult males had seen combat; perhaps one in three bore arms for some part of the war. Over 180,000 people were killed, some 3.6% of the population--a higher proportion of Englishmen killed than in any other war, including World War One.

Revolution, 1646-49

One might think that, with the war won by Parliament, the issues which had led to the bloodshed could now be settled. But how? After all, what had just happened in the aftermath of Naseby was unprecedented in early modern England: a rightful and undisputed king had been defeated militarily by a rebellious army which sought, not to depose him, but to limit his power. Previously, during the Wars of the Roses, the struggle had been between rival claimants to royal power--one king vs. another. But in 1646 there was only one king and everyone agreed on who he was. The question was now, what do with him? Would he agree to a compromise with Parliament limiting his prerogative? And, if not, what then? Recall Manchester's fear that if he "beat us once we shall all be hanged." Moreover, even if Charles had been disposed to be conciliatory, there was a deeper constitutional problem to be addressed. How could the king accept limitations to make him behave as his subjects wanted and still be king? What, in post-war England, would "being king" actually mean? There were few precedents or models in the early modern world for a compromise: that is, a constitutional monarchy. In their absence, few wanted to confront the

real question left over from the First Civil War: “king or no king?” Because they were unable to confront this question, the interested parties began to negotiate.

Before turning to the negotiations themselves, it must be understood that the interested parties were not confined to king and Parliament. They included the Scots Covenanters, Irish Confederates, and the European powers who considered sending aid to both sides at various points. Parliament itself continued to be divided between the Presbyterian “peace party” who feared disorder and so wanted an agreement with Charles at any price and the Independent “war party” who had sought his abject defeat in order to pursue religious reform and preserve the new constitutional framework erected in 1641. And finally, there was the instrument of victory itself, the chief consumer of the government’s revenue and the greatest concentration of ordinary people on either side, the army. No wonder that Sir Jacob Astley (recently created Lord Astley; 1579-1652), one of the last important royalist officers to surrender, supposedly said to the victorious parliamentary forces, “[y]ou have now done your work, boys, and may go to play, unless you will fall out amongst yourselves.”¹⁰ The large number of groups with a stake in these negotiations meant, on the one hand, that the king could play various sides off against each other. Having lost the war, he might still win the peace. On the other hand, he might become the prize, like the king in a colossal game of chess.

For the next two years Charles negotiated with each of these interest groups, sometimes simultaneously, often repeatedly. But he never did so sincerely. As in his dealings with the Long Parliament in 1640-42, he played for time and, perhaps, a continental, Scottish, or Irish army. He never had any intention of giving up one iota of the prerogative. Rather, he felt that he had already given up too much in signing Strafford’s death warrant and that his recent military defeats were a punishment from God for his earlier compromises. So, once again, he prevaricated, dissembled, and, when push came to shove, refused to budge. He knew full well that this course might be personally fatal; his goal was to preserve the monarchy for his children and successors. As he told Prince Rupert just prior to surrender in 1646:

I confess that, speaking as a mere soldier or statesman, there is no probability but of my ruin; yet, as a Christian, I must tell you that God will not suffer rebels and traitors to prosper, nor this cause to be overthrown; and whatever personal punishment it shall please him to inflict on me, must not make me repine, much less give over this quarrel;... Indeed I cannot flatter myself with expectation of good success more than this, to end my days with honour and a good conscience.¹¹

For the king, honor and a good conscience meant sneaking out of besieged Oxford in disguise and riding to surrender himself to the Scots outside Newark, Nottinghamshire in May 1646 because he thought they might offer

him the most lenient terms. He was correct, but when he balked at giving up episcopacy the Scots gave him up to Parliament for £400,000 in January 1647. For a few months Holles's Presbyterians controlled both Parliament and the king. Their only problem was the army and the swingeing taxes it consumed. Despite the soldiers' obvious service to the parliamentary cause, the conservative Presbyterian majority in Parliament did not know what to do with them now that the war was over. They were demanding their back pay (about £600,000) and an Act of Indemnity, that is a law absolving them of responsibility for acts committed in wartime. No parliamentarian soldier wanted to return home to, say, the formerly royalist county of Cheshire, and be brought up on charges of commandeering horses or food from royalist gentry who might happen to still be serving as JPs. In fact, many Presbyterian MPs were more worried about the disorder, both potential and real, that such a large, experienced force of relatively common soldiers trained in violence could bring to the countryside. Since the army was said to be full of religious zealots, they also feared that the soldiers wanted to turn their victory into revolution by breaking down the existing religious, social, and political order.

In 1647 Parliament decided to deal with the issue by disbanding as much of the army as it could without pay, and sending the rest to pacify Ireland. This solution worked for most everybody--except the army. They took a dim view of being sent off to die in Irish bogs before their pay and indemnity were resolved. The resulting crisis ended up politicizing the army. Unpaid and unloved by their parliamentary masters, the soldiers began to listen to radical notions of independency in religion, equality in society, and even a degree of democracy in government. Their leaders came to see the only hope of getting justice for their men in having a say in the negotiations to settle the State. Regiments each selected an "agitator," a sort of union shop steward, to represent them--an example of democracy in action. In June the army declared that it was no "mere mercenary army" fighting for pay, but was, rather, dedicated "to the defence of our own and the people's just rights and liberties" and that they would not disband until their grievances were settled.¹² In other words, the army and the army alone (*i.e.*, not Parliament) truly represented the national interest. This bold statement implied that the soldiers, not Parliament, would now decide where the revolution stopped. To emphasize the point, a group of subordinate officers seized the king and deposited him at army headquarters. In August, the army entered London, forced out Holles and other Presbyterians, and began to negotiate with the king on the basis of a document entitled *The Heads of the Proposals*. It proposed that a bicameral Parliament be elected every two years; that Parliament control the army and navy and nominate all royal ministers; and that all Protestant Churches be tolerated in England under a non-coercive episcopacy. This rather moderate document, if enacted, would have been the first written constitution in English history. Instead, as usual, the king prevaricated, then refused it outright.

At this point the army itself divided. The generals and most officers, known as the Grandees, sought to

maintain military discipline and gentry control of the localities. The rank-and-file, led by their agitators and a small group of political activists known as the Levellers, sought a fundamental change in how England was ruled. For starters, they demanded the abolition of the king and the House of Lords. They also advocated reform of the legal system, urging that it be written in simple English, that punishments fit crimes, speedy trials by juries, and equality under the law. Finally, they wanted a welfare State for widows and orphans of soldiers. The Levellers put their case to the Grandees in a series of debates at Putney Church, just outside London, at the end of October 1647. The Putney Debates focused on a proposed Leveller constitution, *The Agreement of the People* (1647) and, specifically, its suggestion that the franchise be enlarged. Though many spoke, Ireton best advanced the Grandee position, arguing that they had fought the king to restore the Ancient Constitution, not to change it. Therefore, the time-honored requirement of 40 shillings (£2) of land for would-be voters in county elections should remain. This was because the franchise should always reside in those with “a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom,” that is, in “the persons in whom all land lies, and in those corporations in whom all trading lies.” We have seen this argument before, though Ireton’s admission of “those in whom all trading lies” was a progressive concession to the growing wealth and ambitions of the mercantile community. In response, a hitherto little-known officer, Col. Thomas Rainsborough (d. 1648), set forth the Leveller position that “the poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the greatest he.” His corollary was “that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government.”¹³ Here, with eloquent simplicity, the common man was demanding to be part of the political process irrespective of birth or wealth. Rainsborough’s rationale, based not on civil law (Ancient Constitution) nor God’s law (the Bible) but on natural law (Reason), was a new and dangerous concept that seemed to open the way to constant change. Later in the century it would receive an even clearer and more decisive exposition by John Locke and others. In the end, the Putney Debates proved inconclusive. But, though the army left Putney with nothing really decided, the Debates remain a monument to the political consciousness of ordinary people, and, more immediately, reveal the army discussing the future with little or no thought about the king.

Soon after Putney, the king fled once again, this time to Newport on the Isle of Wight. This put him no closer to safety: though he might look across the English Channel to France, Cromwell’s cousin governed the island. After more negotiation, Parliament gave up in despair and, in January 1648, voted to make no more addresses to the king. The Scots, however, had continued to parley and, in December 1647, a group of conservative Covenanters signed an “Engagement” with Charles. In return for an army, he promised to establish Presbyterianism in England for three years. This led to a Second Civil War, comprising a series of revolts in the South, in Wales, and in Scotland. Unfortunately for the rebels, the revolts were not simultaneous, and Fairfax and Cromwell were able to mop up the English and Welsh outbreaks before marching north to subdue the Engagers. Any moderation shown

towards the enemy during the First Civil War evaporated as Cromwell and his men now saw the Royalists as flaunting the evident “Providences of God” revealed in the outcome of the earlier conflict. Many prisoners were summarily executed, and, ominously, soldiers began referring to “Charles Stuart, that man of blood.” It was becoming clear that there would be no peace in England while the king lived.

The Presbyterian MPs, however, reached quite a different conclusion from the Second Civil War. Surely, now, Charles would be ready to negotiate. On the morning of 5 December 1648, Parliament voted 129-83 to resume discussions with the king. This outraged the army; that afternoon, their officers met with sympathetic MPs. The next morning, 6 December, Col. Thomas Pride (d. 1658) positioned his men outside the House of Commons, refused entrance to those who had voted for treating with the king, and arrested some 45 of the Presbyterian leaders and secluded another 186. A further 86 members protested this coup, which became known as Pride’s Purge, by withdrawing. Although many of these later drifted back, only about 200 MPs, about half the original, made up the reduced Commons. Soon, the few remaining Lords ceased to attend their House. The resulting rump of a Parliament clearly no longer represented even the original supporters of the parliamentary cause, let alone the entire kingdom.

But the Rump knew what it had to do. In January, it set up a High Court of Justice to try and execute the king on a charge of High Treason. This statement is, on the face of it, a logical absurdity. Allegiance in a monarchy is always paid to the person of the king. How could Charles have been guilty of treason against himself? They got around this problem by alleging that the king had violated not statute law or even common law, but a more fundamental principle, part of the Ancient Constitution, as expressed in his coronation oath. The legislation establishing the court read as follows:

“Whereas it is notorious that Charles Stuart, the now King of England..., hath had a wicked design totally to subvert the ancient and fundamental laws and liberties of this nation, and in their place to introduce an arbitrary and tyrannical government, and that...he hath prosecuted it with fire and sword, levied and maintained a cruel war in the land against the Parliament and kingdom, whereby the country hath been miserably wasted, the public treasure exhausted, trade decayed, thousands of people murdered, and infinite other mischiefs committed.”¹⁴

Put simply, the king was charged with committing treason against the English people and constitution. This was, of course, a revolutionary idea. At its heart was a notion relatively new to early modern Europe: that the king had a responsibility not only to God, but to the people over whom he ruled. Even more revolutionary was the idea that, should he fail in that responsibility, he could be tried by the representatives of the people and, if found wanting, removed from his office. These ideas and their implications would have earth-shattering effects not only in England

but abroad over the next century and a half.

In the meantime, King Charles could not, of course, agree. When the trial convened in Westminster Hall on 20 January 1649, he questioned the court's jurisdiction. After all, the law, in a monarchy, is always the king's law; the courts are his courts. How, therefore, could any court put the king on trial?

I would know by what authority--I mean lawful--there are many unlawful authorities in the world--thieves and robbers by the highways--but I would know by what authority I was brought from thence and carried from place to place, and I know not what. And when I know what lawful authority, I shall answer. Remember, I am your King--your lawful King.¹⁵

Refusing to recognize the court's authority, he also refused to plead. For the next several days he stood or sat, impassively and disdainfully but with great dignity, as the prosecution sought to make its case. The spectacle must have been impressive: the largest medieval hall in England packed to the rafters with spectators. At its south end, on several tiers of red velvet benches, underneath not the royal arms, but those of England, sat the commissioners: assorted army officers, MPs, and gentlemen, presided over by a heretofore obscure judge, John Bradshaw (1602-59). Before them sat an array of lawyers and clerks, all in black. At the north end and in the upper galleries, crowds of spectators, held back by wooden rails and soldiers in their red coats. On the other side of a hastily constructed wooden partition, in a makeshift dock in the middle of the Hall, sat the magnetic object of all eyes, a solitary figure in black, but for the brilliant blue and silver of the Star and Garter--the king. Given his refusal to plead, the verdict was a foregone conclusion. King Charles was found guilty of High Crimes and Misdemeanors against the People of England. On 27 January he was condemned to death by beheading. At this point he demanded to speak, but Parliament refused permission. Then, fifty-nine commissioners signed the most notorious death warrant in English history.

The night before his execution, the king burnt his papers and saw his youngest children for the last time.¹⁶ The next morning, 30 January 1649, he rose and, after asking about the weather outside, put on an extra shirt for the walk across St. James's Park to the scaffold (ever concerned with the dignity of his appearance, Charles did not want to create an impression of fear by shivering). Then he was escorted by armed guard through the park to the Banqueting House at Whitehall--one of those expensive building projects of his father's which had done so much to alienate the English taxpayer. One wonders what he thought as he walked through the hall under its magnificent ceiling--a depiction of his father's apotheosis in heaven by Peter Paul Rubens and thus one of those expensive art projects which had proved controversial in his own ill-fated reign. At the end of his walk was an open window facing west; outside it a scaffold draped in black, at the center of which was the block (*see Illustration 16*). Beyond

and below stood a crowd of ordinary Londoners, held back by soldiers. The king emerged into the grey light of the January day and asked to speak but, dogged by his weak voice and bad luck to the last, he was inaudible. He then turned to his archbishop of Canterbury, William Juxon (d. 1663) and remarked that the executioner sent him “from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown.”¹⁷ Turning back to the block, he knelt down, said a brief prayer and, in a signal worked out with the henchman beforehand, stretched out his hands. The axe fell and, in accordance with long-standing custom, the executioner raised the late king’s dismembered head for all to see.¹⁸ It is said that at this sight, which normally elicited cheers, the crowd uttered a deep groan.

And well they might, for the events of that January day would have grave consequences for all members of the English polity. For the first time in their history, the English people had judicially and publically murdered their king. Such an act violated the Great Chain, Divine Right, and a thousand years of sermons and royal propaganda. And this was only the beginning of the demolition of the old world. On 17 March, Parliament abolished the kingly office; two days later they abolished the House of Lords. And so, on 19 May 1649, England was declared a commonwealth, that is, a republic.

The Radical Hydra

To the framers of the revolution, the clearing away of so much of the old order must have been exhilarating, opening up new possibilities for reform, even a fundamental reconstruction of English society. But it was also frightening. Remember that according to the doctrine of the Great Chain, none of its links could be broken without incurring God’s wrath and, more specifically political, social, and religious chaos. The problem for the gentry--or that part of it which supported the Rump--was to maintain the rest of the Chain and so prevent that chaos. Put another way, having engineered a revolution which benefitted themselves, they now had to ensure that the revolution stopped before other groups began to seek the same benefits. Like Henry VIII throwing a man down from a high tower, they had to make him stop before he hit the ground.

This would be all the more difficult because in opposing the king, the parliamentary gentry and urban oligarchy had been forced to do something unprecedented: to attract, rather than simply commandeer, the loyalties and assistance of the common people who had fought in the army and elsewhere. They had made the people partners in their revolution and, in the process, given them a lesson in how to question and even overthrow authority. That questioning had been accomplished by a relatively free press. Censorship had been abolished, newspapers appeared for the first time, and the number of political and religious pamphlets published each year mushroomed. One surviving collection alone, assembled by a London bookseller named George Thomason (d. 1666), holds nearly 23,000 items from 1641 to 1662. Most were traditional and conservative in sentiment: Charles I’s last thoughts and

meditations, *Eikon Basilike* (1649), was a runaway bestseller. But many were not, and some, depending on one's viewpoint, expressed opinions that either had never been expressed before or had never previously been allowed into print. John Milton (1608-74) celebrated this flowering of ideas in *Areopagitica* (1644), the classic defense of free speech. But social and religious conservatives were aghast. Presbyterian Thomas Edwards' (1599-1647) encyclopedic *Gangraena* (1646) diagnosed these radical ideas as so many sicknesses to the body politic, seducing the people into embracing philosophies and lifestyles and claiming rights heretofore unknown. In fact, it was only natural that ordinary people, having helped to dislodge the top of a centuries-old hierarchical structure, would question why they should have to stay at the bottom. Put simply, the common farmers and artisans who made up the victorious parliamentary armies now wanted a piece of the pie; or, to use a more contemporary metaphor, having unseated one rider, they did not want to hoist another on their backs. This feeling could only have been exacerbated by current economic and social conditions. The harvests of 1649-51 were as bad as those of the 1590s; taxes were higher than they had ever been under Charles I; plague and disease ran rampant, spread, ironically, by the very army which had been formed to protect the people's liberties.

As we have seen, the army spread not only disease, but also Leveller ideas about political change. After the king's trial and execution the possibilities for radical reform seemed especially promising. One leading Leveller, John Lilburne (c. 1614-57), made a career out of provoking the government by his calls for a wider franchise, free speech, law reform, and individual rights, all of which he summarized in one ringing, radical phrase: "the Sovereignty of the People." Was his call heeded? No. In the spring of 1649 the Rump suppressed a second round of army agitation by arresting the Leveller leaders, executing the leading agitators, and buying off the rank and file by paying their arrears. Lilburne spent most of the next decade in prison or exile before dying in 1657, convinced that "posterity...shall reap the benefit of our endeavours, what ever shall become of us."¹⁹ In fact, Leveller arguments would take centuries to bear fruit and some remain so radical as to be unrealized today. But the fact that they could be aired at all reveals that the framers of the revolution had opened a Pandora's box of new ideas when they deposed the king. This becomes even clearer if we examine the area of religion.

Here, too, the Long Parliament's abolition of censorship, and with it the temporal power of the English clergy, was crucial. Remember that it was only in the previous hundred years that the English people had been allowed to read the Bible; now, for the first time, they could interpret it from the pulpit and in print without fear of persecution. Admittedly, the increasingly conservative Presbyterian majority in the Rump Parliament made some attempt to enforce Kirk-like religious discipline on England, but they never established effective means of coercion. This was, in part, because they never reestablished adequate mechanisms for persecution or censorship; in part because they were effectively opposed by the parliamentary Independents, who sought toleration for virtually all

Protestant beliefs. The Independents, including Cromwell, embraced the revolutionary notion that it was not necessary for everyone to agree on the details of religious belief in order to be good Christians and citizens of the State. Like modern Congregationalists, they found more truth in the spirit, among individuals and small congregations, than in a national Church or the decrees of the Rump or Westminster Assembly. In fact this tendency was a necessary implication of the Protestant, and especially the Puritan, mind set. After all, if all men (and, for some, women) could read the Bible; if God desired a priesthood of all believers; and if all were equal in sin, who could say whose interpretation was right? In September 1650 the Independents in Parliament secured repeal of statutes compelling Sunday attendance at the State parish church.

This new-found freedom of thought, speech, and print resulted in a proliferation of unorthodox interpretations of the Bible and strains of Puritanism. Some had long-standing antecedents; all were controversial. For example, the Baptists or “Dippers” could trace their ancestry to the German Anabaptists from a century earlier. They believed that baptism should be delayed until adulthood, when a rational person could make a free choice of his or her beliefs. Reasonable as this may sound, many contemporaries found it outrageous to rear children without baptism into a Christian faith. Moreover, adult baptism signified that the Church was separate from the State because it was limited to true believers. This was the antithesis of the mandatory State Church urged by Anglicans, Presbyterians, and even most Independents.

And yet, the Baptists were, in many ways, the most moderate of the sects which came into the sunlight of toleration in the 1640s and 50s. Related to the Baptists were the Seekers, who went from church to church seeking truth and, presumably, a final confessional allegiance. More alarming were the Diggers, who could find no Biblical authorization for private property and the accumulation of riches. Their leader, Gerrard Winstanley (c. 1609-c. 1660), anticipated later socialists by urging the wealthy to give up their property and share it in common with their fellow Christians. One can only imagine what the landed gentry or even minor freeholders thought of this! The Diggers attempted to put their beliefs into practice by establishing communes of sorts at St. George’s Hill in Surrey and elsewhere, but these collapsed due to the hostility of local landowners and bad weather. Yet another group sought neither political nor economic change, but a revolution of the spirit: the Ranters believed that, since God was present in all things, and He was, obviously, without sin, sin could not exist. In any case, according to the Ranter, Abiezzar Coppe (1619-72) “[t]o the pure all things are pure.”²⁰ That is, Ranters emphasized the role of individual conscience in deciding questions of right or wrong. In the words of Laurence Clarkson (1615-67), “[s]in hath its conception only in the imagination.” In other words:

there is no such act as drunkenness, adultery and theft in God...What act soever is done by thee in light and love, is light and lovely, though it be that act called adultery...No matter

what Scripture, saints or churches say, if that within thee do not condemn thee, thou shalt not be condemned.²¹

The Ranters, reacting to centuries of tight social control and repression of individuality, reveled in “freedom of the spirit” and its abettors, alcohol and tobacco. As might be expected, **all** other groups reacted in horror to the Ranter program, and the “Ranter moment” of 1649 was followed by harsh repression and Acts against Blasphemy and Adultery.

Even more alarming--in part because more numerous--were the Quakers. Quakers believed that each person had an inner light, the Holy Spirit, or the spirit of Christ. In their view, this inner light was invariably correct and to be obeyed over the dictates of the State, the Church, even Scripture. Moreover, they believed that every person had God’s inner light in **equal** measure. “Every person” meant, of course, king and commoner, landlord and tenant, master and apprentice, man and woman. This led Quakers to refuse to acknowledge earthly authorities like the State, the courts, or their social superiors; indeed, they publicly stressed God’s impending vengeance on “the great ones of the earth.” They manifested their disdain for the prevailing social order by refusing to pay tithes, swear oaths, doff their caps, or bow to those superiors. They also had a feminist streak long before the term was coined: because women possessed God’s inner light as amply as men did, they participated fully in Quaker services; some went out into the world to testify, in violation of all contemporary gender norms. Finally, those services themselves scandalized hostile observers, for the inner light compelled Quakers to sing, rant, “quake,” and move about in a trance-like state during their ecstatic communion with the deity. Some went farther, going “naked as a sign” or violently shouting down rival preachers (pacifism would only be adopted as a Quaker ideal during the 1660s, after a decade of harsh repression). In 1656, James Nayler (c. 1617-60), one of the founders of the Quaker movement, re-enacted Christ’s entry into Jerusalem by riding through the streets of Bristol on an ass. Nayler clearly meant his performance to symbolize Christ’s presence in all human beings, but Parliament saw it as “horrid blasphemy” and a sign of growing disorder. They decreed that he be pilloried in London, whipped through the streets of Bristol, his tongue pierced with a hot iron, his forehead branded with a “B” (for blasphemer), and, finally, put to death. Although Cromwell, by then lord protector, would not allow his execution, the savagery of the rest of this punishment indicates just how frightened the ruling elite was by the specter of Quakerism.

Nayler’s entry into Bristol also suggests a strong millenarian aspect to these movements. That is, many of them, applying Old Testament prophecies and the Book of Revelation to recent, earth-shattering events, had concluded that the thousand-year reign of the anti-Christ was ending, and the beginning of the end of the world was near. One group believed that Lodowick Muggleton (1609-98), a tailor from the West Country who had experienced a series of religious visions, was the last prophet named in Revelation. Muggletonians believed that he had the

power to save or damn on the spot, which he did publicly--when not imprisoned for blasphemy--throughout the 1650s. But most radical and frightening of all to conservatives were the Fifth Monarchy Men. This group believed, in common with most people in the seventeenth century, that all legislative power was God's. But the conclusion they drew from this position was that the legal profession should be abolished and all legislation should be Biblical, specifically based on the Mosaic law articulated in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They argued, on this basis, that moral offences were as serious as civil ones: for example, they advocated that adultery be punished as a capital crime. Finally, following Daniel 7, they believed that the Bible had foretold five great monarchies. Four had, according to their interpretation, already risen and fallen: those of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The fifth would undoubtedly be that of "King Jesus," whose return they thought imminent after the execution of King Charles. They were prepared to hasten this Second Coming by force if necessary. For a brief moment, around 1653, this group had extensive political influence; Fifth Monarchist Major-General Thomas Harrison (1606-60) had the ear of important politicians like Cromwell and wielded vast clerical patronage.

It should be obvious that a free press and religious toleration had, predictably, led to a religious diversity or, in contemporary eyes, chaos. It should also be obvious that these religious ideas had political and social implications and that all three, when added together, were the ruling elite's worst nightmare. Where religion had once been one of the principal props of law and order and the *status quo*, it now seemed to justify, even demand from its followers, the very opposite. Suddenly, extreme Puritanism's emphasis on individual conscience, which had so alarmed Queen Elizabeth and King Charles, was beginning to frighten moderate Protestant country gentlemen as well. As a consequence, the idea of a State Church with the power to coerce conformity began to look good to them. In the end, the radical ideas of the Levellers and the sects proved to be too much for the landed gentry and urban oligarchy, who began to pull back from the revolutionary doings of 1649, if they had ever approved of them. Increasingly, they yearned for the kind of political and social stability which they had enjoyed under the monarchy--without the monarchy itself. They would spend more than a decade searching for it.

Commonwealth, Protectorate, and the Search for Stability, 1649-58

The Commonwealth, or government by the Rump, lasted from 1649 to 1653. In the end, it proved too conservative to please the radicals and too radical to earn the confidence of the ruling class. More specifically, it was too tolerant of the lower orders for the landed gentry; too Presbyterian for the Independent sects; and too tolerant of the sects for the Presbyterians and die-hard Anglicans. Its continued persecution of Royalists by means of sequestering their lands raised badly needed cash, but never enough, and at the price of their continued disaffection. Finally, the new regime never effectively subdued or came to terms with the army. Instead, since the Rump was

never popular, it found itself utterly dependent upon the army's sufferance for its continued existence. The Rump might have raised its popularity by lowering taxes, but this would have necessitated disbanding the army. But disbandment required payment of the army's arrears, and this would have necessitated a tax increase! No one, not Holles and the Presbyterians in 1647, not the Rump 1649-53, not even Cromwell nor his son 1653-58, would solve this conundrum. The Commonwealth would prove more successful with the Scots Covenanters and Irish Confederates, but at tremendous cost in money, blood, and bitterness.

Once the business of the king's execution had been despatched, the Rump sought to kill two additional birds with one stone by sending the army overseas to deal with the Irish rebels. By this time, the Gaelic and Old English Confederates had joined forces with the Royalists under Ormond. This combined Irish force planned to invade England to overthrow Parliament's rule and restore the monarchy. Instead, Cromwell and the New Model Army landed in Ireland in August 1649 and began to take the island back town by town, starting just north of Dublin (*see Map 7*). Within two months, they put the inhabitants of Drogheda and Wexford to the sword after their defenders refused to surrender. In the first case, they did so on the orders of their general; in the second, they simply ran amok. Cromwell's pronouncement on his slaughtered enemies was characteristically sanctimonious: "I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgement of God upon these barbarous wretches who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood."²² In other words, the massacre of some 2,500 townspeople in 1649 was vengeance for the atrocities visited on New English settlers during the Rebellion of 1641. This was fine reasoning, apart from the fact that the 1641 rebels had been Gaelic and Drogheda was Old English; the English never wasted time on the subtleties of the Irish situation! It was also an effective piece of terrorism calculated to "prevent the effusion of blood for the future" by convincing the rebels to submit, and several towns capitulated soon thereafter. This was only the beginning: throughout early 1650 the Cromwellian troops practiced a policy of scorched earth in Ireland, burning the crops so as to lead to the death by starvation of, perhaps, 600,000 in a total population of 1,400,000.²³ Still, it took three years to subdue the Catholic armies. Once this was accomplished, the government resumed plantation, confiscating land from Catholics and giving it to Protestant soldiers and adventurers. Some 40,000 Catholic landowners and their families were evicted from their land and forced to move to the stony, infertile west of the island. In 1641 Catholics had owned 60% of the land in Ireland; by 1660 that percentage had fallen to 20. The result left Ireland firmly in Protestant-Parliamentarian hands, but it also further embittered not only the Gaelic inhabitants of the island, but also the formerly loyalist Old English.

Having laid waste to Ireland, Cromwell next dealt with royalist rebellion in Scotland. In 1649-50, the Scots, horrified at the execution of King Charles, declared for his son, whom they proclaimed Charles II. In return, he repudiated his Church of England upbringing and agreed to the Covenant. Once again, the New Model Army and

Cromwell (Fairfax resigned rather than march against his fellow Presbyterians) had to be called upon to remind everyone who had won the Civil Wars. Cromwell's exasperated plea to the Scots--"I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken"--clearly suggests he had more time for debate with the Protestant Scots than with the Catholic Irish.²⁴ On 3 September 1650 he defeated the Covenanter army at Dunbar, in Scotland (*see Map 11*). One year later to the very day he defeated a second, invading, force made up of Royalists and moderate Presbyterians under young Charles himself, at Worcester in England (**Map 11**). These victories finally sealed Parliament's triumph in the Civil Wars and left the royalist and Scottish forces in disarray for a decade. As for the young "king," he was forced to hide in an oak tree (which would forever after be commemorated in British pub signs as "the Royal Oak"). Eventually, by means of disguise and the covert assistance of a network of mainly Catholic families, Charles made his way to the continent. He would spend the next decade as the impoverished and harried guest of a variety of European rulers. He kept a small, shabby, peripatetic court populated by royalist exiles and hangers-on who plotted with sympathizers in England to engineer a restoration. These plots were all doomed to failure, partly because there was little will to restore the Stuarts either on the part of the English people or the continental powers; partly because the Commonwealth had infiltrated the royalist court with spies who kept it well-informed.

Pacifying Ireland and Scotland should have bolstered the prestige of the Commonwealth. To a certain extent it did. Some Royalists and Covenanters now resigned themselves to rule by the Rump, taking an oath to be "faithful" to the English government "without a King or House of Lords."²⁵ This should, in turn, have enabled the Rump to enact the real reforms for which the Independents and the army had fought. As Cromwell, in one of his progressive moods, urged them after Dunbar, "relieve the oppressed, hear the groans of the poor prisoners.... be pleased to reform the abuses of the professions; and if there be any one that makes many poor to make a few rich, that suits not a commonwealth."²⁶ The Rump made some attempt to do all these things. For example, in 1650-51, it sought to improve the economy by improving trade. It passed the first Navigation Acts which forbade foreign powers from trading with England's American colonies and required all such trade to be carried in English merchant ships with crews that were at least 75% English. The Rump also pursued reform of the law courts, the Poor Law, the clergy, and the moral character of the nation. In the last case it passed harsh statutes attacking adultery, fornication, blasphemy, and swearing. Finally, its administration was more efficient and less corrupt than its Stuart counterpart. In the long run, the Navigation Acts would revolutionize English colonial trade by protecting it from foreign competition and by breaking the old system of trading monopolies. But in the short run they led to a trade war with the Dutch which the Commonwealth could ill afford. Lawyers and JPs held up legal and Poor Law reform as these promised to adversely affect their interests; while religious reform proved unpopular and unenforceable--the

abolition of Christmas because of its pagan trappings was, unsurprisingly, a non-starter. In the end, the Rump's record left many disillusioned, especially in the army.

Even the Commonwealth's military victories did more to enhance Cromwell's martial reputation and the army's prestige than they did the Rump's security or popularity. Moreover, they also cost money which, as we have seen, Parliament either did not have or was loath to supply. By 1653, the Rump was supposedly finally taking steps to dissolve itself and call new elections; but it exasperated everyone by taking forever to do so and, then, suggesting there would be no limitations on who could vote, thus opening the way for the return of Royalists to government. Cromwell finally erupted in a blaze of anger, entering the House with soldiers and dissolving the Rump:

[He] told the House, that they had sat long enough...that some of them were whore-masters...that others of them were drunkards, and some corrupt and unjust men and scandalous to the profession of the gospel, and that it was not fit that they should sit as a parliament any longer."²⁷

Perhaps more telling, no one rose up to defend them. As Cromwell later recalled, "[w]hen they were dissolved, there was not so much as the barking of a dog."²⁸

The end of the Rump provided army leaders, most of whom were Independents, with the chance to establish what they had long dreamed of: a true theocracy. That is, they selected the next representatives not from the old constituencies of county and borough but largely on the basis of Independent congregations. The result was to be an "Assembly of Saints," though it has become more popularly known as the "Barebones Parliament" after Praise-God Barebone (1598?-1679), a well-known London leather-seller and preacher who became a member. As this implies, a number of its members belonged to radical sects, including Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men, who hoped to usher in God's kingdom on Earth. In fact, the Barebones Parliament proved to be a disaster. Many of its members had little experience of government and were completely unrealistic in their expectations of it. For example, following the lead of the Fifth Monarchy Men, they seriously contemplated replacing English common law with the law of Moses. While this Parliament passed some enlightened legislation to establish new procedures for the registration of births, marriages, and deaths, probate of wills, the relief of creditors, and the incarceration of lunatics, its members also offended important segments of the country by seeking to abolish or hinder the court of Chancery (upsetting the lawyers), lay patronage of Church livings and purchase of tithes (upsetting landowners), and the collection of the excise and monthly assessments (upsetting the army). Cromwell, who was by now the most powerful man in the country, reacted with disgust, complaining that where before he had to deal with knaves, now he had to deal with fools. The godly reformer in him had initially welcomed the "Saints." But the hard-headed country gentleman realized that government required prudence and practicality as much as religious enthusiasm and godliness. The rest

of the ruling elite was coming to agree, and the cohort of Cromwellian time-servers in the Assembly engineered their dissolution, perhaps fittingly, while the most godly members were attending a prayer meeting!

Who would rule next? On 12 December 1653 an army delegation presented to General Cromwell the only written constitution ever implemented in England, the Instrument of Government. This named Cromwell as executive, giving him the title “Lord Protector.” Who was this man who had begun life “by birth a gentleman, living neither in any considerable height, nor yet in obscurity,” and had risen--as he saw it, through God’s “dispensations”--to equal the height of any king?²⁹ Oliver (*see Illustration 17*), a distant relative of Henry VIII’s minister, Thomas Cromwell, was born in 1599 in tiny East Anglian Huntingdonshire. He was educated at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, a hotbed of Puritan thought. Still, he would have spent his life as an anonymous middling country gentleman of godly propensities if the war had not uncovered his leadership ability and tactical skill and catapulted him to the center of national affairs. Once it did so, his repeated successes convinced him that God had a special purpose for him. This is not to say that Cromwell was always sure of himself: over the next decade he would at times be torn between the conservative instincts of an English landed gentleman and a Puritan zeal for godly reform in Church and State. However, once his mind was made up, his conviction of being God’s instrument became his greatest strength. Ironically, King Charles had, as we have seen, the same certainty of God’s favor and purpose. But there was one significant difference between Charles I and Oliver Cromwell: Cromwell had a killer instinct. It was this killer instinct, along with his propensity for seizing the main chance, that enraged his enemies, whether Royalists, the Irish, or even former allies like the Levellers.

Advising Cromwell would be a Council of State, filled by generals and the protector’s nominees, which would share control of the State’s finances and armed forces. Legislation was to be made by a Parliament elected every three years by those with estates worth over £200 a year. This, was, in fact, a far stiffer property qualification than the old franchise--an indication of just how conservative the ruling class had grown in the four years since the abolition of the monarchy. In fact, if this constitution looks suspiciously like the old one, with Parliament, Privy Council, and “king” in all but name, that was no accident. The only major difference, apart from the franchise, was that this time the ruler’s power would be backed up by a standing army. It was therefore little wonder that radicals viewed Cromwell’s acceptance of the Instrument of Government as a great betrayal; or that most members of the ruling elite easily accommodated themselves to it.

Oliver Cromwell ruled as lord protector of England for a little under five years. In many ways, his regime contrasted favorably with that of the early Stuarts. It provided rational, efficient government with a minimum of corruption. It launched a much needed reform of the law and sought to make education more accessible. It pursued a broadly tolerant religious policy which allowed for much individuality of practice among congregations; left

adherents of the old Prayer Book and Catholics to live in peace if they would live peacefully; and allowed Jews to return to England for the first time since their official expulsion in 1290. It pursued an aggressive and largely successful economic and foreign policy. The Navigation Acts provoked trade wars with the Dutch and the Spanish which the Cromwellian regime won in the first instance and fought to a draw in the second. This led, in turn, to the acquisition of more colonies, in particular the soon-to-be-lucrative Jamaica. The navy also safeguarded trade in the Mediterranean by attacking the Barbary pirates. Thus, English soldiers, sailors, and merchants finally had their aggressive Protestant foreign policy.

But there were costs to such “big-government” successes. First, a more efficient government was bound to be more intrusive. In 1655, after an unsuccessful royalist rising, Cromwell attempted to insure local control by dividing the country into twelve military districts, each overseen by a major-general. Not unlike lords lieutenants, the major-generals enforced law and order, the Poor Law, and religious toleration; but they also spied on Royalists and Presbyterians, bullied JPs, and purged corporations of anyone suspected of disloyalty to the regime. In keeping with the Puritan sentiments of most Independents and Cromwell’s conviction that God’s judgment could only be averted by moral reform, many major-generals also fought drunkenness, blasphemy, swearing, gambling, whoring, indecent fashions, and forbidden Christmas celebrations wherever they found them. They suppressed alehouses, playhouses, and Sunday sports. Needless to say, the Protectorate did not succeed in stamping out any of these practices or institutions, but it did leave a lasting impression nevertheless. Although their “cantons” in the localities only lasted for about a year, the major-generals and their Puritan supporters would long be remembered as prudes, kill-joys, and intruders into local communities, while standing armies generally would be associated with the oppression of English liberties, local autonomy, and even harmless fun.

The Protectorate was also expensive. A more efficient government, policing the nation at home and prosecuting war abroad *via* a standing army and permanent navy, had to be paid for. The average annual expenditure of the Cromwellian administration was nearly £2 million--far more than that of Elizabeth I, James I, or Charles I at their respective heights. This necessitated, in turn, very high tax rates. Naturally, Cromwell continued the lucrative but unpopular Excise and monthly assessments and even extended the former. His government also sequestered royalist lands, selling some and forcing proprietors to compound, or pay a high fee to reoccupy, others. None of this did anything for the regime’s popularity or the Protector’s ability to get along with a Parliament full of landowners who had to answer to other landowners back home. As a result, like his royal predecessors, he frequently found it necessary to prorogue or dismiss Parliament.

This should sound familiar. If Oliver Cromwell looks, in retrospect, very much like a king without a crown, his followers would have agreed. In 1657 they sought, *via* a document entitled The Humble Petition and Advice, to

rectify the omission by offering him the title of king and the power to appoint both his successor and peers to a House of Lords. Cromwell refused the title but accepted the powers (along with reinstatement as protector complete with purple and ermine robe and a gold scepter!). It should be obvious that after nearly thirty years of constitutional experimentation, ten of them without a king, many in the ruling elite were longing for the old structures of government. This became even clearer after Cromwell's sudden death on 3 September 1658. Like a king, he was given an elaborate State funeral patterned on that of his Stuart predecessors. Like a Crown prince, his eldest son, Richard (1626-1712), was allowed to succeed to the position of Lord Protector.

The Restoration, 1658-60

Richard Cromwell inherited three countries divided in politics and religion and a regime that was both financially exhausted and increasingly unpopular. The nobility and gentry, in particular, resented not only the Protectorate's tax burden, but also the usurpation of their former place as the State's representatives in the localities by Puritan nonentities. When not oppressed by the major-generals, they feared the breakdown of social and religious order described in the previous section. In short, the ruling elite had had their fill of godly reformation, whether purveyed by wild-eyed individuals, independent congregations, saintly parliaments, or oppressive armies. Increasingly, and somewhat myopically, the country--or at least the traditional ruling class--began to long for the good old days under the Stuarts. Only a man of strength and conviction like Oliver Cromwell could have held the country together and kept his regime in power under such circumstances.

Unfortunately for that regime, Richard was no Oliver. Richard Cromwell was, in fact, an intelligent, amiable, thoroughly decent man who would soon lose control of events. In the spring of 1659 Parliament attempted to assert its authority over the Council of the Army. This led the army to force another dissolution of Parliament, banish Richard into retirement, and recall the surviving members of the Rump. The Rump, quite naturally, also sought to control the army, which, true to form, sent it packing on 13 October 1659. The diarist John Evelyn (1620-1706) well expressed the general feeling of uncertainty when he wrote:

The Armie now turn'd out the Parliament....We had now no Government in the Nation, all in Confusion; no Magistrate either own'd or pretended, but the souldiers & they not agreed: God Almighty[y] have mercy on, & settle us.³⁰

In late October, a Committee of Public Safety headed by General Charles Fleetwood (d. 1692), in effect, established rule by the Grandees. But by Christmas Fleetwood had thrown up his hands and resigned power back to the Rump. At this point, General George Monck (1608-70), the ranking commander in Scotland, began to march south with the only fully paid army in the British Isles. No one knew what he would do but each group--Republican, Royalist,

Presbyterian, Independent--seems to have hoped that he would embrace their position.

He reached London in February 1660. After some vacillation, on 11 February he ordered the Rump to call for immediate elections, thereby dissolving itself, with or without the return of the members secluded in 1648. The populace greeted this news with joy--expressed by the roasting of rump steaks in London streets that night. The secluded members returned on 21 February and, on 16 March the full Long Parliament ordered new elections and dissolved itself. Simultaneously, Prince Charles, living hand-to-mouth in exile on the continent, issued the Declaration of Breda in the hope of swaying the election. In it, he promised amnesty to all who had participated in the Civil Wars except those to be excepted by Parliament; liberty "to tender consciences," *i.e.*, freedom of religion also to be promulgated by Parliament; and the recognition of all land sales since 1642. Each of these provisions was designed to allay the fears of former Parliamentarians that a restoration would bring political, religious or economic revenge. In his "Declaration of Breda" Charles sought to begin the healing of old wounds and to present himself as a consensus choice who would be fair to all, not just former Royalists.

It worked. The Parliament elected in April 1660, known as the Convention Parliament because it had convened itself, was overwhelmingly moderate in composition. That is, it was dominated by Royalists and Presbyterians, the latter of whom now supported the Stuarts as their best hope for the restoration of order and good government. When Parliament met at the end of the month, it immediately issued an invitation for the exiled prince to return as king. It also dispatched a fleet to bring the nation's favorite son home. On 29 May 1660, coincidentally the anniversary of his birth, Charles II (1660-85) entered London accompanied by Monck, newly created duke of Albemarle and master of the Horse, as well as a host of aristocratic supporters, both old and new. This time, Evelyn wrote far more optimistically, even triumphantly:

This day came in his Majestie, Charles the 2d to London after a sad, & long Exile, and Calamitous Suffering both of the King & Church: being 17 yeares: This was also his Birthday, and with a Triumph of above 20000 horse & foote, brandishing their swords and shouting with unexpressable joy: The wayes straw'd with flowers, the bells ringing, the streetes hung with Tapissry [tapestry], fountaines running with wine: the Major [mayor], Aldermen, and all the Companies in their liver[ie]s, Chaines of Gold, banners; Lords & nobles, Cloth of Silver, gold & vellvet every body clad in, the windos & balconies all set with Ladys, Trumpets, Musick, & myriards [myriads] of people flocking the streetes & was as far as Rochester, so as they were 7 houres in passing the Citty, even from 2 in the afternoone 'til nine at night.

As described above and depicted in a contemporary print (see **Illustration 18**), it was as if the Great Chain of Being

had not only been restored, but was laid out in person, horizontally, end to end, from Rochester to London, in all its glory. No wonder that Evelyn, a devout member of the Church of England and landed gentleman who had lost much during the preceding revolution, wrote "I stood in the strand, & beheld it, & blessed God."³¹ The old order was restored, the clock turned back. The people of England had experienced a long national nightmare, a winter of profound discontent which had reached its nadir on a cold January day in 1649. They now awakened in springtime to find themselves in love with their new, young sovereign of the old Stuart line.

Or did they? Could the English really "go home again"? Could either Charles Stuart or the people who now embraced him with open arms ever entirely forget that they had publicly vilified and executed the last Charles Stuart, his father, broken the Great Chain, smashed the old Tudor-Stuart State, tried out several new forms of government, debated unorthodox social systems, and experimented with religious toleration? Could the English constitution and the people it was meant to govern ever go back to 1642, or 1625, or 1603?; could they forget the many years when the House of Commons had ruled on its own without king, Lords, or bishops? Put another way, had the Civil Wars and Restoration really done anything to solve the problems of sovereignty, finance, foreign policy, religion, and local control that had led to them? The answers to these questions were uncertain on that brilliant May day in 1660. In fact, they would take most of the next half century to be resolved.

NOTES

1. "Cavaliers" from the Spanish *caballero* or horseman. This may refer to the erroneous assumption that the Royalists tended to be wealthier than their parliamentary counterparts and so able to prosecute the war on horseback. It was originally a pejorative name for the courtly gallants, often of magnificent appearance but little money, who rallied to the king's side.
2. "Roundheads" was a pejorative reference to the apprentices who protested the king's policies in London in 1641. Apprentices, like all working people in England, tended, for practicality's sake, to cut their hair short--hence "roundheads"--in contrast to courtiers who had the time and assistance of servants to dress long hair.
3. Quoted in J. Morrill, *Revolt in the Provinces: The People of England and the Tragedies of War, 1630-1648*, 2nd ed. (1999), p. 124.
4. Edward Massey (1619-1674), 22 March 1645, quoted in Morrill, p. 136.
5. Sir William Paston (fl. 1630-40s), quoted in Morrill, p. 79.
6. Quoted in Morrill, p. 75.
7. And the second bloodiest, after Edward IV's victory at Towton Moor in 1461, ever fought on English soil.
8. Quoted in D.L. Smith, *Oliver Cromwell: Politics and Religion in the English Revolution, 1640-1658* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 51.
9. Quoted in Smith, pp. 17-8.
10. Quoted in G.E. Aylmer, *Rebellion or Revolution? England 1640-1660* (Oxford, 1986), p. 77.
11. S.R. Gardiner, *The Great Civil War* (1898), 2:287, quoted in C. Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments: English History, 1509-1660* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 360-1.
12. *A Declaration, or Representation from His Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax, and of the army under his command, Humbly tendered to the Parliament, St. Albans, 14 June 1647* in J.P. Kenyon, ed., *The Stuart Constitution 1603-1688: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 296.
13. Quoted in D. Wootton, *Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writing in Stuart England* (Harmondsworth, 1986), pp. 286-90.
14. Act Erecting a High Court of Justice, 6 January 1649, reprinted in D. Iagomarsino and C.J. Wood, ed., *The Trial of Charles I: A Documentary History* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1989), p. 25.
15. Quoted in Iagomarsino and Wood, p. 64.
16. The eldest, Princes Charles (1630-85) and James (1633-1701), had been sent out of the country for their protection and to prevent various rebel factions putting either forward as king.

17. Quoted in Iagomarsino and Wood, pp. 143-4.
18. He did so silently, omitting the traditional words "Behold the head of a traitor!" This was, presumably, because he did not want to give away his identity by speaking.
19. J. Lilburne, *England's New Chains Discovered* (1649), printed in G.E. Aylmer, *The Levellers in the English Revolution* (Ithaca, 1975), p. 146.
20. *A Fiery Flying Roll* (1649), reprinted (Exeter, 1973), p. 8.
21. L. Clarkson, *A Single Eye all Light*, pp. 8-12, 16, quoted in C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (1972), p. 215.
22. 17 Sept. 1649, in *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, ed. T. Carlyle (1907), 2:152.
23. Russell, p. 386.
24. Quoted in C. Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York, 1970), pp. 121-2.
25. Quoted in D.L. Smith, *The Stuart Parliaments, 1603-1689* (1999), p. 136.
26. Quoted in D. Hirst, *England in Conflict, 1603-1660: Kingdom, Community, Commonwealth* (1999), p. 268.
27. Quoted in B. Worden, *The Rump Parliament 1648-1653* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 1.
28. Quoted in Hill, *God's Englishman*, p. 132.
29. Quoted in Hill, *God's Englishman*, p. 33.
30. J. Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E.S. De Beer (Oxford, 1955), 3:234.
31. Evelyn, 3:246. For an even more hierarchical description of Charles II's coronation, see *ibid.*, pp. 278-84.