

Why did Britain become a republic?

Case study 2: New government - Source 2

An account of the setting up of the Commonwealth in 1649

(By permission of Taylor & Francis: *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, by his widow Lucy, published by George Routledge, 1906, pp. 272-3)

What is this source?

This comes from the *Memoirs of the life of Colonel Hutchinson* written by his wife. Her account was written in the 1660s. It describes his life and career.

Her husband was a senior commander in the army and a trusted ally of Cromwell. He also signed Charles I's death warrant. However, as time went on Colonel Hutchinson became concerned about Cromwell's actions.

What's the background to this source?

England in 1649 was a republic, a state that was not ruled by a monarch. The new state was known as the Commonwealth of England.

When the Second Civil War ended in 1648, Charles I was put on trial and executed in January 1649. After this, MPs and the army had to decide on a new way for the country to be ruled.

It's worth knowing that ...

There were huge challenges facing the new republic when it was formed in 1649.

- There was a lot of sympathy for Charles I and his son (also called Charles).
- There was rebellion in Ireland.
- The Scots were unhappy about the execution of the king.
- England's enemies in Holland were threatening the country.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What kind of new government was formed after the death of the king?
2. How did the new government work?
3. How did people react to the new government?
4. Was the writer of this source in favour of the new government?
5. What were the achievements of the new government?
6. What was the writer's view of Cromwell?



Source 2

After the death of the king it was debated and resolved to change the form of government from monarchical into a commonwealth, and the house of lords was voted dangerous and useless thereunto, and dissolved. A council of state was to be annually chosen for the management of affairs, accountable to the parliament, out of which, consisting of forty councillors and a president, twenty were every year to go off by lot, and twenty new ones to be supplied. It is true, at that time every man almost was fancying a form of government, and angry, when this came forth, that his invention took not place; and among these John Lilburne, a turbulent, spirited man, that never was quiet in anything, published libels; and the levellers made a disturbance with a kind of insurrection which Cromwell soon appeased, they indeed being betrayed by their own leaders.

But how the public business went on, how Cromwell finished the conquest of Ireland, how the angry presbyterians spit fire out of their pulpits, and endeavoured to blow up the people against the parliament, how they entered into a treasonable conspiracy with Scotland, who had now received and crowned

the son of the late king, who led them in hither in a great army, which the Lord of hosts discomfited; how our public ministers were assassinated and murdered in Spain and Holland¹; and how the Dutch, in this unsettlement of affairs, hoped to gain by making war, wherein they were beaten and brought to sue for peace,—I shall leave to the stories that were then written; and only in general say that the hand of God was mightily seen in prospering and preserving the parliament till Cromwell's ambition unhappily interrupted them.