

Protestation of the House of Commons (1641)

In this document, the British House of Commons protested against the arbitrary rule of Charles I. Alarmed by the king's Catholic leanings and imposition of unjust taxes, the Parliament lodged this protest. Within a year, they launched a civil war against the king's supporters. Following their victory on the battlefield and the execution of Charles I in 1649, parliamentary sovereignty became a fundamental principle of English liberty. Supporters of parliamentary sovereignty based their claim in part on ancient documents such as the Magna Carta (1215). However, it would take another revolution, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, to enshrine this principle in a formal and binding Bill of Rights.

The House of Commons Protests Against Royal Policy

From Protestation of the House of Commons, 3 May 1641. As reproduced in *The Stuart Constitution*, ed. J. P. Kenyon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 200-01.

We the knights, citizens and burgesses of the Commons House in Parliament, finding to the grief of our hearts that the designs of the priests and Jesuits, and other adherents to the see of Rome, have of late been more boldly and frequently put in practice than formerly, to the undermining and danger of the ruin of the true reformed Religion in his Majesty's dominions established, and finding also that there hath been, and having cause to suspect that still are, even during the sitting in parliament, endeavors to subvert the fundamental laws of England and Ireland, and to introduce the exercise of an arbitrary and tyrannical government by the most pernicious and wicked counsels, practices, plots and conspiracies; and that the long intermission and unhappier breach of parliaments hath occasioned many illegal taxations, whereby the subjects have been prosecuted and grieved; and that divers innovations and superstitions have been brought into the Church, multitudes driven out of his Majesty's dominions, jealousies raised and fomented between the king and people, a popish army levied in Ireland, and two armies brought into the bowels of this kingdom, to the hazard of his Majesty's royal person, the consumption of the revenue of the Crown and the treasure of this realm; and lastly, finding the great causes of jealousy, [that] endeavors have been, and are used, to bring the English army into [a] misunderstanding of this parliament, thereby to incline that army by force to bring to pass those wicked counsels, have therefore thought it good to join ourselves in a declaration of our united affections and resolutions; and to make this ensuing Protestation:

I, A.B., do, in the presence of God, promise, vow and protest to maintain and defend, as far as lawfully I may, with my life, power and estate, the true reformed religion, expressed in the doctrine of the Church of England, against all popery and popish innovation within this realm, contrary to the said doctrine, and according to the duty of my allegiance to his Majesty's royal person, honor and estate; as also the power and privilege of parliament, the lawful rights and liberties of the subjects, and every person that shall make this Protestation in whatsoever he shall do, in the lawful pursuance of the same: And to my power, as far as lawfully I may, I will oppose, and, by all good ways and means, endeavor to bring to condign punishment all such as shall by force, practice, counsels, plots, conspiracies or otherwise do anything to the contrary in this Protestation contained:

And further, I shall in all just and honorable ways endeavor to preserve the union and peace betwixt the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland, and neither for hope, fear, nor other respect, shall relinquish this promise, vow and protestation.

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