The Glorious Revolution of 1688

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James II

Parliament, however, was also unable to gain the upper hand. From 1679 to 1681, Protestant nobles had Parliament pass acts excluding Charles II's Catholic brother James from succession to the throne. The political turmoil of the Exclusion Crisis created the Whig faction favoring exclusion and the Tory counter-faction opposing exclusion. Even with a majority in Commons, however, the Whigs could not force a reworking of the constitution in their favor because Charles responded by dissolving three Parliaments without giving his consent to the acts.

As a consequence of the stalemate, Charles did not summon Parliament over the final years of his life, and James did succeed to the throne in 1685. Unlike the pragmatic Charles, James II boldly pushed for all of his goals. On the religious front, the Catholic James upset his Anglican allies by threatening the preeminence of the Anglican Church (Jones 1978, 238). He also declared that his son and heir would be raised Catholic. On the military front, James expanded the standing army and promoted Catholic officers. On the financial front, he attempted to subvert Parliament by packing it with his loyalists. With a packed Parliament, "the king and his ministers could have achieved practical and permanent independence by obtaining a larger revenue" (Jones 1978, p. 243). By 1688, Tories, worried about the Church of England, and Whigs, worried about the independence of Parliament, agreed that they needed to unite against James II.

William of Orange

The solution became Mary Stuart and her husband, William of Orange. English factions invited Mary and William to seize the throne because the couple was Protestant and Mary was the daughter of James II. The situation, however, had additional drama because William was also the military commander of the Dutch Republic, and, in 1688, the Dutch were in a difficult military position. Holland was facing war with France (the Nine Years War, 1688-97), and the possibility was growing that James II would bring England into the war on the side of France. James was nearing open war with his son-in-law William.

For William and Holland, accepting the invitation and invading England was a bold gamble, but the success could turn England from a threat to an ally. William landed in England with a Dutch army on November 5, 1688 (Israel 1991). Defections in James II's army followed before battle was joined, and William allowed James to flee to France. Parliament took the flight of James II as abdication and the co-reign of William III and Mary II officially replaced him on February 13, 1689. Although Mary had the claim to the throne as James II's daughter, William demanded to be made King and Mary wanted William to have that power. Authority was simplified when Mary's death in 1694 left William the sole monarch.
New Constitution

The deal struck between Parliament and the royal couple in 1688-89 was that Parliament would support the war against France, while William and Mary would accept new constraints on their authority. The new constitution reflected the relative weakness of William's bargaining position more than any strength in Parliament's position. Parliament feared the return of James, but William very much needed England's willing support in the war against France because the costs would be extraordinary and William would be focused on military command instead of political wrangling.

The initial constitutional settlement was worked out in 1689 in the English Bill of Rights, the Toleration Act, and the Mutiny Act that collectively committed the monarchs to respect Parliament and Parliament's laws. Fiscal power was settled over the 1690s as Parliament stopped granting the monarchs the authority to collect taxes for life. Instead, Parliament began regular re-authorization of all taxes, Parliament began to specify how new revenue authorizations could be spent, Parliament began to audit how revenue was spent, and Parliament diverted some funds entirely from the king's control (Dickson 1967: 48-73). By the end of the war in 1697, the new fiscal powers of Parliament were largely in place.