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**“That which you have by force, I count as nothing” - was the English Revolution anything more than a military coup d'état?**

When considering proclamations such as The Solemn Engagement and Declaration of the Army in 1647, defining the English Revolution as a military coup becomes appropriate. The political involvement of the army stretches far back before Pride's Purge in 1648; which would generally be considered the most prominent use of illegal military force and the ultimate stepping stone towards regicide. Further yet, the army was physically involved through Cornet George Joyce's seizure of the King from Parliament's custody in Holdenby House, and his subsequent transportation to Sir Thomas Fairfax's headquarters in Newmarket, suggesting violent antagonism bubbling below the surface which would coalesce as regicide in 1649.

However, the army's justification for their hurried involvement in politics is clear. As stated by Cromwell's newly formed Agitators in The Solemn Engagement: “That without such satisfaction and security, as aforesaid, we shall not willingly disband, nor divide, nor suffer our selves to be disbanded or divided.”<sup>1</sup> Presbyterians in Parliament were more than eager to disband the army without the necessary arrears for their service to the state, or fouler, send them to Ireland to fight without any such pay. Therefore, with ‘agitation’ rising and army revolt seeming likely, there is no question that such involvement in politics was necessary. This leads us to consider the event of Pride's Purge itself.

In December 1648, Colonel Thomas Pride's forced exclusion of MPs who still clung to the Newport Treaty and arrest of so-called ‘extremists’ such as William Prynne and Sir William Waller can only be described as an unconstitutional, illegal coup, despite the lack of violence involved. The subsequent absence of moderate Presbyterians such as Denzil Holles (who stoutly advocated the continuation of the negotiations at Newport – at which Charles had conceded rather a few terms, such as allowing Parliament to control the militia for 20 years) is also significant in reinforcing the mockery of a ‘Rump’ that was left. The independent minority left was just that – a minority.

The first draft of the Agreement of the People is also suggestive of the New Model Army Agitators and civilian Levellers' repressed desire for a republic since 1647, as it stated that a new constitution should see sovereign power being held by representatives of the civilian body; leaving no room for a monarch. Radical Levellers such as Colonel Rainsborough (claiming to represent the New Model Army rank and file who had been betrayed by the continuation of negotiations) took this a step further at the Putney debates, arguing that all men had ‘native rights’, consequently permitting them to vote. Essentially, the Levellers opposed all forms of negotiations with the King and pushed for a new constitution placing power wholly in the House of Commons, although, admittedly, Cromwell and Ireton were quick to suppress this radicalism, suggesting that the New Model Army had not yet completely abandoned monarchy.

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<sup>1</sup> Ireton, H. (generally considered to be the main author). (1647). ‘*The Solemn Engagement*’. Available at <http://www.bilderberg.org/land/solemn.htm>. Accessed: 17.07.19

On the other hand, there are many considerations that can justify Pride's Purge. Public support – or perhaps at least no outright rejection – of a potential regicide was essential, so a Parliamentary trial was necessary to openly condemn the King as a war criminal. Whilst an army court martial would simply worsen the miasma of illegality surrounding army's recent movements, a trial would suggest that the law was being observed, with only the aim to bring justice to the people of the three nations. After all, views of Charles as a criminal date back even before the Civil Wars: John Pym's Nineteen Propositions was instrumental in reinforcing the notion that Charles and his dishonest deeds during Personal Rule (particularly the dubiously legal taxation) would not slide within Parliament.

Furthermore, Parliament's repeal of the Vote of No Addresses in September 1648 is often seen as a primary catalyst for Pride's Purge. Yet, the measure interestingly states that "the person or persons that shall make breach of this order shall incur the penalties of high treason"<sup>2</sup>, and using this wording as is intended, one could reasonably accuse Parliament's desperate final attempts to negotiate with the King of being treasonous, criminal, and warranting immediate action by the army (who continued to fight for the true cause of the Civil Wars).

Pride's Purge also occurred after years of excruciatingly drawn out negotiations, so one must consider the opinions of Cromwell and his army during this time of failed compromise.

There is critical evidence to suggest that the New Model Army – even holding the moral high ground after their victory in 1646 - conducted their negotiations with the King (after his seizure by Cornet Joyce) with a higher degree of leniency than Parliament. Namely, the Head of Proposals suggested a more relaxed constitution than Parliament's Newcastle Propositions, and Charles was even allowed indulgences such as the attendance of clergymen, which has been disallowed by Parliament's Commissioners<sup>3</sup>. Surely, this is not the attitude of a regicidal army?

In fact, some would hold that "there is no reason to suppose [Cromwell] had any personal hostility towards the King, or any feeling inconsistent with a desire to see him restored to his proper place in the constitution"<sup>4</sup>. Of course, Cromwell's martyrdom of the parliamentary cause for the sake of a stable constitution becomes somewhat ineffective when we consider the conduct of Charles himself throughout the period of negotiations from 1646 onwards.

Like a 'Bilton snake' indeed, Charles had no enthusiasm for bargaining for his prerogative rights, and every enthusiasm for joining forces with the Scots to bring Cromwell to account for questioning the divine rule of an anointed monarch. Such evidence of this includes a Victorian painting<sup>5</sup> depicting Cromwell's supposed interception of a messenger carrying Charles'

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<sup>2</sup> (1648). 'The Vote of No Addresses'. Available at <http://www.constitution.org/eng/conpur079.htm>. Accessed 19.07.19

<sup>3</sup> Picton, J. (1883). Third edition. 'Oliver Cromwell: The Man and His Mission'. London: Cassell & Company Limited. Available at <https://archive.org/details/olivercromwellma00pictuoft?autoplay=1&playset=1>. Accessed: 10.07.19. p. 257

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 256

<sup>5</sup> Crofts, E. (1883). 'Cromwell at Sign of the Blue Boar', Holborn, London'. [Oil on canvas]. Dudley Museum and Art Gallery: Dudley. Available at <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/cromwell-at-the-blue-boar-holborn-london-52302>. Accessed 18.07.19

correspondence advocating union with the Scots, which would later come to fruition as The Engagement.

Further evidence of Charles' obstinate nature is woven within his escape to the Isle of Wight in November 1647, which effectively gave the army justification to cease pointless negotiations. Charles' conduct under arrest at Carisbrooke Castle is further reflective of his reluctance to cooperate. His servants – notably his butler who concealed letters in Charles' gloves<sup>6</sup> – continued to encourage the rhetoric that Charles was simply prolonging empty negotiations, and come the Scottish Covenanters' invasion (as agreed in The Engagement in return for the establishment of Presbyterianism in England for three years), Charles would be rightfully restored as the divine, unquestioned leader of the nations. Other interesting anecdotes to this effect include Charles' multiple attempts to escape the castle, along with an incident where he struck Colonel Hammond as he searched Charles' clothes for the Engagement<sup>7</sup>. Again, these paint a stark picture of a devious and haughty King.

Yet, even after the bloodshed of the Second Civil War, regicide was still the unthinkable. Indeed, at this point in time, Cromwell himself was predisposed to alternatives such as deposition. After all, he was not a stout republican like Sir Arthur Haselrig (considering Cromwell a traitor and opposing all forms of government by a single person, including the Protectorate), nor did he aim for anything other than “responsible government without anarchy, and freedom of conscience without intolerance”<sup>8</sup>. And whilst this is not impossible under monarchy itself, this would prove itself to be impossible under Charles Stuart: “tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy to the good people of this nation”<sup>9</sup>.

Throughout the entire period of the English Revolution, Charles is known for regretting only one decision: signing the death warrant of Thomas Wentworth (Charles later remarked on the scaffold that Strafford's “unjust sentence...is punished now by an unjust Sentence upon me”<sup>10</sup>). It can therefore be concluded that Charles had not a single ounce of regret for refusing negotiations, hence justifying the military coup that saw his treacherous rule thwarted once and for all.

However, the status of the revolution as a military coup must also be considered in relation the trial of the King. Whilst the Rump aimed to present the proceedings as legal, this remains far from the truth. As Bradshaw read aloud to the court that Charles was being sentenced “in the name of the people of England”, Anne, Lady Fairfax is reported to have shouted “not half, not a quarter of the people of England [support the death sentence]. Oliver Cromwell is a traitor!”<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Purkiss, D. (2007). *The English Civil War*. London: Harper Perennial. p. 544

<sup>7</sup> Ackroyd, P. (2015). *Civil War*. London: Pan Books. p. 300

<sup>8</sup> Harrison, F. (2016). *Oliver Cromwell*. London: Endeavor Press Ltd. p. 76

<sup>9</sup> Cheyney, P. (1908). *Readings in English History Drawn from the Original Sources: Intended to Illustrate a Short History of England*. Boston: Ginn & Company. Available at <https://archive.org/details/readingsinenglis01chey/page/n4>. Accessed 20.07.19. p. 489

<sup>10</sup> Charles I. (1649). *Speech made upon the scaffold*. Available at <http://anglicanhistory.org/charles/charles1.html>. Accessed: 19.07.19

<sup>11</sup> Purkiss, D. (2007). *The English Civil War*. London: Harper Perennial. p. 555

These words, coupled with the absence of Cromwell's loyal 'Black Tom' from the trial, are more than suggestive of the fact that the Rump did not represent the desires of the people of England.

Regardless, a common argument for the necessity of the trial and execution lies within Cromwell's religious motivations. As previously discussed, there is much evidence to suggest that Cromwell was not a republican at all, but rather a servant of God, bound to bring justice to those who had suffered servitude under a tyrannical King. Even in the First Civil War, Cromwell's belief that God graciously awarded him victories was intrinsic to his views towards the Royalists and their guileful leader.

Harrison suggests that the tipping point in Cromwell's patience with Charles came at the start of the Second Civil War, where, in the "overwhelming defeat of the Royalists, he saw the finger of God pointing to judgement on the contriver of all these horrors"<sup>12</sup> – of course, this refers to Charles Stuart. This cultivates another justification for the upheaval of the English Revolution. Despite dispute whether regicide was the 'correct' outcome of the Civil Wars, it remains unsaid that this simply was the outcome that occurred.

Therefore, we must consider the final facet of the question – the impact of the English Revolution itself.

The Rump, Nominated Assembly, Protectorate and Committee of Safety were monumental in only one thing: creating the borderline anarchic state of England which saw Charles II restored in 1660. In fact, in some ways, Cromwell was no less frustrated with the Protectorate Parliaments than the Long Parliament. After the Restoration, however, increasing numbers and power of the electorate along with diminishing authoritative powers of the monarch began to shape the constitution into the one we see today.

Essentially, whilst the English Revolution did indeed see a military coup in the form of Pride's Purge, leading to the regicide of Charles I and the following change in the constitution that saw the Rump abolish the House of Lords and monarchy, it must be understood that this upheaval was necessary – in Cromwell's eyes – to restore Godly peace and order to the nations, and prevent further injustices against the common people the King had terrorised for so long.

The English Revolution was born from Charles I - an aloof, insecure monarch - and died alongside its innovator, Oliver Cromwell, even being mostly reversed through the Restoration. However, this turbulent period has intrinsic worth to English history, and since the simple action of denying the entry of certain MPs to Parliament had such a momentous, cascading effect, Pride's Purge can absolutely be considered as much more than a simple military coup.

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<sup>12</sup> Harrison, F. (2016). *Oliver Cromwell*. London: Endeavor Press Ltd. p. 93