Why did Britain become a republic?

Case study 2: New government - Source 6

An account of the setting up of the Instrument of Government in 1653

(By permission of Oxford University Press: Firth (ed.), The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, Lieutenant-General of the Horse in the Army of the Commonwealth of England, 1625-1672, Vol. 1, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894, pp. 370-1)

What is this source?

This is an extract from the memoirs of Edmund Ludlow. Ludlow was an MP and commander of the Parliamentary armies in the Civil War. He was a hard-line opponent of Charles I and signed his death warrant.

> Ludlow later clashed with Cromwell when Cromwell closed Parliament in 1653 and became Lord Protector. His memoirs were first published in the 1690s when the monarchy had been restored. For these two reasons the book is very hostile towards Cromwell.

What's the background to this source?

The Instrument of Government, dated 15 December 1653, was England's first written constitution. It recorded the basic rules for a new kind of government. It gave power to an elected Lord Protector, advised by a council. Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector the next day.

- By 1653 Cromwell and other army commanders were frustrated. They had a vision of a more religious, godly country.
- Most MPs in the Rump Parliament did not share this vision. The MPs were afraid of extreme political and religious groups and tried to crush them.
- Cromwell wanted a more tolerant approach to these groups, as long as they did not cause trouble. Although he has a reputation as a religious fanatic, Cromwell was surprisingly relaxed about other faiths and religious groups.

- The Rump Parliament also tried to reduce the size and power of the army because the nobles and gentry were fed up with paying taxes to keep it.
- In 1653 Cromwell lost patience with the Rump and dismissed it. His supporters then made him Lord Protector.

It's worth knowing that ...

Cromwell became Lord Protector for life. He ruled until his death in 1658.

The office of Lord Protector had many of the powers of a king. However, it was not hereditary. So when Cromwell died, none of his children automatically became ruler.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What was the Instrument of Government?
2. According to this source, how was it put into place?
3. How can you tell the writer was not in favour of this measure?
4. What were the main terms of the Instrument of Government?
5. What do you notice about the members of Cromwell's council?

Source 6

At the next meeting of officers it was not thought fit to consult with them at all; but they were openly told by Major-General Lambert, that the General would take care of managing the civil government; and then having required them to repair to their respective charges, where their troops and companies lay, that they might preserve the publick peace, he dismissed them.

Thus was this important business that so highly concerned the nation, and in some measure all Europe, in a clandestine manner carried on and huddled up by two or three persons; for more they were not who were let into the secret of it, so that it may justly be called a work of darkness. This Instrument appointed the legislative power to be in the Representative of the people and the Protector; that a Parliament should be chosen every three years, which should sit five months, if they thought fit, without any interruption: that their first meeting should be on the thirteenth of September next ensuing: that the members of whom the Parliament was to consist, should be chosen by the people: that whatsoever they would have enacted, should be presented to the Protector for his consent; and that if he did not confirm it within twenty days after it was first tendred to him, it should have the force and obligation of a law; provided that it extended not to lessen the number or pay of the army, to punish any man on account of his conscience, or to make any alteration in the Instrument of Government; in all which a negative was reserved to the single person. It provided also that all writs should issue out in the Protector's name: that most of the magistrates should be appointed, and all honours conferred by him: that he should have the power of the militia by sea and land: that in the intervals of Parliament the nation should be governed by the Protector and his council, who were not to exceed the number of one and twenty, nor to be under thirteen. The first persons nominated to be of his council were Major-General Lambert, Col. Desborough, Mr. Henry Lawrence, Sir Charles Wolsely, Col. William Sydenham, Mr. Francis Rouse, Philip Viscount Lisle, Col. Philip Jones, Col. Montague, Mr. Richard Major, Walter Strickland, Esq., Sir Gilbert Pickering, Major-General Skippon, and Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper, in all fourteen.