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What was the English Revolution?

John Morrill, Brian Manning and David Underdown

Those living through the period 1570–1640 would have felt themselves much closer to civil war in the first two decades than in the last two. A disputed succession, organised Catholic and Puritan religious parties (in the Catholic case made the more menacing by a strong advocacy of tyrannicide), and the willingness of foreign powers to intervene in the internal affairs of England: all these were far more the hallmarks of the mid-Elizabethan than of the Caroline period. Yet these were the classic occasions of internal conflict in Reformation Europe. They were the major but not the only signs of a country moving away from civil war. The Crown had weathered the storm induced by a century of population growth and price inflation. By the 1630s, both these were blowing themselves out; the economic and social outlook were rosier. The Crown doubled its real income between 1603 and 1637 and had the lowest national debt in Europe. Although the methods used were unpopular and provoked some limited passive resistance, the Crown got its way. In the later 1630s only one fiscal device – Ship Money – was openly (and largely ineffectually) resisted, and the Crown could have abandoned it and still balanced the budget in peacetime. Since no foreign power in the foreseeable future would declare war on England, the Crown had another twenty years in what would have been a favourable economic climate to solve the problems of war finance.

Far from being a state sliding into civil war and anarchy, the early Stuart state saw measurable decreases in levels of extra-legal violence: fewer treason trials, no revolts, fewer riots concentrated in fewer areas

(the western forests, the fenland), the ubiquity and omnicompetence of royal justice, the ability of the Crown to insist on the arbitration of disputes at law or by royal officers.

It can thus be argued that the civil wars grew out of the policies and out of the particular failings of a particular king, Charles I. For despite its growing strength, the English political system remained a frail one which required skilful management. The state did lack the means to wage war, even to develop as a major colonial power; it lacked a bureaucracy dependent for its income and standing upon the Crown; it lacked coercive power. Government had to be by consent, above all by the willing co-operation of political élites in the forty counties and in the two hundred self-governing boroughs. By and large, material self-interest bound those élites to co-operation even in the 1630s, and there was far greater ideological cohesion and agreement within these élites and between them and the Court than in other western European states, but they did believe themselves to have rights and liberties which it was the Crown's duty to protect, and much of the necessary modernisation of finance and administration in the early seventeenth century had involved the erosion of those rights.

On balance, however, Elizabeth and James were skilful in permitting changes in the distribution of political and administrative power which reflected changes in the distribution of wealth and social power. As the peerage declined as social and political leaders, and as wealth became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the gentry and of wealthy craftsmen and farmers, so there was an enormous expansion of the responsibilities and powers of the county community and of parish government. Thus the number of gentry appointed to prominent local offices increased fourfold (through commissions of the peace, lieutenancy, etc.), and the powers and responsibilities they discharged were massively increased; and at the same time the wealthier members of village communities gained enormous influence over their poorer neighbours through the statutory expansion of the powers of parish officers (the poor law, administration of charitable funds, etc.).

This redistribution of power away from the Church and the peerage (and away from the poor) was achieved by the co-operation of Crown and political élites in Parliament. This system of government, in which the governors were not easily or directly subject to royal control, needed very sensitive management. It needed control by a monarch who could make the loaves and fishes of patronage feed a multitude of suitors. It could be done, but in the reign of Charles I it was not done. Charles was an incompetent King; inaccessible, glacial, self-righteous, deceitful. Within fifteen years of his accession he had forfeited the goodwill of most of the political élite, who viewed his actions with alarm, incom-

prehension or dismay. Yet few, if any, contemplated trying to bring down his personal rule by force. Emigration not underground resistance was the ultimate preference of men like John Pym and Oliver Cromwell in the later 1630s.

In 1640, however, Charles blundered away his initiative. He tried to impose his will upon his Scottish subjects twice, both times without adequate means. He could have made painful concessions, resumed his personal rule in England and looked to divide-and-rule tactics to regain his power in Scotland. But by attempting to impose his own brand of Protestantism on the Scots through an unco-ordinated force of Irish Catholics, Highland Catholics and an English army containing many Catholics, all to be paid for with cash to be provided from Rome and Madrid, he turned the anti-Catholic fears which his policies and his cultural values had already stimulated into a deep paranoia. The Scots' occupation of northeast England, and their demand for war reparations guaranteed by Parliament, created a wholly unanticipated and wholly unique situation: a meeting of Lords and Commons over whose determination he had no control. The MPs who gathered for the Long Parliament knew they had a once-for-all chance to put things right. They did not set out to organise for war but to restore the good old days.

There were three strands to the opposition to royal policies in 1640: they were, for many men, intertwined; but for many more they were discrete. There were those whose opposition can be called 'localist', whose experience of government in recent years had been of insensitive interventionism by central government in the affairs of their shires or boroughs, the imposition of national priorities at the expense of local preference and custom; there were those whose opposition can be termed 'legal-constitutionalist', a genuine belief that the Crown had been persuaded by evil counsellors to invade the liberty and take away the property of the subject, at best to serve the venal self-interest of the evil counsellors, at worst as part of a grand design to set up popery and tyranny; and there were those whose opposition was religious, who saw Protestantism under attack from an insidious popish conspiracy at court, and a less concealed but just as deadly and systematic challenge to the identity of the Church of England instigated by an innovative and heretical Archbishop of Canterbury and his henchmen.

The events of 1640–2 showed that neither the 'localist' nor the 'legal-constitutionalist' perceptions of misrule led men to take up arms. Those primarily concerned with the disruption to local government and autonomy occasioned by royal policies in the 1630s were overwhelmingly neutralist in 1642, well aware that war could not but bring on much worse disruptions. At most, such men followed the line of least

resistance, following reluctantly the orders issued by others. Constitutional grievances were keenly felt by most of those who gathered at Westminster for the Long Parliament. But constitutional remedy was not speedily or rigorously pursued. Only the Triennial Act reached the statute book in the first eight months; the prosecution of evil counsellors took precedence, and what time was left over was spent more on debating religion than the rule of law. However, when the Houses did get round to constitutional grievances they quickly, and largely without rancour, rushed through a body of remedial legislation. Two points are obvious about the constitutional grievances of 1640–1; that they were, without exception, grievances which had arisen since 1625 (that is, they were grievances against Charles I and not against the early modern state), and that Parliament saw itself as engaged in a restorative, conservative programme. By the summer, there were no constitutional grievances left except those created by the King's manifest bad faith in conceding the remedies to those old grievances.

The constitutional programme of 1641–2 was not – unlike the religious programme – an end in itself; it was a means to an end. Fresh guarantees were sought that the King would honour his pledges and rule responsibily. Whether or not such guarantees were necessary really depended on whether or not the King could be trusted, and that was a matter intimately connected with the religious question. Although Parliament issued the Militia Ordinance and the Nineteen Propositions, neither was the subject of prolonged debate in the provinces. There were no county petitions for or against the Propositions, for example. In 1641 petitions called for constitutional reform; in 1642 the overwhelming majority of those concerned with constitutional issues called for accommodation, for negotiation, for settlement. Yet throughout 1642 petitions from across England debated, in ever more sharply distinguished ways, the case for and against episcopacy. No more than a dozen serious pamphlets debated the constitutional issues in the months before Edgehill; there were scores of pamphlets considering the future of the Church. In the four weeks after the Attempt on the Five Members, pamphlets on that outrage were outnumbered four to one by pamphlets on the impeachment of twelve bishops the previous week.

Many of those who felt that the guarantees being sought were legitimate and proper did not feel that it was right to fight to achieve them. One could believe in the Propositions but vote against the raising of an army to enforce them. The constitutional issues were the occasion of the civil war but not the actual cause. Men decided whether to obey the Militia Ordinance or the Commission of Array not on the merit of those measures themselves, but on other grounds. The great majority tried not

to have to decide, seeing good and evil on both sides. They went reluctantly to war. But minorities in most counties felt there was a cause worth fighting for; that there was a glorious future to command. Those who felt thus were those who felt strongly about religion.

In 1640, there was near unanimity in county petitions to the Houses and in the rhetoric of the members that the Laudian church was innovative, grasping, a threat to 'the pure religion of Elizabeth and James I', and that Charles had become the victim of a popish conspiracy. He had cut himself off from his people, had surrendered himself to the wiles of his courtiers and of counter-reformation culture. He had been brainwashed. The war with the Scots, together with his alleged involvement in the Army Plots, the Incident, the Attempt on the Five Members, and even in the Irish Rebellion, were all seen as the irrational acts of a King poisoned by popery, a man no longer responsible for his actions. In so far as there was a civil war because of the way men acted on their own perceptions of events, there was a civil war in 1642 because many of Charles's subjects believed that they had to look to their own defence, the King having become incapable of discharging his trust. Moderate clergymen like Richard Baxter and official parliamentary apologists like Henry Parker supported Parliament not because they feared royal tyranny, but because they believed the King had ceased to rule. He had become a zombie. In so far as that explanation made sense to the leaders of Parliament like John Pym, it was a religious explanation.

But many others saw a different side of Charles. They saw a King who had abandoned the counsellors of the 1630s; who had accepted the remedial legislation of the Long Parliament; who had abandoned Laudianism, had appointed moderate calvinist bishops, had promised to reform abuses but to defend the 'true reformed Protestant religion by law established without any connivance of popery or innovation' (a euphemism which acknowledged his abandonment of his faithful Archbishop whom he left to rot in the Tower). Such men saw a threat to order and liberty less in the antics of the King's *ultra* supporters than in the tolerance and leniency which the parliamentary leaderhip extended towards the demonstrations and mass picketing of the Houses by crowds of Londoners, and of the iconoclasm and popular disturbances throughout England.

Yet as these two sides emerged in Parliament and in the provinces, it was the religious issue which stood out as the decisive one. While the events of 1640–2 narrowed the constitutional issues which came to revolve around means and not ends, religious issues broadened and deepened. From a general detestation of Laudian innovation and popery, there emerged a passionate defence of the pre-Laudian Church: of bishops, the prayer book, the rhythms of the Christian year (built

around the festivals of Christmas and Easter). This passionate defence was sustained by increasing numbers in both Houses and in petitions from a majority of the shires, attested by gentry, yeomen, craftsmen and clergy. But there also emerged an equally passionate call (such as had not been heard for decades) for godly reformation, for the sweeping away of a corruptible church order, so recently and so easily taken over by the enemies of true religion, and for the erection of a Church committed to preaching, to discipline, to a programme of moral rearmament. Such a Church could turn England from a nation full of ignorance and vice into a model godly commonwealth, into Zion. This cry too was heard in Parliament and throughout the country. As the impasse was reached in 1642, small groups in many counties thrust themselves forward to fight for Church and King, or to fight for reformation and liberty.

In almost every case, those who thrust themselves forward were those who had previously campaigned for episcopacy or against it. Many of those who had had 'legal-constitutionalist' objections to the Personal Rule now fought for Church and King. No-one who argued for a godly reformation came over to the King's side because they found the Commission of Array more agreeable than the Militia Ordinance.

These 'militants' brought on the war. Others were dragged in, following agonised and slight preferences or taking the line of least resistance. The war was not the result of social divisions. Gentry, yeoman, tradesmen fought in equal numbers (though not equal numbers in each region) for King and Parliament. If militant puritan middling sorts can be identified, so can militant Anglican middling sorts and neutral middling sorts in similar numbers. If there were more puritan yeomen than puritan gentlemen, there were more yeomen than gentlemen to be puritan: there were also more Anglican yeomen than Anglican gentry. The civil war was not a clash of social groups: it was the result of incompetent kingship which allowed religious militants to settle their disputes about the nature of the church, and therefore of different concepts of the moral order, to fight it out. It was the last and greatest of Europe's Wars of Religion.

After four years of civil war, the Parliamentarian minority defeated the royalist minority. But they had alienated the uncommitted, the neutrals and their own moderate supporters. In order to win the war, they had had to impose a crushing burden of taxation, to set up a civil authority with draconian powers (of arbitrary taxation, arbitrary imprisonment), and had created a standing army kept up to strength by impressment and maintained by compulsory billeting and quarter. The security problem required the maintenance of expensive security forces. The measures required to sustain this expensive army increased the security problem. At the same time, the attempt of puritan zealots to

impose their new and mandatory church and religious order foundered amidst the passive resistance of the majority who remained loyal to the old services and to their old ministers. The puritans' hope of imposing their Church was further weakened by internal disunity, extending beyond natural differences of emphasis over correct church order as the strain of events and a heady atmosphere engendered by a free press and the questioning of all established values produced the disintegration of puritan intellectual unity.

The yearning for settlement grew, with widespread recognition that the war had resolved nothing, merely brought unprecedented misery and loss. There was a massive call for a return of the King on terms he might well have accepted in 1642. The second civil war in 1648 was in large part the consequence of that yearning. But for many in the puritan vanguard of 1642, the dream of the New Jerusalem remained vivid. The sufferings of civil war were not a check but a spur; they had a meaning. God was punishing, chastening, cleansing his people. Theirs were pains with a purpose. The war had made the wickedness of the old order all the clearer. An incorrigible King refused to accept and actively sought to overture the judgment of God. He was a 'man of blood', whose judicial execution was now demanded in atonement. On January 30th, 1649, the Regicide marked the triumph of that minority position.

Yet by executing the King and consciously proclaiming a godly republic, the puritan vanguard further isolated themselves. So long as their Army remained united they could cow the majority into acquiescence. But the puppet regimes set up and pulled down by the Army were caught in a pincer. If they sought to realise the vision of the New Jerusalem they found themselves frustrated by the passive resistance of the old social élites; if they temporised with the élites, they lost the support of the Army. And meanwhile the unacceptable face of puritanism alienated them yet further from the majority. When Army unity crumbled with the death of Oliver Cromwell, who strove to infuse the old social order with new religious values, the return of the King was inevitable.

Charles II came back to a changed world. Constitutionally, he had to bow to the will of the country gentry and to accept their hegemony in the counties and increasingly in the towns. The power of the state was humbled and the autonomy of local governors exalted. But even more important, the Restoration settlement saw the overthrow of religious enthusiasm. Charles I and Laud had shared with the puritan county bosses like William Brereton, Robert Harley, John Wray, and Army bosses like Oliver Cromwell and Thomas Harrison, the vision of using an alliance of Church and State to impose a new moral order. All such

hopes of realising a godly and ordered commonwealth were discredited by the Revolution. Religion was relegated to the fringes. The Church was emasculated and put under lay control; economic, political, artistic thought was secularised; science ceased to be the means to create an ordered world ('a great instauration' in which disease and dearth were vanquished and man's fleshly wants satisfied so that the spiritual values could be cherished). Science became, as politics, accepted as the art of the possible, a process of piecemeal empirical enquiry and improvement unrelated to grand designs of social engineering. In the 1680s, pleading for religious toleration, John Locke, heir to the puritan tradition, defined a Church as a voluntary society of men, meeting together to worship God in such fashion as they deemed appropriate. Religion had been pushed to the edge of life, almost into becoming a hobby. Out of England's wars of religion came the modern secular state.

JOHN MORRILL

For further reading

Before the Civil War, ed. H. Tomlinson (Macmillan, 1984) is an excellent set of essays on key aspects of 1603–42; Anthony Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Arnold, 1981), the best recent study of 1640–2; Caroline Hibbard, *Charles and the Popish Plot* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983), the best study of the collapse of royal credibility; *Reactions to the English Civil War*, ed. J. S. Morrill (Macmillan, 1982), a collection of essays on 1642–9; William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment*, is an important recent regional study. The main argument of this essay is developed at greater length in J. S. Morrill, 'The religious context of the English civil war', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 34 (1984).

The Parliament which Charles I was obliged to summon to meet at Westminster on November 3rd, 1640, did not intend to initiate a revolution. The two Houses of Parliament were composed of nobility and gentry – wealthy landlords – who represented the ruling class of England. Their intention was to reinstate the ancient constitution which in their view had been undermined by the actions of the King since 1629, and to restore the Church of England to the position established by the Elizabethan Religious Settlement which in their opinion had been subverted by the innovations of Archbishop Laud. Charles and his advisers had strained the natural alliance and normal harmony between the monarchy and the ruling class. The aim of the Parliament was to recover the working partnership of the nobility and gentry with the Crown.

The King's policies in Church and State during the 1630s were blamed upon evil advisers. The first objective of the leaders of the Parliament was to remove those bad councillors. The Earl of Strafford was executed and Archbishop Laud was imprisoned in the Tower of London. But when the leaders of the Parliament went beyond the removal of evil advisers and demanded that the King 'employ such councillors and ministers as shall be approved by his Parliament,' they raised an issue which caused division in the Parliament. Many of the more conservative members of both Houses supported the King in the defence of the 'ancient and undoubted right' of the monarch to choose his own advisers.

The second issue which caused division in the Parliament was religion. Laud and the bishops were accused of betraying the Protestant tradition of the Church of England by introducing ceremonies which in the eyes of most of the nobility and gentry savoured of Roman Catholicism. But this was an issue which troubled not only the ruling class. In some parishes in London and in the provinces crowds tore down the rails in the chancel and put the communion table back in the nave of the church where it had been before the Laudian innovations. They assaulted ministers for wearing the surplice and shouted out objections to the liturgy of the prayer-book for having too much in common with the Roman Catholic Mass. Petitions attacked the bishops and called for the abolition of episcopacy. Some Members of Parliament rallied to the defence of the bishops and the prayer-book. They feared that an attack on the principle of hierarchy in the church might open the way for an attack on the principle of hierarchy in society at large. They were concerned to preserve the existing liturgy as an expression of a traditional order against attack, on the one side, from a 'popish' faction of 'upstart' clergy led by Laud and, on the other side, from a 'fanatical' faction of lower-class religious radicals. But they were also worried by the popular disorders which accompanied the arguments about the bishops and the prayer-book.

Thus the third factor which produced division in the Parliament was popular disorder. Demonstrations at Westminster against bishops and the prayer-book in the autumn of 1641 led some Members of Parliament to demand action to disperse assemblies of the people and to prevent them from gathering at Westminster. They feared that Members would be intimidated and the Parliament overawed by popular pressure. But the leaders of the Parliament were more fearful that the King planned to use force against the Parliament, and they were reluctant to discountenance popular demonstrations because their only defence against a royal attack was popular support. They were right. When the King attempted a coup and tried to arrest

leaders of the Parliament in January 1642, he was frustrated by popular demonstrations and forced to flee from the capital. A majority of the House of Lords and two-fifths of the House of Commons also withdrew from Westminster in the following months, either out of sympathy with the King or from unwillingness to be implicated in actions against him.

Both the King with his supporters and Members who remained in Parliament at Westminster raised armed forces, not with the intention of fighting, but each with the object of deterring the other from resorting to violence, and each with the aim of strengthening its position in negotiations with the other. The Members at Westminster demanded control over the King's choice of advisers and of commanders of the militia. Charles would not concede this and a substantial section of the nobility and gentry rallied to him as the defender of the established forms of government in the State and the Church, and as the symbol of order and the guarantee of the existing social hierarchy. But few of the men at Westminster were revolutionaries. They were driven to make their demands by distrust of the King and fear that his intention was to get rid of the Parliament by force and return to his ways of ruling in the 1630s.

A revolution involves the replacement by force or the threat of force of one political or social system by another. So far what had happened in England was not a revolution. By the summer of 1642 the old political system had broken down, and the mechanism for resolving conflicts had failed, but no new political system was visualised. The country drifted into civil war. Most people remained, or attempted to remain, neutral, deploring the conflict, seeking peace, and trying to avoid a commitment to either side. The ruling class was split into three – royalists, parliamentarians, and neutrals – though probably more were royalists than parliamentarians. While most of the lower classes were neutrals, the parliamentarians had significant popular support amongst the small traders, artisans and apprentices of London, and amongst the people engaged in the manufacture of cloth in the provinces.

Political and constitutional issues caused the breakdown into civil war, but religious issues became increasingly influential in determining allegiance to one side or the other, although never the only issues. Opponents of the King included a broad alliance of moderate Puritans, militant Presbyterians, and radical sectaries. The Puritans wanted to maintain the Established Church and to retain a reformed episcopacy: their aims were to purge the Church of 'the remnants of popery', to improve the quality of the clergy, to promote preaching, to raise moral standards and to establish a stricter moral discipline over the whole population. The Presbyterians had the same aims as the Puritans

but did not think that those could be achieved so long as the Church was governed by bishops. They accepted the Established Church but sought to change its government from the Episcopalian to the Presbyterian form, which was based on a hierarchy of assemblies with representatives of the laity as well as the clergy, rising from the parish assembly to the National Assembly. The Presbyterians also sought the replacement of the prayer-book by a liturgy on more strictly Calvinist lines.

The sects rejected the idea of an Established Church to which everybody was compelled to belong. They regarded a true church as a gathering of 'true believers' – a voluntary association of like-minded people who agreed to form a church and to worship together according to their own lights. They separated from the Established Church, whether Episcopalian or Presbyterian, and formed their own independent, self-governing congregations. If there was to be an Established Church they asked to be allowed to worship outside its jurisdiction in their own autonomous congregations according to their own consciences. This broad alliance of moderate Puritans, militant Presbyterians, and radical sectaries gave the parliamentarians victory over the royalists in the civil war. But this alliance was inherently unstable and was breaking up even before the war ended in 1646. This instability was a reflection of social differences and conflicts. Parliamentarian gentry tended to be moderate Puritans, and when they could not prevent the abolition of episcopacy, they sought a form of Presbyterianism which would be controlled by Parliament and the gentry. They were opposed by the militant Presbyterians who had popular support amongst the middling and smaller merchants, shopkeepers and apprentices of London. Presbyterianism in either form was resisted by the sects, which had become during the war increasingly influential in the parliamentarian army, London and some provincial centres, and drew their strength from small traders and artisans in London and people engaged in the manufacture of cloth in the provinces.

The sects generated a radical political group, the Levellers, who sought not only toleration for the sects but also the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords, and the establishment of the supremacy of the House of Commons, which was to be made responsible to an expanded electorate. The Levellers exercised some influence amongst sections of the rank-and-file of the parliamentarian army and amongst sections of the lower classes in London during the period 1647–49. But popular discontent at increased taxes and rising food prices benefited the royalists more than the radicals. Nevertheless the revival of royalism was crushed by the parliamentarian army in the Second Civil War in 1648. In December 1648–January 1649 the same

army carried out a military coup: it occupied the capital, purged the Parliament, tried and executed the King, abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords, and established a republic with a unicameral legislature which elected the executive government. This was a revolution in that it involved a change of the political system by force and it was not just the substitution of one set of rulers for another. But the constitution devised by the Levellers was not implemented nor was the political revolution followed by a social revolution.

Power had been slipping during and after the civil war from the hands of the pre-war governing élites – the greater gentry, that is the bigger landlords, in the counties, and the greater merchants in the towns. The defeat of the King and the royalists meant that in London, some provincial towns, and many counties, power passed to lesser gentry and smaller traders. But the greater gentry and larger merchants were not displaced totally from power and held on to it in some counties and towns. Although the lesser gentry did not form part of the old governing élites, and did not belong economically to the same class as the bigger landlords, they did share the status which differentiated all gentry, whether greater or lesser, from plebeians, and they had more in common with the greater gentry than with radical traders and artisans. They were determined to preserve the social hierarchy and the distribution of power according to social status.

Radicals failed to move the revolution further to the left after 1649. In part this was due to the fact that they split into three broad tendencies. Many religious radicals were satisfied with the defeat of Presbyterianism and with the establishment of a degree of toleration for the sects in the 1650s, and they sought little further political and social changes. The other radicals were divided between the secular radicalism represented by the Levellers and the millennarian radicalism represented by the Fifth Monarchists. Up to a point both the Levellers and the Fifth Monarchists advocated similar programmes of reform; both demanded the abolition of tithes and revolutionary changes in the legal system; both sought economic growth; both drew their support from small traders, artisans and apprentices, and both were essentially urban movements; both denounced the nobility and gentry and the rich in general, and both sought to displace the old ruling class. But here they split. The Levellers aimed to transfer power by means of a more democratic and decentralised political system, in which the qualification for political power would not be wealth or social status but merely being 'a free-born Englishman'. The Fifth Monarchists, however, sought to transfer power to the 'godly people' or 'saints', that is the members of the sectarian congregations, by making 'godliness rather than wealth or social status the qualification to exercise political power. They rejected the

Leveller constitutional programme because it gave political rights to the ungodly as well as to the godly.

The second reason why the revolution did not move further to the left was that the social base of the radicals was too narrow. Radicalism was confined largely to small numbers of traders and artisans, and the peasants – the great mass of the population – were unaffected. Occasionally during the revolution particular grievances erupted amongst the peasants in some localities but rarely rose to the level of a challenge to the existing social and economic system.

The third reason was that the old social order remained strong and fear of radicalism steadily reunited the gentry: the return of the monarchy, of the House of Lords, and even of the bishops increasingly seemed the safest guarantees of order, stability and the old social hierarchy.

The monarchy was restored in 1660 but not to the position it had held in the 1630s and it was to be a constitutional monarchy and not an absolute monarchy on Continental lines. The power of the central government was curbed and the greater gentry were strengthened in their control of the counties and the greater merchants in their control of the towns. The Church of England could not be restored to the position it had held in the 1630s and it ceased to be the church of the whole nation. The religious spirit of the revolution flowed into Dissent and Nonconformity and the split in English religious life became permanent. The old ruling class came back with new ideas and new outlooks which were attuned to economic growth and expansion and facilitated in the long run the development of a fully captialist economy. It would all have been very different if Charles I had not been obliged to summon that Parliament to meet at Westminster on November 3rd, 1640.

BRIAN MANNING

For further reading

Robert Ashton, *The English Civil War: conservatism and revolution 1603–1649* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978); Anthony Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Edward Arnold, 1981); Alan Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion 1640–60* (Leicester University Press, 1966); J. T. Cliffe, *The York-shire Gentry from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Athlone Press, 1969); B. G. Blackwood, *The Lancashire Gentry and the Great Rebellion 1640–60* (Chetham Society, Manchester University Press, 1978); David Underdown, *Pride's Purge: politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1971); B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men; A study in seventeenth-century English millenarianism* (Faber, 1972).

What was the English Revolution? Was it, as participants in the debate over the gentry a generation ago variously argued, a revolution generated by social tensions, confirming a changed balance of power within the élite, with a rising (or declining) gentry temporarily replacing an aristocracy in crises at the centre of power? Was it part of a European 'general crisis', one of many seventeenth-century 'revolts of the provinces' against the extravagance and assertive centralism of the new state-building monarchies? Was that general crisis the outcome of structural economic changes, the final stage in the replacement of 'feudal' productive relations by capitalism, the 1640s thus being in some sense England's 'bourgeois revolution'? Or was it perhaps not really a revolution at all, but merely a conflation of local struggles, or even, as Conrad Russell and other revisionists have recently suggested, simply a bit of bad luck, the result of, at most, short-term governmental breakdown?

As always, each historian has his or her own solution. My own starts from two innocuous premises: first, that the revolution was *not* a mere accident (though the fortuitous and unpredictable certainly played a part in it); secondly, that to understand it we need to look back once more over the history of the previous century. When we do so we find, I suggest, a profound division emerging among the English people about the moral basis of their commonwealth, a division expressed in a cultural conflict that had both social and regional dimensions. The revolution was an unsuccessful attempt to resolve the conflict by imposing a particular notion of moral order, articulated in the culture of the Puritan 'middling sort', upon the rest of the kingdom.

The Tudor state rested on a theory of order incessantly reiterated by preachers, publicists and politicians. 'Almighty God hath appointed all things in heaven, earth, and waters in a most excellent and perfect order': the sonorous message of the Homily on Obedience was regularly dinned into the ears of English men and women throughout their lives. Society was a harmonious organism, held together by reciprocal obligations. 'Some are in high degree', the Homily continues, 'some in low, some kings and princes, some inferiors and subjects, priests and laymen, masters and servants, fathers and children, husbands and wives, rich and poor'. The patriarchal authority of the father of a family was the cornerstone of order, reinforcing the corresponding layers of authority of lords over tenants, monarchs over subjects. The theory presupposed the universal existence of stable families, stable local communities, as the bases of a stable state.

But in practice England was far from stable. Excessive population growth had led to land shortage, unemployment, and 'masterlessness'

for increasing numbers of people. Rapid inflation spawned disastrously high food prices, especially in crisis periods like the 1590s and 1620s. Some people profited from the situation: the farmer big enough to produce a surplus for the market, who could often buy out less fortunate manorial tenants, for example. Economic and social values, too, were changing. People prospering in the marketplace had less time for the old constraints of the 'just price' or the co-operative ethos of the traditional open-field community. The ideal of the harmonious 'vertical' society in which people of different degrees worked together, was being challenged by a new world of competition. Villages became more polarised, as 'parish notables', minor gentry and yeomen, began to rise above the rest of their neighbours.

People like this, newcomers to wealth and status, often felt threatened by the soaring numbers of poor generated by the population explosion. They saw themselves as islands of godly virtue in a sea of sinful disorder – a disorder distressingly visible in the drinking and merrymaking that constantly undermined household discipline, particularly among the young. 'Was there ever seen less obedience in youth of all sorts . . . towards their superiors, parents, masters and governors?' asked Philip Stubbes in his *Anatomy of Abuses*, a vigorous attack on the festive culture. Protestantism, especially its Puritan variant, taught doctrines of discipline, work and responsibility, and it is not surprising that the emerging local élites found in it a convenient justification for their authority. They, after all, were God's elect, charged with the duty of advancing godly reformation by disciplining the reprobate majority. County magistrates strove to suppress the church ales and other disorderly village festivals; in some places (Dorchester is a conspicuous example) their urban counterparts systematically enforced a 'culture of discipline' aimed at realising their ideal of a reformed Christian 'city on a hill'. Puritanism was of course much more than a system of social control, but this aspect of it is of particular relevance to the revolution.

Of course Puritan discipline was not the only available response to the crisis of order. There were those at court and in the Anglican hierarchy who abhorred the divisive impact of Puritan preaching, who like James I feared that its insistence on the primacy of individual conscience threatened the whole system of order, even monarchy itself. Stability could best be maintained, they thought, by more traditional policies: by a paternalist monarchy, aristocracy and church protecting the lower orders from exploitation by the acquisitive 'middling sort'. So they tried, as Robert Dover did at the Cotswold Games, to revive the old festive culture – the May games and revel feasts, and all the other calendric and religious

rituals in which the values of 'good neighbourhood' had been affirmed. William Fennor captured the spirit of the conservative ideal in his nostalgic lines:

Happy the age, and harmless were the days
(For then true love and amity were found)
When every village did a maypole raise,
And Whitsun-ales and May-games did abound.

The resulting cultural conflict became more intense after James I issued the Book of Sports in 1618, proclaiming the legality of innocent recreations even on the sabbath, and still more so when Charles I and Archbishop Laud reissued it in 1633. Disputes over maypoles and church ales may seem far removed from the English Revolution, but in fact their political implications were clear. When village revels were prohibited by the JPs people murmured, one of Laud's bishops reported, that it was hard 'if they could not entertain their friends once a year, to praise God for his blessings, and pray for the King, under whose government they enjoyed peace and quietness'. The hierarchy's policy of protecting traditional culture further encouraged the suspicions, aroused in numerous other ways, of the existence of a sinister plot to restore Catholicism.

This is not to dispute the importance of the more familiar religious and political aspects of the revolution, or of the crucial role played by localist resentment of 'Thorough' policies. But politics and religion are part of culture, and this was a cultural as well as a political revolution: an attempt by the Puritan gentry and middling sort to impose their conception of godly order on the rest of the nation. The cultural aspect is clearly apparent in the well-known autobiography of Richard Baxter. When he embarked on his ministry at Kidderminster in 1641, Baxter encountered a situation typical of many English parishes: 'an ignorant, rude and revelling people for the most part', but also 'a small company of converts, who were humble, godly, and of good conversation'. The ungodly majority resisted efforts to suppress their 'painted forms of giants and suchlike fooleries' and soon, Baxter recalls, 'if a stranger passed . . . that had short hair and a civil habit, the rabble presently cried, "Down with the Roundheads"'. The familiar stereotypes of Roundhead and Cavalier (cultural as well as political symbols) were already emerging. Some of the local alignments in the civil war were soon to reflect earlier cultural divisons. The Welsh border counties and the downlands of southern England, always strongholds of traditional culture, were royalist in the 1640s; regions like the Essex and Wiltshire clothing districts, where the parish notables

had been more successful in imposing godly reformation, were correspondingly parliamentarian.

We have been using the term 'English Revolution', but 'English revolutions' might be more appropriate, for there were in fact three distinct revolutions: a moderate, reformist one in 1641, many of whose constitutional achievements were endorsed by the settlement of 1660; a violent, republican one in 1648–9, only temporarily successful; and a third 'revolution that failed', the abortive democratic revolution whose adherents were driven into the political underground in the 1650s.

The first, reformist phase reflected the virtually unanimous rejection by 'the Country' of Charles I's 'Thorough' government; in it the Long Parliament outlawed Ship Money, dismantled the Star Chamber and punished Strafford and other agents of absolutism, all in the name of the freedoms guaranteed by the mythical ancient constitution. The cultural conflict was not a primary factor during this period of relative unity, though it occasionally surfaced in attacks on Laudian clergy and demands for 'Root and Branch' reform. Orchestrated by John Pym, a propaganda campaign also reawakened the lurking fears of Catholic conspiracy.

Parliament's reaction to those fears – its appeal to the people and its revolutionary claim to the militia power – drove moderate elements over to the King's side and precipitated civil war. In that war there were, as we have been often reminded, many neutrals, many who gave the integrity of their local communities a higher priority than the national aims of either side. But even neutrals had preferences, and not everyone was neutral. The war was not fought solely by conscripts or troops imported from Scotland and Ireland: leadership and volunteers on both sides reflected the enduring cultural split. Parliament depended heavily on Puritan reformers, the King on people who had long struggled against the socially divisive impact of godly reformation. It was, among much else, a war between adherents of two competing concepts of order.

The convoluted political struggle that followed the war contained further echoes of the cultural conflict. The Puritan minority, entrenched in the army and in Parliament's county committees, demanded further reformation at any cost. But the moderate gentry and their allies and dependants in 'the Country', even in the hitherto parliamentarian counties of the south-east, had had enough of the military burdens, taxes and other violations of ancient rights that made Parliament a far worse centralising menace than ever the King had been. Most of the propertied political nation wanted only a return to the settlement of 1641. Thanks to the disciplined power of Fairfax's army, the conservative,

localist reaction was beaten back in 1648, opening the way to the second revolution in which the House of Commons was purged, the House of Lords abolished, and the King executed. The militant minority which did these things was aided, and indeed pushed onward, by adherents of the potential 'third revolution', the popular elements politicised by the war, the middle-class London Levellers and the separatists inflamed by millennarian visions of a new Jerusalem in which the godly 'saints' would rule. This, of course, was not what the parliamentary leaders, even revolutionary leaders like Oliver Cromwell, intended. Suppression of the Levellers was to be the new republic's first order of business; constant foot-dragging to frustrate the more extreme of the sects' promised reforms (of Parliament, the law, the tithe system) was to be the second.

Even at its zenith after 1649 the English Revolution was a limited revolution, never approaching the thoroughgoing reformism of, for example, Jacobin France in 1793. The vast majority of people of all social levels retained most of an older, deeply ingrained value system – beliefs in the patriarchal family, the primacy of ancient law and custom, the virtues of the traditional, co-operative community. This is abundantly clear in the outlook of the Clubmen, the biggest mass movement of the entire period, in 1645. And even the leadership contained many who were ambivalent about the revolution. Oliver Cromwell, one half of him a zealous Puritan reformer, the other half a conservative country squire, himself personifies the ambiguities of the revolution. When, after the failure of the Commonwealth either to gain public acceptance or to retain the confidence of the army, Cromwell attained the supreme power as Protector, his regime exemplified these same contradictions: two periods of 'healing and settling', separated by the interlude of the Major-Generals, in which yet another blast of authoritarian Puritan reformation was inflicted on the nation. It is not surprising that even many of those who had yearned for godly discipline at last concluded that military rule was too high a price to pay for it, and welcomed the restoration of Charles II.

In the end, the revolution was a conflict over the moral basis of English society. Behind the clash of cultures we can detect two social ideals, even two societies, in conflict: one stressing custom, tradition, and the co-operative, 'vertical' community; the other moral reformation, individualism, the ethic of work and responsibility. The middling sort's campaign to impose theirs as the national culture failed because deep-rooted social forces were too strong for them. The great cosmic drama, the battle of good and evil, the journey towards the eternal city on the hill: all were internalised after 1660, worked out within the soul of each individual. Defeat compelled John Milton to locate paradise

within, John Bunyan to allegorise the quest for a righteous society as an individual, not a national pilgrimage. The civil war had begun, says Baxter in a passage alluding to the cultural conflict, 'in our streets before king or Parliament had any armies'. It ended, for many, in disillusion. But in both its successes and its failures the revolution was as much a cultural as a constitutional or political one.

<div align="right">DAVID UNDERDOWN</div>

For further reading

Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (Secker, 1964); and *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (Temple Smith, 1972); William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Harvard University Press, 1983); Brian Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution* (Heinemann, 1976); J. S. Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces: Conservatives and Radicals in the English Civil War 1630–1650* (Allen & Unwin, 1976); Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution 1529–1642* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).