



What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 1: Cromwell in his own words – Source 2

An order from Cromwell about the publication of pamphlets, 29 November 1654

(W.C. Abbott (ed.), *The writings and speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, Vol. III, p.522. Published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1947)

What is this source?

This is an order sent by Oliver Cromwell to Edward Dendy, Sergeant at Arms.

This officer was responsible for law and order in the city of London.

What's the background to this source?

The events in this document show why Cromwell often found himself torn in half. Cromwell thought people should be able to exchange ideas about politics and religion. He thought that this was a way for the population to become more religious and godly. On the other hand, he would not put up with attacks on his authority.

In the years before the Civil Wars there was strict censorship in Britain. It was dangerous to come up with new ideas about religion or politics. It was even more dangerous to try to spread those ideas in pamphlets. During the Civil Wars those controls collapsed. New ideas were spread widely through cheap pamphlets run off on printing presses. By the time Cromwell took power these pamphlets were common and many of them attacked him.

It's worth knowing that ...

There were so many different political and religious views in Cromwell's time that it was difficult not to be criticised by someone.

- Some religious hard-liners felt Cromwell did not do enough to make England a more godly place. Others felt Cromwell went too far!
- Some wanted the monarchy restored. Most of the army was opposed to the return of the monarchy.



- Most MPs were more worried than Cromwell by people questioning the way religion and politics was organised. They usually wanted harsher restrictions than Cromwell.
- There were also pamphlets praising Cromwell.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What orders did Cromwell give?
2. What did the Sergeant at Arms have to do?
3. What does this source tell us about opposition to Cromwell?
4. Do you think Cromwell's main concern about the pamphlets really was that they dishonoured the nation and disturbed the peace?
5. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?

Source 2

*To Edward Dendy, Esq. Serjeant at Arms, or his
Deputy or Deputies*

OLIVER P.

Whereas several scandalous and seditious pamphlets are from time to time published to the great dishonour of this nation, and the disturbance of the peace thereof, And We being informed that certain pamphlets of that nature have been, and now are about to be printed by several persons within the City of London, and the liberties thereof, These are therefore to will and require you forthwith to repair to the dwelling, or work houses of all such printers within the said City and liberties as you shall suspect to have lately printed or to be upon the printing of such pamphlets as aforesaid, and them, and every of them forthwith to apprehend and bring in safe custody before Our Council at Whitehall. And you are to seize upon and bring away the several presses and all such the said pamphlets and other papers whatsoever that are any way prejudicial to Us or the State, and in order thereunto You are hereby authorized to break open any locks or bolts whatsoever.