

The english civil war



The English Civil war took place in 1642 until around 1650 and included warfare in not just England but also Scotland and Ireland. The two opposing sides were the English parliamentary party and English monarch, King Charles I. This civil war was not concerned about who ruled these three kingdoms, but which type of government was used and which religion would be dominant. Not only were there many factors that led to this civil which produced historical consequences, but there were fundamental issues and differences between each side.

Before the reign of Charles I, several key situations were in place. English was financially strapped for money due to preceding monarchs' wars, crop failures and an inadequate taxation system. Second, English monarchs received their money from a temporary advisory committee called parliament. Parliament was comprised of gentry who were the only ones by law able to raise money from the people (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia). Third, each kingdom was dominated by different churches/theology: England was Church of England, Scotland was Calvinism, and Ireland was Catholic.

When Charles succeeded his father, James I, he immediately went against those prevailing situations. He went to war against Spain thus further emptying the coffers of England. Charles alienated his protestant supporters when he married Henrietta Maria, the Catholic daughter of France's king Louis XIII, and later when he and his archbishop of Canterbury started making the Church of England more ceremonial and high Anglican (protestants were fearful that the church was adopting catholicism). Now, Charles needed money but the protestant parliament majority refused. In the preceding years before the eruption of civil war, Charles dissolved the

parliament, raised his own money by enacting long forgotten and unused laws and fined those who refused to comply. This of course caused further antagonism. Charles also wanted to unify the church which included applying these high Anglican policies in Scotland. Scotland rebelled.

Charles appealed to a newly formed parliament for money to attack Scotland, but they could not come to terms; however, Charles went to war anyway. Within the year, Charles was in desperate straits and was forced to reconvene another parliament to raise money to defend England from the advancing Scottish army.

This parliament took the earlier parliament's grievances to the king hoping for resolution in exchange for the funds the king wanted. However, this did not happen as Charles attempted to arrest 5 members of parliament and charge them with treason. This attempt failed and the five managed to escape. This event was the catalyst that provoked the civil war. Charles fled London in fear of his life and ultimately, stayed in Oxford for the majority of the war. Initially, the parliamentary's army called the Roundheads was formed to prevent an invasion from Scotland and to seek "radical changes in religion and economic policy, and major reforms in the distribution of power at the national level" (Kids. net. Au). The king's royalist were known as Cavaliers and won many of the earlier battles. Oliver Cromwell became a dominant military leader of the "New Model army" for the Roundheads with his effective reorganization and disciplined army.

The English Civil War can be divided into 3 separate or series of wars. The wars might have ended at the end of the second war had the parliament not

had a major division within its ranks. “ The majority of its members were ready to restore Charles to the throne as a limited monarch, under an arrangement whereby a iniformly Calvinist faith would be imposed on both Scotland and England as the state religion” (Coffin, Stacey and Cole 442). However, Oliver Cromwell led a group who were distrustful of Charles and by arresting some and preventing others from the exisiting parliament and forming a new Rump Parliament, put the king on trial, found him guilty of treason, and then had the king beheaded on January 30, 1649.

With the army behind Cromwell, a constitution was drafed by officers of his army giving extentensive powers to Cromwell and in reality providing him a dictatorship. Meanwhile, since Ireland had supported the monarchy during the first and second of the civil wars, Cromwell laid seige to and massacred Royalist troops and civilians at Drogheda. This event has fueled English-Irish and Catholic-Protestant strife for the last three centuries (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia). Skirmishes continued between the Irish and parlimentary forces for the next four years.

Up to the execution of Charles I, Scotland had predominately fought against the Royalist. However, the Scots did not agree with the execution and feared they would not remain independent under the new commonwealth of Cromwell. Scotland supported Charle’s son Charles II and crowned him king causing Cromwell to wage war against the Scots. Charles II managed to escape to Wocester, England where Cromwell later defeated him. Charles II then escaped to France which effectively ended the civil wars.

There were fundamental issues and differences between each side of the English Civil War with “ natural” and “ civil” rights being the dominant differences. Each side had opposite views. Those Englishmen supporting the parliamentary army believed that every man was entitled to government by representation including these “ natural” and “ civil” rights. Colonel Rainsborough of Cromwell’s army states “ and I do think that the poorest man in England is not at all bound in a strict sense to that government that he has not had a voice to put himself under...” (Coffin, Stacey and Cole 442). General Ireton further defines what is meant by these “ natural” and “ civil” rights when he said “ But that by a man’s being born here he shall have a share in that power that shall dispose of the lands here, and of all things here, I do not think it is a sufficient ground” (Coffin, Stacey and Cole 442). Both men believed that all men just by the fact of their birth had a divine right to a voice in their government and that no king had the unlimited power to overrule that right.

Charles I as well as his father James I believed in the “ Divine Right of Kings” and compared kings to gods on earth. This meant that kings had unlimited power and could do whatever they wanted. This caused resentment if others interfered with the king’s desires. Even on the way to his execution, Charles firmly believed that the common people were not to be concerned with a voice in the government; in fact he believed it was not even in their best interest to do so. This was evident by the speech he made on his way to be beheaded when he stated “ But I must tell you that their liberty and freedom consists in having of government those laws by which their lives and goods may be more their own. It is not for having share in government. That is

nothing pertaining to them. A subject and a sovereign are clean different things...” (Coffin, Stacey and Cole 443). It is almost as if he considered the average man less than human. Cardinal Richelieu, the effective ruler of France during the reign of King Louis XIII, certainly thought so too. In a book written by Richelieu in 1688, he wrote “ It would not be sound to relieve them of all taxation and similar charges, since in such a case they would lose the mark of their subjection and consequently the awareness of their station. Thus being free from paying tribute, they would consider themselves exempted from obedience. One should compare them to mules, which being accustomed to work, suffer more when long idle than when kept busy” (Coffin, Stacey and Cole 439).

It is interesting to note that the participants of these debates did not consider the implications their arguments had for the political rights of women. It probably never crossed these debaters’ minds that women were the equal of men in reason and political understanding. After all, it had not been that long before when Leon Battista Alberti, an Italian humanist, architect, artist and considered a true Renaissance man wrote in his article “ On the Family” that “[Husbands] who take counsel with their wives...are madmen if they think true prudence or good counsel lies in the female brain...Furthermore, I made it a rule never speak with her of anything but household matters or questions of conduct, or the children” (Coffin, Stacey and Cole 375).

Nearly one hundred years after Alberti, Luther still regarded women the same including the idea that women were easily led into sin, especially sexual sin “ To prevent sin, it was necessary that all women should be

married, preferably at a young age, and so placed under the government of a godly husband” (Coffin, Stacey and Cole 414). Considering the widespread and entrenched view men held of women, it is not surprising that these debaters did not consider that women needed political rights, let alone that some women would desire them.

The English Civil War produced some lasting historical consequences. This was the first time a reigning monarch had been legally executed by their own government. Also, after the war and the nine year interim when Cromwell ruled England as a virtual dictatorship, England became a limited or constitutional monarchy and has remained so to this present day. Since that time, England’s monarch no longer has had absolute rule but has had to work with parliament to rule the country. It has been a much slower process for the changing of men’s opinions about the equality of women’s minds and women’s value in the political world (well over three hundred years), but that too, has had a significant change since the time of England’s Civil War. Women are now running for political office and becoming the CEOs of large corporations.

Currently, the centuries old strife between the Catholic Irish and the Protestant English has mostly resolved. Otherwise, England (now part of the United Kingdom including Ireland, Scotland and England), has had a stable parliamentary monarch government and its populace is free to choose their individual religion, both a truly lasting consequence of the English Civil War.