

What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 1: Cromwell in his own words – Source 6

Cromwell's thoughts about his job, 13 April 1657

(W.C. Abbott (ed.), *The writings and speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, Vol. III, p. 470. Published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1947)

What is this source?

These are parts of a speech that Cromwell made to a committee of MPs in April 1657. It was one of many meetings he had with this committee.

He was responding to the 'Humble Petition and Advice'.

What's the background to this source?

In 1657 Cromwell and the MPs agreed a new constitution for ruling the country called the Humble Petition and Advice. Cromwell accepted this constitution, but he refused the offer to become king, which was also made to him.

In the years after the Civil Wars Cromwell and Parliament were anxious to achieve stability and peace in the country. However, Cromwell clashed with Parliament over many issues. They tried out several different ways of ruling the country in the years that Cromwell was in power.

It's worth knowing that ...

It is not clear why Cromwell refused the throne.

Many people wanted him to become king, but many others did not want this. It may be that Cromwell refused it because he thought it would cause trouble and even rebellion. Some historians also think that Cromwell feared God would frown on him becoming king, as it would be arrogant. This may be why Cromwell referred to himself as a constable. A constable was an important local official who kept order, but it was a role which a long way away from the power and status of king or Lord Protector. It was a more modest job.



Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. According to Cromwell, why did he end up as Lord Protector?
2. What was his attitude to being called either 'King' or 'Lord Protector'?
3. Why do you think he refused the title of king?
4. Why did he compare himself to a constable?
5. Some critics accused Cromwell of greed and ambition. Does this source support that accusation?
6. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?

Source 6

I am a man standing in the place I am in, which place I undertook not so much out of the hope of doing any good, as out of a desire to prevent mischief and evil, which I did see was imminent upon the nation. I saw we were running headlong into confusion and disorder, and would necessarily run into blood, and I was passive to those that desired me to undertake the place that now I have.

And therefore I am not contending for one name compared with another, and therefore have nothing to answer to any arguments that were used in giving preference to Kingship or Protectorship. For I should almost think that any name were better than my name, and I should altogether think any person fitter than I am for any such business, and I compliment not, God knows it!

as far as I can, I am ready to serve not as a King, but as a constable. For truly I have as before God thought it often, that I could not tell what my business was, nor what I was in the place I stood, save [by] comparing it with a good constable to keep the peace of the parish. And truly this hath been my content and satisfaction in the troubles that I have undergone, that yet you have peace.