



The following year, Cromwell reorganized his forces: he increased the power of the New Model Army (the army was «remodeled» on a national basis, replacing the old county associations), which not only became a valiant military instrument, but also a strong political party, representing the revolutionary lower middle class. Thanks to Cromwell's reinforcement of the army, Charles' troops were again defeated at Naseby (1645). Fighting went on for another year, but the result was now certain: the king's cause was irretrievably lost.

Charles fled from his headquarters at Oxford to Newcastle, where he surrendered to the Scots. So the first stage of the revolution ended. Negotiations were opened at Newcastle between the king, the Scots and the representatives of the Parliament; but as Charles refused to accept Presbyterianism and the Covenant, the Scots delivered him to his adversaries.

The problem in the rank of Parliament was now to find a means to pacify the country and to restore Charles to the throne, under proper conditions to prevent him from exerting any real power. But Charles refused to accept the heads of the proposal offered to him and to submit to every condition limiting his royal prerogatives. In the three following years he continuously tried to regain his power by exploiting the divisions existing among his opponents. He intrigued to play off the army against the Commons and the Scots. In 1649 a Scottish army came to England to help Charles, but it was defeated by Cromwell at Preston. Then Cromwell, after taking London, expelled from Parliament or arrested all Charles' supporters; those who remained belonged to the most radical Puritan section. This part of Parliament, called the Rump Parliament, voted for the appointment of a High Court of Justice: the Court condemned Charles to death and he was executed.

The Commonwealth. After Charles' execution, England was proclaimed to be a Commonwealth (1649-1660; → Glossary) or Republic, governed according to a written Constitution provided by the Agreement of the People. The document established complete religious toleration, the democratic control of the army, the biennial election of Parliament to appoint an Executive Council.

The Commonwealth Government was soon attacked by Scotland and Ireland which did not agree with the new settlement, and Charles' son was proclaimed king as Charles II at Edinburgh.

The leadership of the army, confronted with the threat of a war, abolished the House of Lords and appointed a Council of State. Cromwell at the head of the army landed in Ireland and succeeded in shattering the Irish forces at Drogheda and Wexford (1649), and the Scottish troops at Dunbar (1650); but the violent methods employed in the war caused deep resentment which was to last for years. Charles II, defeated at Worcester (1651), fled to France.

In 1652 a war broke out against the Dutch, the most dangerous of England's rivals at sea. Cromwell forced the Dutch to come to an agreement (1654). Later on in a successful expedition to the West Indies against the Spanish fleet, England gained the island of Jamaica.

At home, in spite of military successes, the Commonwealth failed to achieve a social and political stability. If the Civil War had destroyed the instruments of «royal tyranny» and had transformed the apparatus of the State, it had left many problems still unsolved.

At Cromwell's sudden death in 1658, his eldest surviving son Richard (1626-1712) succeeded him, but he was unable to govern the country, divided by contrasting interests, and was obliged to resign (1659). After his resignation Parliament called Charles back from his exile in France and was crowned as Charles II (1660-1685). The return of the monarchy is known as The Restoration. The period between the reigns of Charles I and Charles II is also called the Interregnum (1649-1660).

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF EVENTS

1625-1649 Reign of Charles I: 1628 → Petition of Rights; 1629-1640 → Charles' rule without Parliament: Eleven Years' Tyranny; 1641 → Triennial Act and Great Remonstrance; 1642 → Oliver Cromwell became the leader of the Parliament's army; 1642-1649 → Civil War (Battles of Marston Moor, Naseby, Preston); 1649 → Execution of Charles I.

1649-1660 The Commonwealth: 1649-1658 → Cromwell's Protectorate; 1658 → Cromwell's death: Richard Cromwell succeeded his father; 1659 → Richard Cromwell's resignation.

1660 The Restoration (Charles II's crowning).

