

Why did people go to war in 1642?

Case study 2: 1640-42 - Source 2

Report of disputes between Charles and Parliament in early 1640
(Catalogue ref: SP 16/452/33)

What is this source?

This is an extract from a letter written by the Earl of Northumberland to Viscount Conway in May 1640.

The writer was a member of Charles I's army in the north of England facing the Scots. He was writing a private letter to a member of his family.

What's the background to this source?

Charles I managed to rule his kingdom without calling Parliament from 1629-40. However, by 1640 he was desperate for money. He was facing a rebellion in Scotland and needed to pay more soldiers to fight the rebels. He was forced to call Parliament to try and get MPs to agree to new taxes to raise the money.

During the Personal Rule of 1629-40, Charles brought in many measures to raise money without having to ask Parliament. The most unpopular was 'ship money', a kind of tax. Charles also forced many towns and villages to provide soldiers, plus equipment for his troops. On top of this, Charles and the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, brought in changes to the Church of England. Many people disliked these changes.

It's worth knowing that ...

There were two Parliaments in 1640. The Short Parliament only lasted a few weeks in early 1640. Then Charles ended it (as mentioned in this source). By November Charles was forced to call another Parliament, the Long Parliament. Both Parliaments had many complaints about different aspects of Charles's Personal Rule.



On the whole, MPs were united in opposing Charles's policies. Some were concerned about religion. Others were concerned about taxes. Others were concerned about Charles ignoring the law. However, MPs disagreed about how far they could argue with the king. They were still loyal to Charles as king even though they were unhappy about some of his actions.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What did Charles offer the MPs?
2. How did they react?
3. What were the main concerns of the MPs?
4. Does this source suggest that relations between Charles and Parliament were good or bad?
5. Does the writer criticise MPs in any way?
6. Does this source give us any clues about why the kingdom went to war in 1642?



Source 2

The King did yesterday offer the house of commons to relinquish absolutely the shipping money if they would at this time supply him wth 12 subsidies, this gave them not satisfaction, they desired to be also eased of the militarie charge as they feared it w^{ch} was from the pressing, coating, and conducting of souldiers; innovations in religion they likewise insisted much upon, other grievances they touched but these were the maine ones they complained of, and had they beene well advised I am veryly perswaded they might in time have gained their desires, but they in a tumultuous and confused way w^{ch} went on wth their businesses, w^{ch} gave so greate offence unto his Ma^{ty}: that this morning he hath devolved the parliament