6 European Political Development during the 17th Century (Part 1): England and the English Civil Wars

In the second half of the 16th century increased costs in warfare and administration forced governments to seek new sources of revenue

In France, the royal government ultimately achieved absolute power through the development of sources of income that were not controlled by nobles or assemblies representing wealthy and influential subjects

However, in England and other places where rulers had insufficient funds and limited powers of taxation, royal authority was challenged

The kings of these countries and provinces had to negotiate with factions on which they depended for financial support

Henry IV of France, a contemporary of Elizabeth I of England, had struggled with a nation divided by religious civil war

His successor Louis XIII began to reassert the crown’s authority and in the 17th century Louis XIV brought the French nobles under royal control

Louis XIV granted the Parlement (court) of Paris to register royal decrees and to give them the authority of law

Louis XIV also allowed the regional parlements (courts) the ability to deal with local issues

When the nobles realized that the strong monarch was a source of patronage and a guardian of the nobility’s privileged status in society, they lost interest in challenging royal authority or acting as a check on the king’s executive authority

An Estates General (assembly) had emerged in France in the late Middle Ages, but once the monarchy consolidated its authority over taxation there was little reason for it to meet

Indeed, no sessions of the Estates General met from 1614 to the eve of the French Revolution in 1789

Reign of James I

When Elizabeth I of England died childless in 1603, there was no immediate successor to claim her throne

Thus, the throne went to her cousin James VI of Scotland, son of Mary Queen of Scots, who Elizabeth I had executed in 1587

James VI of Scotland also became James I of England

As a Scot, James was an outsider in England and had no native constituency to help him deal with England’s religious factions and national debt

Also, James’ advocacy of the concept of the divine right of kings also set him on a collision course with English tradition

Divine right of kings suggests that since royal authority comes from God, the monarch is not subject to the will of the people

The people are subject to the authority of the crown

England’s Parliament had been developed in the 13th century as a check on the executive authority of the crown, particularly as it related to the crowns’ power of taxation

The House of Lords represented the nobility, and the House of Commons represented the general population of the middle ranks

The House of Lords commanded a large amount of influence as the upper or senior ranked house of Parliament

The Parliament met only when summoned by the monarch to authorize taxes

James hoped to develop alternate resources that would enable him to fund his government without calling Parliament into session

Thus, based on his understanding of divine right to power, he created new customs duties called *impositions*

These duties rankled Parliament and the body gave legislative opposition to the crown but did not risk serious confrontation

Religious divisions and problems added to these political tensions over the impositions and other issues

Puritans (Calvinists) within the Church of England hoped that James’ Scottish Presbyterian (Calvinist) upbringing would encourage him to reform the Church of England

Puritans wanted to eliminate priestly rituals and church government run by bishops, and replace them with simple services and congregations led by presbyters (councils of elders) elected by the people

However, James had no intention of using the church in a way that would promote the development of representative government which he saw as an infringement on his divine sourced authority

In 1604 when James was issued the Millenary Petition, which was a list of Puritan grievances, James rejected the petition and pledged to maintain and enhance the Anglican episcopal structure and practices of the church

James did, however, accept the Protestant demand that the Scriptures be read in the common language

In 1611, he authorized a new translation of the Bible, which became known as the King James Version, which remains the standard English text

James had no sympathy for the moral agenda in Puritanism, such as their revulsion and resistance to various forms of honors, recreations, sports, and holidays

James saw these things as innocent activities that were good for the people

James also felt that the Puritan rigidity about such things prevented Roman Catholics from converting to the Church of England

In 1618, James issued a decree that legalized the playing of games on Sundays

Puritans so strongly opposed this decree that James I backed down from his position

James’ lifestyle also gave offense to Puritans

James’ royal court was a center of scandal and corruption

For example, the Duke of Buckingham was rumored to be the king’s lover

Buckingham controlled access to the crown and royal patronage, and he openly sold peerages and titles to the highest bidders

Disappointment and disgust with James led some Puritans (Separatists) to voluntarily leave England for Holland in 1607, and later for the New World in 1619

Pilgrims of New England at Plymouth Colony in Cape Cod Bay

Later in 1929, a larger and better financed group of Puritans founded the Massachusetts Bay colony

James’ conduct of foreign affairs also roused opposition

James preferred peace to war since he feared that war would lead to debts that would force him to beg assistance from Parliament

His 1604 treaty with Spain however caused some to view it as evidence of James’ pro-Catholic feelings

These suspicions increased when James tried to repeal the penal laws against Catholics

The situation deteriorated in 1618 when James refused to send troops to Germany to support Protestant troops in the 30 Years War, and at the same time suggested that his son marry the daughter of the king of Spain

This led to a compromise where his son Charles married the French princess Henrietta Maria

Reign of Charles I

When James health deteriorated, the reins of government passed to his son Charles I

Parliament rejected the marriage alliance in 1624 and pushed England into a war with Spain, however without funding

James died in 1625 and Charles continued James’ policies

Since Parliament refused to fund the war with Spain, Charles was forced to impose duties, collect taxes, and impose forced loans upon property holders without the consent of the Parliament

Also, to save money, soldiers in transit to war zones were quartered in people’s homes

When Parliament met in 1628, its members were furious and refused to grant the king’s request for funds unless he agree to submit to a Petition of Right:

1. No more forced loans
2. No imprisonment without due cause
3. An end to housing troops in people’s homes

In August of 1628, Buckingham was assassinated and in January 1629 Parliament issued more decrees against the king

The levying of taxes without parliamentary consent was declared an act of treason

Charles responded by dissolving Parliament, and it remained out of session until a war with Scotland in 1640 created a monetary crisis for the crown

Without funds from Parliament Charles could not continue the war against Spain, and when he made peace with France in 1629 and with Spain in 1630, he was accused of wanting to strengthen ties with Roman Catholic nations

Many Protestants feared that Catholics were establishing strong influence over the king

Charles’ wife, Henrietta Maria was Catholic, and her marriage contract gave her the right to hear Mass at the English court

Charles also favored a movement within the Church of England that opposed Puritan doctrines and advocated elaborate worship services

To allow Charles to rule without having to deal with Parliament for money, a policy of *thorough* was instituted

This policy sought to establish absolute royal control over England by promoting strict efficiency and administrative centralization

Charles exploited every legal fund-raising device from the enforcement of previously neglected laws to extending existing taxes into new areas

Of course, Charles won challenges to these measures in the royal courts, but it was at the expense of alienating the propertied men who would sit in Parliament if it were ever to be called back into session

During these years of personal rule (1629-1640), Charles lived expensively

He sold titles to raise money, and to dilute and diminish the prestige of the nobility

The nobility and the landowners who saw their prestige diminished feared that Charles would avoid having to call Parliament into session ever again if he were to maintain his power

Charles may have ruled indefinitely had he not abandoned his father’s example of moderate religious toleration in favor of imposing religious conformity in England and Scotland

English Civil War

The archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, encouraged Charles’ preference for High-Church Anglicanism, an Anglo-Catholicism if you will

This style of religion favored a state-supported church with a powerful episcopacy and elaborate liturgies instead of the preaching-centered worship of the Puritans and Presbyterians

In 1637, over the objections of Puritans and Presbyterians, Charles and Bishop Laud attempted to impose the English episcopal system on the Scots

The Scots rebelled, and Charles having insufficient funds for war, had no other choice but to reconvene Parliament

The members of Parliament found themselves in a difficult position

They wanted to oppose the king’s policies while desiring to put down the Scottish rebellion against him

Parliament refused to discuss funding for the war until Charles agreed to accept their list of grievances

Charles responded by dissolving the Parliament, which became known as the Short Parliament

However, in 1640 the Scots invaded England and Charles had no other choice but to call another Parliament into session

This Parliament became known as the Long Parliament

The landowners and the merchant ranks resented the king’s financial demands and paternalistic centralized rule

Puritans disliked the king’s religious policies

The Long Parliament (1640-1660) enjoyed support from many factions throughout the middle ranks

The House of Commons began by impeaching the king’s chief advisors

The earl of Stafford and Bishop Laud were executed for treason in 1641 and 1645 respectively

Parliament then abolished the instruments associated with the political and religious policy of *thorough*, and the king’s courts such as the Court of the Star Chamber, and the Court of High Commission

The levying of new taxes without the consent of Parliament was declared illegal

And Parliament declared itself a permanent branch of England’s government

It claimed that it could not be dissolved without its own consent and that no more than three years could elapse between its meetings

Although members of Parliament were united on limiting the powers of the monarchy, they were divided on the issue of religious reform

Moderate Puritans (Presbyterians) and extreme Puritans (Independents) agreed on abolishing the episcopal system, however the Presbyterians wanted to impose a Calvinist system of churches governed by presbyters, whereas Independents wanted radical decentralization of the church and to allow each congregation to govern itself

A considerable number of conservatives in Parliament did not want any religious changes at all

These divisions intensified as rebellion broke out in Ireland and Parliament was asked for the funds to raise a royal army to suppress it

Leaders in Parliament argued that Charles could not be trusted with an army and that Parliament should take control of the force

However, conservatives were aghast at the break from tradition

Charles sought to exploit the division within the Parliament

When Parliament presented Charles with the Grand Remonstrance (1641), a petition of over 200 grievances, he responded by sending soldiers to Parliament to arrest its leaders

When the Parliamentary leaders escaped, Charles withdrew from London and began to raise an army against the Parliament (January 1642)

The House of Commons passed the Militia Ordinance (1642) and began to raise its own army

The royal forces were known as the Cavaliers and were based in the west of England

They fought for a strong monarchy and the Anglican Church presided over by bishops

The parliamentary forces were called Roundheads (due to their haircuts) were based in the southeastern part of England

They wanted parliamentary government and a decentralized church with a presbyterian government

Two things contributed to Parliament’s victory over the crown

First was an alliance between Parliament and Scotland in 1643

Second was the reorganization of the parliamentary army under Oliver Cromwell

Cromwell was a country squire who favored the Independents

The only established church Cromwell and his supporters would accept was one that granted freedom of worship to Protestant dissenters

In 1644 Parliament won the Battle of Marston Moor, and in 1645 Cromwell’s fanatical New Model Army (national instead of feudal associations) defeated the king at the Battle of Nasby

Again, Charles tried to exploit the divisions in Parliament between the religious factions in 1648, however Cromwell was able to overcome this effort as he and his supporters forcibly subdued the majority Presbyterians in Parliament and took over the body with a small minority of Independents

This is known as the Rump Parliament

In January of 1649 after trial by a special court, the Rump Parliament executed the king, abolished the monarchy, the House of Lords, and the Anglican Church

The English Republic

From 1649 to 1660 England was officially a Puritan Republic

However, Cromwell ruled England

His army conquered Ireland and Scotland and unified what later became known as Great Britain

In 1653 Cromwell became frustrated when Parliament sought to disband his expensive army of 50,000 men

In response Cromwell marched in Parliament with his army and disbanded the assembly

Cromwell became the Lord Protector of England and established a military dictatorship that had dwindling support

His army and foreign adventures cost many times over what Charles I spent

Commerce suffered and people chafed under Cromwell’s enforcement of Puritan codes of enforcement

He was as intolerant of Anglicans as the king had been of Puritans

Cromwell failed to build a political system that provided a suitable alternative to the monarchy and Parliament

By the time he dies in 1658, most of the English were ready to end the Puritan republican experiment and return to traditional institutions of government

In 1660, the exiled Charles II, son of Charles I, was invited to England to restore the Stuart monarchy

The Restoration

Charles II ascended the throne to great rejoicing and England returned to the institutions it had abandoned in 1642

A hereditary monarchy with no obligation to consult with Parliament

An Anglican Church with bishops and an official prayer book

Religious toleration due to Charles II secret Catholic sympathies

However, between 1661 and 1665 Parliament enacted a code that excluded Catholics, Presbyterians, and Independents from religious and political offices

Penalties were imposed on those who attended non-Anglican worship service

Oaths of allegiance to the Church of England were required for those who served in government

Charles II’s foreign policy was dominated by a series of naval wars with Holland caused by England’s Navigations Acts that required good brough to England be brought on English ships or ships registered to the country where the goods came from

The Dutch carried goods from many nations and places, so these acts were a direct attack on the Dutch’s mode of operation

In 1670, Charles allied with the French in the war against the Dutch and received French aid to help pay for the war

In exchange for this subsidy, Charles II secretly pledged to Louis XIV of France to announce his conversion to Catholicism at an ideal moment in time

Charles II tried to instill religious toleration in England in the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, but it was rejected by Parliament

Parliament then refused to provide Charles II money for the war against the Dutch unless the Declaration was rescinded

Parliament then passed the Test Act which excluded Catholics from public office

The Test Act was aimed at the king’s brother, James, duke of York, heir to the throne and a devout convert to Catholicism

Short of money needed to fight the Dutch war, Charles II increased customs duties without the consent of Parliament and received more financial aid from Louis XIV

This allowed him to avoid convening Parliament after 1681

Charles II died in 1685

By this time, he had positioned his brother James to inherit a friendly government that had been cowed and filled with royal supporters

James II squandered the opportunities set up by his brother

He alienated Parliament by insisting on the repeal of the Test Act

He flaunted the Test Act by openly appointing Catholics to high offices

He issued a new Declaration of Indulgence in 1687 that suspended religious tests and permitted free worship

Candidates for Parliament who were opposed to this declaration were evicted and replaced by Catholics

In June 1688 James II imprisoned Anglican bishops who did not support his suspension of laws against Catholics

James II’s policy of toleration was part of a drive to bring England under tighter royal control

James II’s goal was absolutism

However, even loyal royalist allies could not support this great consolidation of power

Fear of the creation of the type of absolutist monarchy Louis XIV created in France gripped the English

When James II’s Catholic wife gave birth to a son in June 1688, England’s Protestants became alarmed

Within days after the boy’s birth, members of Parliament had agreed to invite William III of Orange and his wife, James II’s Protestant daughter Mary, to invade England to preserve traditional liberties

William III of Orange was the stadtholder of the Protestant Netherlands, and the great-grandson of William of Orange the Silent, and the leader of the European states that were threatened by Louis XIV’s plans to expand France’s power

The Glorious Revolution 1688

When the English people failed to oppose the landing of William of Orange’s army in November of 1688, James accepted defeat and fled to France

Parliament completed this bloodless Glorious Revolution by declaring the throne vacant and proclaiming William and Mary as its heirs

William and Mary then issued a Bill of Rights that limited the powers of the monarchy and guaranteed the civil liberties of England’s privileged ranks

However, the Bill prohibited Catholics from occupying the throne

From that point the English monarch would be subject to law and would govern with the consent of the Parliament that would meet regularly

The Toleration Act of 1689 legalized all forms of Protestantism and outlawed Catholicism

The 1701 Act of Settlement provided for the English crown to go to the Protestant House of Hanover in Germany if none of the children of Queen Anne (r. 1702-1714), the second daughter of James II, survived her

Since Anne outlived her children, the Elector of Hanover became King George I of England in 1714, the third foreigner to occupy the English throne in just over a century

James I

William III

George I

The Glorious Revolution established a framework for a government by and for the governed

It established a permanent check on monarchical power by the ranks represented in Parliament

Philosopher John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) came to be read as a justification for the new system

Locke claimed that the relationship between a king and his people was a bilateral contract

If the king broke that contract, the people (those with property) had the right to depose him

Locke’s political theory and England’s parliamentary monarchy were destined to have wide appeal

Constitutional monarchy