

What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 4

The memoirs of a senior army commander, first published around 1670

(By permission of Taylor & Francis: *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, by his widow Lucy, published by George Routledge, 1906, pp. 297, 300)

What is this source?

Here are two extracts 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.

He was a senior commander in the army and a trusted ally of Cromwell at first. However, as time went on Colonel Hutchinson became concerned about Cromwell's actions.

What's the background to this source?

By the end of Cromwell's rule Colonel Hutchinson was a bitter critic of Cromwell.

Another critic of Cromwell was named in this source. John Lambert was a general on the Parliamentary side in the Civil War. Afterwards he was an important leader and deputy to Cromwell. However, in 1657 they fell out when Lambert and other army officers urged Cromwell not to accept the offer to become king. Lambert then retired from public life and went to live in Wimbledon.

It's worth knowing that ...

Working out the viewpoint of this source is an interesting challenge for an historian. Hutchinson was not a supporter of Cromwell by the time this was written. However, the Hutchinsons were no friends of the monarchy. Hutchinson was one of the men who signed Charles I's death warrant.

This book was written in the 1660s, when Charles II (son of Charles I) was back in power. Lucy Hutchinson's book was not published until

about 1670 as it contained too many criticisms of Charles I to be approved by Charles II.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What does source 4a accuse Cromwell of doing?
2. What positive things does source 4b say about Cromwell?
3. Does this seem strange in a source that is written by a critic of Cromwell?
4. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?
5. According to this source, did Cromwell face much opposition to his rule?
6. Why should historians be careful when using memoirs as sources?



Source 4a

In the interim Cromwell and his army grew wanton with their power, and invented a thousand tricks of government, which, when nobody opposed, they themselves fell to dislike and vary every day. First he calls a parliament out of his own pocket, himself naming a sort of godly men for every county, who meeting and not agreeing, a part of them, in the name of the people, gave up the sovereignty to him ¹. Shortly after he makes up several sorts of mock parliaments, but not finding one of them absolutely for his turn, turned them off again ².

Source 4b

... were every day forming designs, and plotting for the murder of Cromwell, and other insurrections ¹, which being contrived in drink, and managed by false and cowardly fellows, were still revealed to Cromwell, who had most excellent intelligence of all things that passed, even in the king's closet; and by these unsuccessful plots they were only the obstructors of what they sought to advance, while, to speak truth, Cromwell's personal courage and magnanimity upheld him against all enemies and malcontents. His own army disliked him, and once when sevenscore officers had combined to cross him in something he was pursuing, and engaged one to another, Lambert being the chief, with solemn promises and invocations to God, the protector hearing of it, overawed them all, and told them, 'it was not they who upheld him, but he them', and rated them, and made them understand what pitiful fellows they were; whereupon, they all, like rated dogs, clapped their tails between their legs, and begged his pardon, and left Lambert to fall alone, none daring to own him publicly, though many in their hearts wished him the sovereignty.