

Why did people go to war in 1642?

Case study 2: 1640-42 - Source 1

A petition from the citizens of London, September 1640

(John Rushworth, Historical Collections, Vol III, 1639-1640, p.1263. Published in London, 1680-1701)

What is this source?

This petition was sent to Charles I on 24 September 1640. Petitions were a way for Parliament or the citizens of a town to show that they were unhappy about something.

Charles ruled his kingdom without calling Parliament from 1629-40. During this period (called the Personal Rule) he brought in many changes. The citizens of London who sent this petition were unhappy with those changes.

What's the background to this source?

During the 1630s Charles tried rule the country without calling Parliament. This led to problems.

- Monarchs often ran out of money in the 1600s. When they needed more, they asked Parliament to agree to new taxes. Charles tried to raise money without a Parliament. He used taxes like 'ship money'. He sold monopolies and patents to merchants, giving them total control of particular trades and stopping other people making a living in these trades.
- People could be fined or jailed for not paying Charles's taxes. Charles also treated opponents of his policies harshly. They could be fined, arrested or tortured. This was often done with no trial at all, or in a special court called the Star Chamber. The Star Chamber usually did what Charles wanted.
- Charles also brought in many changes to the church. His religious policies led to a rebellion in Scotland in 1638. Charles tried to crush it, but he was very short of money to pay for the army he needed.

- By 1640 he was short of men, ships, money and supplies. He called a Parliament in April 1640 to ask for the money he needed, but he dissolved it again when MPs criticised aspects of his rule.

It's worth knowing that ...

London was by far the biggest city in the country in the 1600s, just like today. As a result, London paid a lot of taxes, collected in money and in goods. It was a rich and important city.

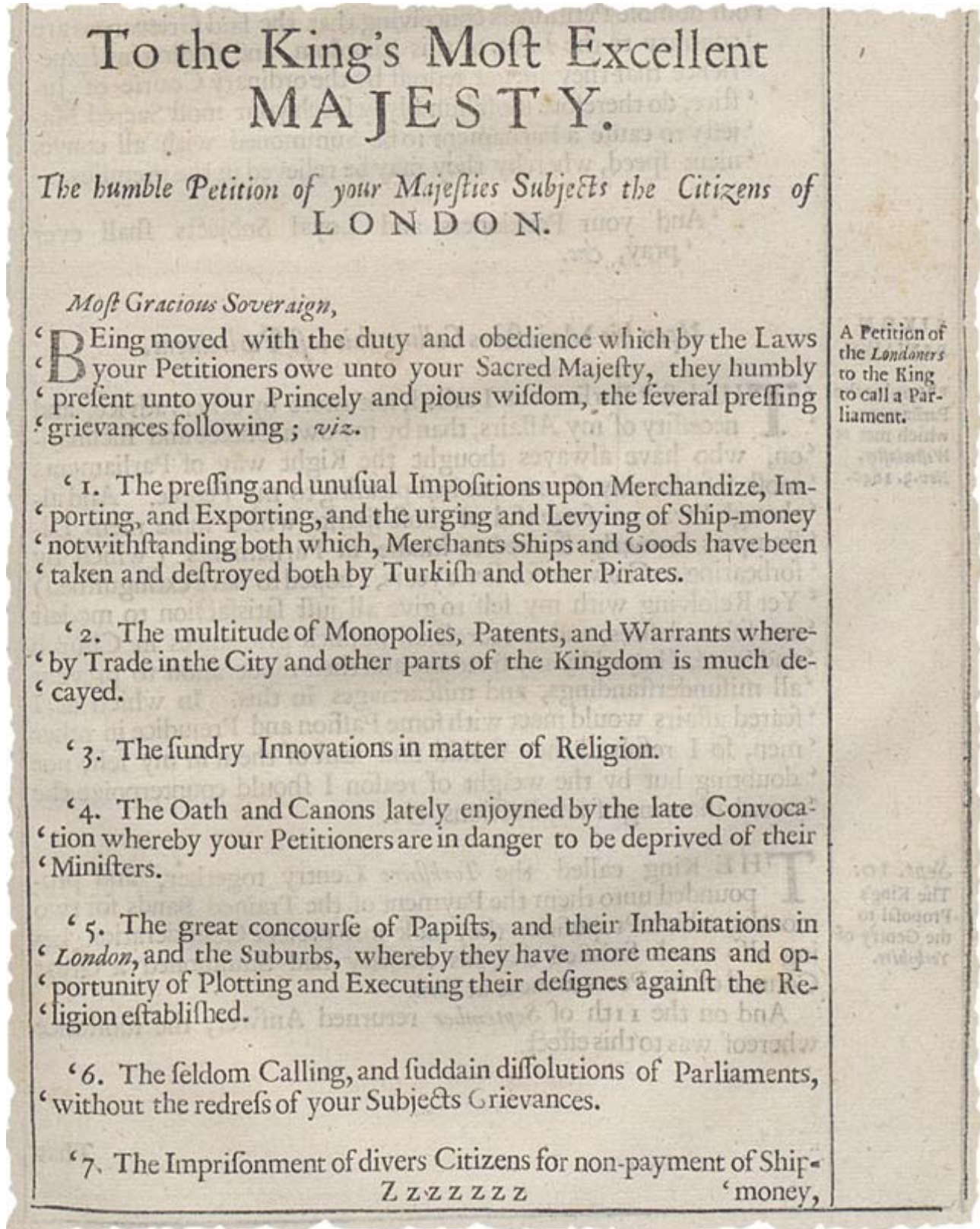
The citizens of London were also more politically active than any other part of the country and radical (wanting big changes). This helps to explain why the city sent several petitions to Charles during this period. London had more Protestant hardliners (Puritans) than other parts of the country. It is not surprising that London took the side of Parliament once war broke out in 1642.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What were the people of London complaining about?
2. Is it possible to tell from this document which issues caused the greatest concern?
3. Does this source give us any clues about why the kingdom went to war in 1642?



Source 1



A Petition of the Londoners to the King to call a Parliament.

