

Tudor revolution in henry viii

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



After the Tudor dynasty English government and kingship was never the same. The way the king's power switched from a Medieval system of hierarchy his control over his land was limited, to rule he needed support of the nobility and church and his parliament ineffective to an oligarchical government where the king influenced penetrated his land, his nobility and within the government the power of the nobility shrank and the church became a secular concern. Government modernised through the centralisation of power and royal supremacy would rule. Parliament's importance would be re-invented and reforms to administration, law and justice, sovereignty and church power could be described as a revolution in government which under Henry VIII's reformation of the church brought new opportunities for the consolidating of royal power. Cromwell reforms in the 1530's appear to be the turning point[1]. Although to say royal supremacy was an achievement, to say it occurred within the space of one decade seems restrictive and to say one man reformed a national government seems too simplistic, but looking at Henry's reign post-Cromwell Henry seemed more interested in his love life and war than gaining further reforms. Also Edward VI and Mary I's rules brought the return of factionalism, the return of power to the nobility and a decline in an effective government and Elizabeth, however, may have ruled stronger than her siblings 'the crown was never quite the same after Henry VIII died'[2], considering the damage inflicted and the rising threat of the gentry and Puritanism which restricted her abilities to pass statutes prove that if there was a Tudor revolution, it must have happened under Cromwell. However, were Henry's and Cromwell's reforms really a revolution? Hoak claims the rise of royal

supremacy was emittable[3]but Elton, the theorist who invented the concept of the Tudor revolution believes although ideas may have been present, ‘ he remained the man who turned ideas into reality’[4], but surely this is admits if not him then someone else would have done it? Throughout this essay I will examine the areas of reforms instigated under Cromwell and Henry VIII as previous mentioned and examine whether they brought revolutionary change or were an obvious step towards secularisation.

If there was a revolution in government it is necessary to look at the effects of the reformation on government control as the centralisation of the church was the first real break from Medieval tradition and ignited the want for royal supremacy. The church was the centre of life for the English population of all social rankings and therefore was the real center of power and who’s alignments rested not with the king but with a foreigner power, the pope. The church had a separate court for which the king’s power was exult[5]and bishops like Worsley had direct influence in the running of the government, and its law system and corruption within the church was greater than in government as Skeleton notes ‘ people did not come to court because there was better profit in attending cardinal’s rival court’[6]. The church was a rival government within a government, it seems logical that to bring it under state control and historically, very much like the actions of Constantine the Great, ‘ kingship has been restored to its full inheritance and endowed with the authority of the early Christian emperors’[7], however, although ironically it was a step back to go forward, how is learning from history revolutionary? The fact the backlash received from the nobility and populas was due to the feeling the church had too much land and power and disdain for the

influence that a foreign body had within England[8], suggest it was not such a radical idea as some made out to be, suggesting that others had contemplated it before. From this we can see a reformation of the church also caused a reformation of politics, but not necessarily a revolution. The break with the church inspired the idea of sovereignty and of commonwealth but where these new concepts?

The idea of sovereignty of a unified self-governing free state, away from ' the authority of any sovereign potentates'[9]appears certainly as a revolutionary in the history of English ruler-ship and as Elton suggests would have been the main driving forced spurring revolutionary change[10]as sovereignty consolidated Henry's land and government under Henry's control. Both Henry and Cromwell believed the House of Commons had to represent the whole nation[11]for the first time the entire nation would be under Westminster's control. The eliminated other small rivals courts those in Buckinghamshire and Sheffield[12]and brought Wales and northern counties under the king's rule for the first time, i. e. places like Durham[13]through Cromwell uses of councils and the influence of parliament in all the kingdom, i. e. even Calias had two seats in parliament[14]. Of course if under the control of parliament laws would be easier to enforce, regulate and to put the most loyal in control. On the other hand, this idea perhaps again is nothing but new, as Edward III during the Hundred Wars' Year had created a national nobility and joined the country against the free of the French[15], Henry and Cromwell likewise could have used the situation of the reformation to unite England using the same mentality against the Catholic

church. The shifting use of power and effectiveness of parliament, however, does not seem copied from the pages of history.

Parliament Elton argues ' Henry VIII's turning to parliament proved his supreme political genius; that his deliberate decision to take the nation " into partnership, was the most momentous step in the rise of parliament'[16], for Elton sovereignty created a duty and purpose for Parliament, however, it seems Henry used parliament as a propaganda tool to promote the acceptance of change and show the link between the king and people[17]as Henry's supremacy was dependent on divine appointment and not parliament. However, from an administrative point of view Henry hereafter had a greater control over his kingdom, but parliament did not restrict Henry's decisions. This seems to point towards less of a governmental revolution and more towards a despotic government, historians like Gardiner have alleged Cromwell used his power more as an autocratic weapon[18]and Pollard portrays Cromwell especially like some Machveillian monster[19], which both suggest the real intentions of Henry and Cromwell's government. However, perhaps this could be interpreted as the Tudor revolution, considering other historic despotic governments, like Communist Russia, although a modern comparison, it was still a revolution of politics and considering politically, socially and economically almost resembled a Medieval state, it does become a fair comparison.

Regardless of this parliament became an effective organ of government and brought reforms to the law and juridical system, the church and administration. Cromwell's administration produced the largest body of

statues seen before the 19th Century[20], most centred on the church and many laws were to do with king's affairs i. e. Henry VIII passed 81 bills in his interest, though considering he was trying to legitimise a marriage to Ann Boleyn, its hardly surprising, but none the less a groundbreaking swift from Medieval politics. However, Roskel believes parliament developed from its Medieval roots and that by a natural process (the need for secularisation perhaps) and not the product of a Tudor revolution as the only change was ' a new theory of parliament and in the process drastically altered the practice'[21]. The perfect example of this is the Privy council and demonstrates the need to remove the problems of factions and power which the nobility held.

The Privy council had existed before Henry and Cromwell but the way it was used differed greater. The council would be an important link between parliament and the king and power came down only to those the king choose and old knightly elements were reduced to a few significant roles. The number of members decreased and meant those in power could not and made it easier to pass laws and to avoid factions, i. e. Henry VII's council of 1472 included 72 men, whereas Henry's first had only 19[22]and members now had to have worked within the government before they could be in the council[23], therefore this new system would exclude the majority of the nobility who might only serve their own interests. This can certainly be viewed as a revolutionary change, like the church the nobility was another thorn in the side of many English kings, although the council cut out the use of the nobility it was not a ' political instrument for assuaging opposition'[24], concessions still had to be made and therefore could not be

completely revolutionary as the nobility were key important in keeping regional control. The most significant change perhaps was that the council could pass laws by proclamation and unlike its European counterparts in Spain and France who could only advise the king[25], whereas the English privy council was able to influence and intervene the king's decisions, this reflects a comprising relationship where although Henry had royal supremacy he did not have a complete free reign over policy which shows policy being built on the existing governments foundations which lead to the improvement of the common law and the function of parliament[26], but were these improvements revolutionary?

Henry's reign was built on law and reforms to the common law and the judicial system ' from the 1530's onward they began to obey statute in a way they had never done before'[27], for the first time on a national level the process by which parliament made laws and court administered them was enforced throughout the land. From 1532 for the first time the government conceived legalisation became the new focus in the houses, this was something which Elton says ' no one ever dreamt of establishing'[28]changes in the law through Parliament, this was truly revolutionary. This shift towards the creating and then enforcing on law was something which had not happened under Medieval governments. Henry had control over both religious and regional courts, he had the ability to appoint judges and juries and unlike any other point made it seems a decision that was not emittable or the result of natural change as there had been no demand for a stricter enforcement of the law. Changes within the administration system also could be described as revolutionary.

Administration benefited hugely from Cromwell's policies and the outcome of the reformation. The change of law lands over church properties brought plenty of money into the

The crown's new revenue courts showed the move towards the elimination of purely personal in favour of lasting bureaucratic control[29].

Henry said ' wherein we as head and you members are conjured and knit together into one body of politic[30]' basically organic view of state in harmony and mutually dependent on its subjects. Although idea around since Dudley's Tree of Commonwealth (1509) and practised by Henry VII though Cromwell brought a renewed vigour in the practice.