

What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 2

Extracts from the Humble Petition and Advice, 1657

(Acts and Ordinances, published by Parliament, 1657)

What is this source?

These are extracts from the 'Humble Petition and Advice'. This was a constitution or system for government drawn up in 1657.

It was an attempt by MPs to move back towards a traditional form of government.

What's the background to this source?

In 1657 Cromwell gave up trying to rule with Parliament. He brought in a system of rule by military commanders called Major Generals. This proved unsuccessful and unpopular. This in turn led to the 'Humble Petition and Advice'. Cromwell accepted the terms of the Humble Petition. However, he refused to become king, which many MPs had wanted as well.

- We do not know for sure why Cromwell refused the crown.
- If he had become king, he would have solved the problem of what happened when he died. (By the time of this document, he was not a well man.) MPs feared another civil war between rival leaders who wanted to take his place (see section 1 of the Humble Petition where they asked Cromwell to name his successor).
- Cromwell becoming king would have made most MPs happy. However, many in the army did not approve of the idea. Cromwell may have wanted to keep peace with the army.
- Above all, Cromwell refused the crown because he thought God would disapprove of this action and see it as a sign of pride and ambition.

It's worth knowing that ...

The Humble Petition did not stop disagreements between Cromwell and Parliament. The main issues were liberty (freedom) and being tolerant (allowing people to have different ideas and ways of doing things).

- MPs were terrified of returning to the chaos and damage of the Civil War years. They believed that any religious or political ideas that were even slightly unusual should be crushed to stop them causing more problems to society (see section 11 of the Humble Petition).
- If Cromwell had sided with MPs on this issue, he could have gained a lot of popularity and support. However, he did not. He thought stability was important, but he thought religious freedom and civil liberty were important as well. He would not simply crush all groups whose views were unusual.
- Cromwell was certainly not afraid to make up his own mind and take difficult or unpopular decisions if he felt they were right.
- Like MPs, Cromwell believed in crushing potential threats. On the other hand, Cromwell believed that people could find God in their own ways – not just by belonging to the Church of England and obeying its laws and rules. He defended the right of smaller Protestant groups to worship God in their own ways. He even tolerated Catholics as long as they did not cause trouble. During Cromwell's reign Jews were allowed back into England for the first time since the Middle Ages.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What powers did the Humble Petition give to Cromwell?
2. What limits were there on his power?
3. What clues do we get from this source about the threats that MPs feared in the 1650s?
4. What overall impression does this source give of what MPs thought of Cromwell?



Source 2

I.

That Your Highness will be pleased by and under the Name and Stile of Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland, and the Dominions and Territories thereunto belonging, To hold and exercise the Office of Chief Magistrate of these Nations, and to Govern according to this Petition and Advice in all things therein contained, and in all other things according to the Laws of these Nations, and not otherwise; That Your Highness will be pleased during Your Life time, to Appoint and Declare the Person who shall immediately after Your Death, Succeed You in the Government of these Nations,

II.

That Your Highness will for the future be pleased to Call Parliaments consisting of Two Houses (in such maner and way as shall be more particularly afterwards agreed and Declared in this Petition and Advice) Once in three Years at furthest, or oftner,



IV.

That those who have Advised, Assisted or Abetted the Rebellion of Ireland, and those who do or shall profess the Popish Religion, be disabled and made incapable for ever to be elected, or to give any Vote in the Election of any Member to sit or serve in Parliament; And that all and every person and persons who have Aided, Abetted, Advised or Assisted in any War against the Parliament, since the First day of January, One thousand six hundred forty one (unless he or they have since born Arms for the Parliament or Your Highness, or otherwise given signal Testimony of his or their good Affection to the Commonwealth, and continued faithful to the same) And all such as have been actually Engaged in any Plot, Conspiracy or Design against the per-

son of Your Highness, or in any Insurrection or Rebellion in England or Wales since the Sixteenth day of December, One thousand six hundred fifty three, shall be for ever disabled and made incapable to be elected, or give any vote in the Election of any Member to sit or serve in Parliament.



VI.

That in all other particulars which concern the calling and holding of Parliaments, your Highness will be pleased, That the Laws and Statutes of the Land be observed and kept; and that no Laws be Altered, Suspended, Abrogated or Repealed, or new Law made, but by Act of Parliament.

XI.

That the true Protestant Christian Religion, as it is contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and no other, be held forth and asserted for the publique profession of these Nations;