STUART VIEWS OF KING HENRY III AND KING RICHARD II

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Englishmen in the mid-seventeenth century were curious and intrigued by the limits of kingship power and disagreements over such limits led some to force Charles I out of the monarchy. Historians looked then to the past for answers, and found them in the reigns of Henry III and Richard II, both of whom experienced civil strife and numerous parliamentary conflicts during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries much like Chares I was experiencing in the 1640s. Charles and James I at first strongly enforced Divine Right, which is that kings have power from God and people should not rebel against them for they would therefore be rebelling against God. Maintaining this policy was important to keeping the citizenry in check, but would inevitably fail and cost Charles the monarchy and his head as he was executed in 1649. The books and pamphlets compared in this essay address the reigns of Henry III and Richard II and were written in the mid-seventeenth century. Examining how these past rulers and citizens dealt with each other helped the people of 1640 understand the English Civil War and the execution through Parliament of the rightful ruler, King Charles I. It may even have helped the eighteenth century citizens act against their monarch. Each earlier monarch was either troubled by civil war or would soon experience such a catastrophe. Power struggles between kings and Parliament would define both reigns, eventually resulting in the strengthening of Parliament in both cases. Favoritism, envious barons, and poor advisory councilors would initiate these disputes, and ultimately help redefine Parliament, much like the situation in the 1640s.

The books and pamphlets compared were written roughly in the mid- seventeenth century, a time when Civil War was breaking Parliament's power and purpose was questioned. It is logical, then, that most people would be writing about these two monarchs because both dealt with the powers of Parliament, civil war, and deposition of a king, as well as the role the King's councilors played in the growing hostilities towards Parliament. This paper uses the 17th century pamphlets to compare and contrast the reigns of Richard II and Henry III, before returning to the question of why they focused on their reigns.

Sources from the Stuart period emphasized that both King Henry III and King Richard II ascended the throne at an early age (Richard at ten and Henry at nine), and in both instances the public supported their coronations. For Richard II the citizens spared "no cost to express their Loyalty and zealous Affection to his Person, both in his passage through Town, and at his Coronation."[1] There may well have been fears about his legitimacy as king because his father, the Black Prince Edward, died before his grandfather Edward III. Edward III had six sons, and thus upon his death there were many uncles and relatives attempting to control and influence the young king, which would cause problems later.

Henry III was also well supported. As Sir Robert Cotton wrote in 1627 "to satisfie all, a child asendeth the throne, mild and gracious, but easie of nature, whose Innocency and naturall goodnesse led him safe along the various daungers of his fathers Raigne."[2] This view coincides with recent historians that write that Henry III "was not a bad man, possessing none of his father's viciousness."[3] One year prior to Henry's coronation, England had experienced a civil war when the barons forced John to accept Magna Carta, vastly limiting the powers of the monarchy and empowering the parliament. These conditions would underlie the conflict throughout Henry's reign, as he would continuously try to reestablish his authority over the barons.

Stuart writers also noted that both Henry and Richard's reign began with parliamentary control of the country, though technically Parliament did not exist during Henry's reign. Henry's battles were between him and the feudal landowners, such as barons and nobles, who would eventually form the House of Lords. Both monarchs, however, relied too heavily on their advisors, each having favorites that essentially ruled the kingdom, much to the barons' displeasure and eventual rebellion. Henry III, for example, relied mostly on the advice of his Council, including his Uncle Hubert de Burgh and Peter des Roches. De Burgh wielded supreme authority during Henry's minority worked to keep others out of the king's council. In addition, Henry appointed Frenchmen to his council, enraging the barons because, according to Sir Robert Cotton in 1627 "nothing is more against the nature of the English, then to have strangers rule over them."[4] Despite the obvious opposition form the barons de Burgh advised Henry to delay or deny their desires.[5] Richard similarly angered the barons and the church because he "regarded nothing the councells

of the Sage and the Wise men of the Realm."[6]  Instead Richard relied heavily on the advice of Michael de la Pole, later appointed Chancellor, and John de Gaunt, his uncle.

These "evil Counsellors" caused part of the rift between parliament and King for both Richard and Henry.[7]  None of the sources from the Stuart period, however, adequately explain other reasons for the fallout between King and Parliament.  In both instances the barons had fought hard during the previous reigns to gain more power.  Prior to Richard II's reign, the barons consistently pushed for control and increased their authority by creating what would become the House of Lords and Commons, and requiring that they must approve any tax increases. Subsequently, when Richard II began disregarding Parliament's advice, the barons were incensed.[8]  During Henry III's reign, the barons had just forced his father, John, to sign Magna Carta, granting lords and barons more power.  They were quite angry when Henry appointed his own advisors and rarely sought parliament's advice, thereby violating Magna Carta.[9]

According to the Stuart writers, these problems should be blamed not solely on the kings or councilors, but on the time period and parliamentary greed.  Regarding de Burgh, Sir Cotton points out "bad times corrupt good Councells and make the best Ministers yeelde to the lust of Princes," implying that it wasn't de Burgh's personality but rather the period that had corrupted him.[10]  In Richard's case it was Parliament that was greedy and evil, according to the Stuarts.  They state that "parliament induced him [Richard II] to believe that all the ill they did was a generall good" and that Parliament used the money of the Crown for their own reasons.  Parliament also made Richard II swear that he would protect them, even though their allegiance was questionable.[11]  The great council of the king could not inform the king of these conspiracies because they too were denied access by Parliament.  Chancellor Scroop was another victim of the time.  The barons wanted the king to grant them their rightful lands through inheritance, to which the king agreed but the Chancellor "who zealously desired the prosperity of the kingdom, and just profit of the king, absolutely refused to do it."[12]  Scroop told the barons that the Crown was financially depleted, and that the King needed those lands.  This was an action that soon afterwards resulted in Scroop's removal from office.

While these pamphlets cite different reasons for revolutionary actions, it appears that revolution in fact did occur under both Henry III and Richard II.  In both instances the king had been ruled by an advisory council for a short while and upon coming of age demanded more power.  Both Parliaments of these monarchs' respective reigns resisted the king in separate but similar ways.  In King Henry's instance, the Stuarts discuss how Parliament was disgusted with the favoritism showed to Hubert de Burgh and agreed to conspire against him by siding with his rival, Peter des Roches.  By doing so they brought charges against de Burgh, executed him, and supported des Roches authority.[13]  Roches, however, proved no better than de Burgh in the eyes of the barons as he appointed foreigners to his cabinet, further enraging the barons.[14]  The barons forced upon Henry the Provisions of Oxford, which stated that the subjects could rise against him if he was ruling against the law.  The Stuart writers referred to this as a "traitorous Ordinance," and denounced the formation of a Baronial Council under the Provision by writing "for one bad king before, they had foure and twenty worse."[15]  The Pope later annulled this agreement, and the King and barons agree to arbitration by King Louis XI of France.  This, according to the Stuart pamphlets, is what begins the revolution of the barons.  Louis XI judged in Henry's favor and sparked the barons to rebel successfully.[16]  The pamphlet does not, however, mention that Henry III gave up claim to all his lands in France in return for Louis's support.[17]  The king did counter the barons and defeat them, and as punishment took all their lands.  One Stuart pamphlet argues that "this sentence (though it was less that they deserved)" started the fires of rebellion again.[18]

The civil unrest during Richard II's reign was slightly different.  While the barons did conspired to retain control, Richard's relation with them was not nearly as solid as in Henry's reign, nor did it end as peacefully.  Richard, who had wanted complete Supreme authority ever since minority, Richard became suspicious and paranoid of Parliament and trusted no one.[19]  The pamphlets do not mention exactly why he felt this way, but the blame could fall on the "merciless Parliament" of 1386, which executed Richard's advisors and forced him to accept an agreement that allowed his subjects to rebel if he governed against the consent of his peers,[20] much like the provisions of Oxford.  Twentieth-century historians seem to agree that Richard learned a valuable lesson that "he must co-operate with his greater subjects and must rule by consent if he wanted to retain his crown."[21]  Like Henry III,

Richard began the fires of rebellion by claiming lands for himself rather than the rightful heirs. Unlike Henry, however, Richard's actions led to his deposition by Henry de Gaunt, who became outraged when Richard took his lands, and raised an army that overwhelmed the king. Henry de Gaunt did, however, use Parliament to depose King Richard, rather than simply using force.

Overall, then, these seventeenth-century writers show that greed, relentless pursuit of power by the royal court, and parliamentary disputes were the roots of the problems in the reigns of Henry III and Richard II. Stuart writers were especially interested in Henry III and Richard II's reigns because they were experiencing civil strife and were looking to past instances that would help define parliamentary powers. Such research by seventeenth-century historians was important in helping them solve problems caused by an unpopular king, like Charles I. Charles's era of personal rule (that is without Parliament) 1629-40, resulted in a buildup of anti-monarchy sentiment, which consequently led to the Long Parliament (1640-1653). The actions of this Parliament attempted to undo all that Charles I had invoked, and they looked to the reigns of Henry III and Richard II to rationalize their actions. This period was littered with rebellion and Civil War, which ultimately resulted in regicide, or the execution of Charles I. This regicide was acceptable to some because of the similar treatment of Richard II, who was the first English king to be deposed through parliamentary actions. Following Charles's execution came a time of chaos, as England was without a monarchy for the first time in its history. Oliver Cromwell and the "Lord Protector" position was a failed experiment, and England would restore the monarchy in 1660 to Charles II. The entire process on rebellion and revolution would be repeated in 1668, when James II is forced to abdicate and William and Mary come to power.[22] This "Glorious Revolution" is the result of nearly a century of internal conflict, both religious and political, which both Henry III and Richard II experienced centuries earlier. Examining the people's reaction to those reigns helped seventeenth-century Stuart historians decide on appropriate actions to take.

[1] Sir Robert Howard, *The Life and Reign of King Richard the Second* (1681), 3.

[2] Sir Robert Cotton, *A Short View of the Long Raigne of Henry the Third* (1627), 3.

[3] David Williamson, *Brewer's British Royalty* (London: Cassell Academic, 1996), 196.

[4] Cotton, *A Short View*, 10-1.

[5] Ibid, 7.

[6] Well-wisher to the common-wealth, *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second* (1642), 2.

[7] Edward Chamberlayne, *The Present Warre Parallel'd* (1647), 1.

[8] Clayton Roberts and David Roberts, *A History of England, 1, Prehistory to 1714, 2nd ed.* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1985), 180.

[9] Mike Ashley, *The Mammoth Book of Britain Kings and Queens* (New York: Carroll and Graf Pub., 1998), 532.

[10] Cotton, *A Short View*, 10.

[11] *The Bloody Parliament in the Raigne of an Unhappy Prince* (1643), 3.

[12] Howard, *The Life And Reign*, 33.

[13] Cotton, *A Short View*, 10-1.

[14] Ibid, 11.

[15] *The Present Warre Parallel'd*, 3.

[16] Ibid, 4.

[17] Roberts and Roberts, *A History of England*, 145.

[18] *The Present Warre Parallel'd*, 11.

[19] *The Bloody Parliament*, 3.

[20] Roberts and Roberts, *A History of England*, 181.

[21] Michael Hicks, *Who's Who in Late Medieval England* (London: St. James Press, 1991), 3:151.

[22] Elisabeth G. Ellis and Anthony Esler, *World History: Connections to Today* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:

Prentice Hall, 1999), 431-5.