



Why did people go to war in 1642?

Key people & events

Charles I's Personal Rule

Most monarchs disliked having to listen to Parliament. However, they always had to call Parliaments because they needed money and they needed Parliament to agree to taxes to raise that money. In return, MPs could express their concerns in Parliament about particular issues.

From 1629-40 Charles I ruled without calling Parliament. During this Personal Rule, Charles began to work closely with his officials to raise money without asking Parliament. He did this very successfully. Charles increased his income from £600,000 to £900,000 per year. However, he created a lot of bad feeling as a result.

- In 1626-7 he introduced a forced loan. Wealthy nobles and gentry were forced to give Charles money whether or not they wanted to. Five knights who refused to pay the loan were thrown into prison without a fair trial and left there.
- Charles brought in a range of new customs duties and collected them very effectively. (New customs duties usually had to be approved by Parliament.)
- Charles also sold monopolies and patents. These gave control of a particular trade to one individual or company. This meant that other traders either had to pay to take part in the trade or they might be forced out of it altogether.
- Charles collected ship money. This was a tax traditionally paid in counties that had coastlines. It paid for the navy to protect the coast. Charles forced people in all counties to pay ship money. An MP called John Hampden fought a high profile court case against ship money in 1637, but lost.

The growth of opposition

By the late 1630s some of the nobles and gentry were worried that Charles had found a way to run the country without ever having to call Parliament. They were also concerned that Charles was trying to rule England the way kings ruled in France or Spain. Absolute monarchs ruled those countries. They had total power and did not have to take any notice of Parliaments, laws or



anything else. Charles's use of courts like the Star Chamber to arrest opponents and punish them without a proper trial seemed to show he was planning to rule England the same way.

As a result of these concerns, a group emerged to challenge Charles. Their leader was John Pym. Other leaders were Oliver St John and John Hampden. They wanted to limit the king's powers so that he had to listen to Parliament. However, they did not get their chance to challenge the king in Parliament until 1640.

Religion

In 1633 Charles appointed William Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury. Charles and Laud held similar views on the Anglican Church (the Church of England). They both wanted the clergy (ordinary priests) and bishops (senior churchmen) to have more power and importance. For example, Charles appointed a bishop, Bishop Juxon, as Lord Treasurer. He also tried to force nobles who had taken over church lands in the 1500s to give them back to the church.

By the 1630s most churches in England were plain and undecorated. Most services were simple. They involved readings from the Bible with a priest preaching and teaching. Laud was concerned that many ordinary people found the services dull. He brought in services that involved more music and ceremony. Priests were allowed to wear decorated robes. Paintings, crosses, statues and stained glass windows were allowed in the churches. Laud also brought in a new prayer book.

Many ordinary people, nobles and gentry approved of these measures. By 1640 they felt that churches were attractive, but not too showy. They felt that church services were serious, but not too dull and boring. The church dealt harshly with people or groups who had different or extreme religious ideas. The gentry approved of this because it meant that everyone knew their place in society. Many people liked their new Anglican Church and were prepared to fight to defend it.

On the other hand, Laud's changes also caused a huge amount of opposition. Many local lords and gentry did not want to give lands back to the church. They also disliked clergy being given important jobs in the government instead of them.

The loudest critics of all were the Puritans. Puritans were extreme Protestants. Like Laud, they believed that the Church of England in the 1630s needed changing. Unlike Laud, they believed churches and services should be even simpler. They were bitterly opposed to the Catholic Church. They worried that Laud's changes were making the Church of England too much like the Catholic



Church. They disliked the bishops because the Catholic Church also had bishops. They disliked the bishops because it was the bishops who put Charles's religious policies into action. They hated Laud and he hated them. In 1637 William Prynne and two other Puritans published a pamphlet criticising Laud. He had them arrested, their ears cut off and their faces branded with red-hot irons. This treatment created a lot of sympathy for the Puritans. It also increased the hatred between the Puritans and the bishops.

The Puritans were a small minority, but they were very powerful and influential. Most came from the gentry or merchant class. They were usually well educated and successful in business. They were very determined because they believed God was on their side. The leading opponents of Charles I (including John Pym and John Hampden) were Puritans. They too were prepared to fight for their beliefs.

Scotland

Even greater arguments about religion were still to come. In 1637 Laud and Charles insisted that Scotland should use the prayer book that they had brought into the Church of England. The Scots resented this interference in their church. When the prayer book was first used in July 1637 there was a riot in Edinburgh. Scottish opponents of Charles I signed a Covenant (an agreement) criticising him. Charles immediately marched north with an army, but the Scottish Covenanters defeated him in 1638. Charles was beaten again in 1640 and the Scots invaded Newcastle. They agreed to leave if Charles paid a large amount of money. Charles did not have enough money. He had to call Parliament.

The country divides, 1640-41

Charles called Parliament in April 1640 and then dismissed it again because MPs refused to give him what he wanted. However, he was forced to recall Parliament in November 1640. For the next 12 months Charles still did not get the money he wanted. Pym and the other Puritan MPs attacked Charles's ministers. They criticised Laud's policies on the church.

In May 1641 Parliament accused the king's chief minister and friend, Lord Strafford, of treason (betrayal of the country) and executed him. Many MPs were disgusted by the way Pym twisted the laws to get Strafford executed. The evidence against him was very weak. Pym used biased witnesses and prevented Strafford from talking to his lawyers. The trial collapsed, but Parliament then passed an Act that said Strafford was guilty of treason (rather than actually proving it).

After Strafford's death the attacks on Charles's policies continued.

- In August 1641 Parliament got rid of ship money.
- In November they passed the Grand Remonstrance. This was a document criticising the policies of Charles and his ministers. MPs had never criticised a king's actions like this before.

Some MPs felt Pym and the Puritans were going too far. They began to argue with Pym and support Charles. After all, Charles was the king, appointed by God. The country began to divide into Royalists, who supported Charles, and Parliamentarians.

Ireland and a declaration of war

In the middle of these tensions, attention suddenly turned to Ireland. Elizabeth I had conquered Ireland (which was mostly Catholic) in the late 1500s, but English control was always under threat. In October 1641 rebellion broke out in Ireland. All MPs agreed that an army had to be raised to fight the Catholic rebels. However, Royalists and Parliamentarians argued about who should command this army. As the arguments continued, Charles became impatient. In January 1642 he took troops into Parliament and tried to arrest five leading MPs (including Pym). His attempt failed, but his actions started a civil war. The Parliamentarians said Charles could not be trusted. Royalists rallied round Charles. Both sides prepared their forces. Charles declared war on Parliament in August 1642.

Find out more

Charles I's Personal Rule

<http://history.wisc.edu/sommerville/361/361-25.htm>

British Civil Wars, Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1638-60

<http://www.british-civil-wars.co.uk/index.htm>