

What kind of king was Charles I?

Case Study 2: Charles I as a ruler – Source 2

Documents relating to the Duke of Buckingham, 1627

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What is this source?

These are extracts from the State Papers of Charles I. The documents concern George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.

By the early 1600s it was impossible for monarchs to look after every detail of government personally. Most relied on trusted allies to help them run the government. These officials usually came from important and powerful families.

The first two extracts are official documents that show how Charles gave various powerful positions to Buckingham.

(The third extract is a private letter to Nicholas Windebanke, Secretary of State, from a man in Buckingham's household. We've included it just because it shows how different court life was in those days compared with modern times.)

What's the background to this source?

Villiers (usually known as Buckingham) was Charles's closest friend and political ally in the earliest years of his rule. Charles trusted him with many important posts.

Important posts in the government brought a lot of honour and prestige. They usually brought wealth and power as well. Important posts allowed you to appoint your own family members and friends to other positions (often in return for a fee). There was a lot of competition for the top jobs in the government. The great families expected to get a share of important positions in return for serving the king loyally.

It's worth knowing that ...

James I had always been clever at giving different government posts to members of different groups or families. He tried to keep the political nation



happy this way. Charles I was less skilled at spreading top jobs among different rival groups. He gave enormous power and influence to Buckingham.

Under James I it was relatively easy for an important noble to meet the king. Under Charles I it became much more difficult. Charles wanted a very formal, ordered court with rigid rules. He could only be seen at certain times. To get an appointment to see Charles, you usually had to go through Buckingham first. His job as first gentleman of His Majesty's Bedchamber allowed him to control the king's appointments.

Buckingham used his links to Charles to make himself, his friends and his family wealthy and powerful and exclude other families. Many rivals resented Buckingham. In 1627 many MPs felt that Buckingham was a bad choice to lead the army and navy. He had already led one disastrous expedition to Spain in September 1625. Charles refused to listen and Buckingham led his forces to another humiliating defeat in October 1627. Buckingham was later assassinated in August 1628.

Your turn: What does this source tell us?

1. In source 2a Charles gave Buckingham the power to appoint his own deputy. James I had always kept this type of power for himself. Which king would you say was wiser? Why?
2. Study source 2b. Which important positions did Buckingham hold?
3. Buckingham was extremely unpopular with many leading nobles. Does source 2b give any clues as to why?
4. Which of these two interpretations is best supported by sources 2a and 2b?
 - Charles was a good monarch because he rewarded loyal servants well.
 - Charles showed poor judgement by giving too much power to one man.
5. Study source 2c. Does this tell us anything about the Duke of Buckingham and court life?



Source 2a

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And by vertue of the same power, which we have
granted and confirmed, and do hereby grant and
confirm unto the Duke of Buckingham; We
do likewise hereby authorize him the said Duke
of Buckingham, to make election of his Deputies
in his absence, upon the occasion of other Affairs;
or in his sickness; and to confer and confirm
upon and to his said Deputies, the same Commission
of power, to execute all things, in all points,
belonging to the Office and Command of him the
said Duke in this employment; with as full
and absolute an authority; and as effectually,
as if he the said Duke of Buckingham were
himself in person present.



Source 2b

George Duke Marquis and Duke of Buckingham Duke of Rohan's preferred will
 Baron of Wotton Esq. High Admirall of England Lord Warden of the Cinque ports
 Lieutenant of the Countie of middes and Berke, chiefe Justice and Justice in Court
 of his Ma^{ty} Higheste Chastie and Peace in this his Countie of his Ma^{ty} most honorable
 Gentleman of his Ma^{ty} Chamber Knight of the most noble order of the Bath
 one of his Ma^{ty} most honorable privie Counsaile and Lord Generall of his
 Ma^{ty} Fleet and Army employed in this present Expedition to

Source 2c

our occurrences heard
 are of noe great consequence; wee have them
 all at the second hand from you: Little Jeffrey
 the queens dwarf fell last day out of the
 window at Denmark house; the queene took
 it so heavily that she attyrd not her selfe
 that day; wee are all well, only my lady
 takes a little, we hope she is with
 child; for wishing you all hapines in your
 proceedings I rest
 Buckingham house
 18 June 1627
 Your most faithfull &
 affectionated frinde
 witthall