

Chapter 13: Constitutional Exchange in England: From the Glorious Revolution to Universal Suffrage

A. Constitutional Exchanges and the Glorious Revolution: Willem-William III and the Parliament

From an early age, William-Willem III had been educated in the fields most useful for a future *stadhouder*: in military matters and strategies for negotiating with a sovereign republican government (Claydon 2002: 15). During his adult life, William had become very good at building support within the provincial governments and in the States General. This was necessary in the context of Dutch constitution (see chapter 15) because the provinces, rather than the stadhouder were sovereign, and had veto power over both budgets and legislation. The office of stadhouder was normally combined with that of captain general, which made the stadhouder responsible for the army and one of the most influential persons in the Netherlands.

As stadhouder, William-Willem III was used to dealing with a sovereign national parliament to obtain funds for his executive responsibilities, especially for national defense, as national security was the primary charge of the Dutch *stadhouders*. (Claydon 2002: 25). By the time that stadhouder Willem III became William III, King of England, he was a middle-aged man with substantial experience in military leadership and bargaining with parliament. He was not, as kings of England tended to be, long destined to the throne and used to royal deference throughout his life, although he belonged to a very distinguished and powerful Dutch family and was married to the daughter of James II.¹⁶³

From approximately 1580-1790, the Netherlands was organized as a confederation of provincial governments, which themselves were often organized as confederations of local governments. The office of *stadhouder* was, in principle, an appointed rather than hereditary position, and a regional rather than a national position, although in practice the provinces always chose their *stadhouders* from the Orange-Nassau family. Filling the office of stadhouder was not automatic, and the office was left empty several times in Dutch history. For example, it had been left empty for two decades after the death of William-Willem III's father, Willem II. Overall, this balance of authority was nearly the

¹⁶³ Willem-William had an indirect claim to the English Sovereign, as the son of Willem II of the House of Orange (who died when Willem III was very young) and Mary Stuart, the daughter of King Charles I. He married Mary (the daughter of James II, who was, thus, the niece of Charles II) in 1677 at the age of 27 (Claydon 2002: ch. 1).

opposite of the English Sovereign's historical relationship with parliament. Essentially unanimous support within the States General was necessary to obtain national resources for the Dutch army, and this could not be taken for granted.¹⁶⁴

In 1689, as *stadhouder* of most of the Netherlands and king of England, Willem-William III continued to have the security of the Netherlands and its conflict with France very much on his mind. He was, consequently, very interested in resources for war with France and willing to bargain with parliament to obtain those resources. This is not to say that William was less interested in authority and wealth than previous kings, nor that war with France was not in England's long-term interests, but William III—as opposed to Charles II or James II, who had often been allied with France—was very concerned about French power and was used to working within constitutional constraints to advance his interests in a manner that previous Stuart kings were not.¹⁶⁵

William's crown also depended more on parliamentary support than had recently been the case, because James II and his wife Mary had hereditary claims to the throne. William, consequently, was more interested in parliamentary good will and was more willing to trade royal prerogatives for tax revenues than previous English kings.

The 1689 parliament, in contrast, was more self-assured and independent than the one that restored the Stuart monarchy and also more interested in shoring up its own authority. The announcement of French support for James II's effort to recapture the English and Scottish thrones, increased parliament's own interest in supporting William's campaign against France. James II was unlikely to be as generous as his brother had been after the civil war three decades earlier.

¹⁶⁴ The confederal structure of the Netherlands indirectly gave the city of Amsterdam a veto on national tax requests. Amsterdam had the largest tax base of any community in both Holland and the Netherlands. The province of Holland generally used unanimous agreement to pass major tax and military bills (Claydon 2002: 24–25). The province of Holland had similar veto power in the national States General. For more details about Dutch governance at this time see Israel (1995). An overview is provided in chapter 14.

¹⁶⁵ For example, in 1672 William refused King Charles II's (his uncle's) offer to press for his elevation to the king of Holland as part of a peace settlement with France. He refused, in part because the offer involved a smaller Netherlands and, in part, because "his countrymen were more attached to their liberties than they would be to any royal ruler." (Claydon 2002: 19)

Shortly afterward, in gratitude for its liberation from the French, the elites of the province of Gelderland offered William III the sovereign office of duke, rather than the appointed office of *stadhouder*, which would have ended that province's republican form of government. Several other provinces complained that a Gelderland Dukedom would undermine the Dutch constitution. William, perhaps with greater aims in mind, refused the elevation to duke and accepted the lesser post of *stadhouder* (Claydon 2002: 23).

Opportunities for constitutional exchange between king and parliament were, consequently, the greatest they had been since the Magna Carta was signed four and a half centuries earlier. A deferential, rule-following, and resource-hungry king with urgent duties abroad confronted a parliament anxious to expand its control of public policy. The constitutional bargains struck over the next dozen years were pivotal events in English and Dutch history. William's success with the parliament is evident in the enormous funding that parliament provided him for his war with France. The tax base was expanded and tax rates were increased. Tax receipts more than doubled over those of James II, rising from two million to more than five million pounds in 1694 (Claydon 2002: 125–26). Expenditures rose even more rapidly, with the consequence that British debt expanded to unprecedented levels (North and Weingast 1989), accomplished in part via the Dutch method of earmarking some taxes for debt service and repayment (Stasavage 2003).¹⁶⁶

Central government employment tripled in size from 4,000 under James II to 12,000 under William, while the British army and navy approximately doubled in size during the nine-year war with France (Claydon, 2002: 25–26). The long-term geopolitical success of William's "English strategy" is also obvious.¹⁶⁷ The British had been inclined to intervene on the French side under Charles II and James II, but after William III, English efforts to contain French influence continued for three centuries (Morgan 2001: 402). The Netherlands survived as an independent country.

The price paid for parliament's support in the nine-year war with France (1688–97) was also clear. The Coronation Act of 1689 required the sovereign to "solemnly promise and swear to govern the people of this Kingdom of England ... according to the statutes in parliament agreed on, and the laws and customs of the same." In exchange, William and Mary obtained the traditional sovereign revenues for life. The customary revenues were, as ever, too little to support large-scale military campaigns, and taxes for war required the support of parliamentary majorities. Such taxes were normally extended for short periods, between one and four years, as they had been in the past.

In 1694, a new Triennial Act was passed, which (again) required parliaments to be called at least once every three years, but this time required new elections at least once every three years. The

¹⁶⁶ Interest paid on foreign debt fell significantly during William's reign, evidently in large part because of the adoption of Dutch practices (Stasavage 2003:74–78, 2002: 126–31), which facilitated the large-scale borrowing necessary to fund a good deal of the great military expansion. It also bears noting that Dutch financiers were more willing to purchase English debt, given that England now had a Dutch king.

¹⁶⁷ His interest in bringing England to the Dutch side in its contests with France dated at least back to 1677, when he arranged to marry Princess Mary, who was at that time second in the line of succession after her father (Claydon 2002: 23–24).

Triennial Act together with the parliament's short-term tax policies required more frequent elections to the House of Commons, which made the House of Commons, more independent of the Sovereign. No longer, could a king "lock in" an especially supportive parliament by keeping it in session for more than a decade, as Charles II had done immediately after the restoration.

Parliamentary audit and increased parliamentary control over expenditures were the result of precedents established by William's effort to win the trust of parliament on military matters and thus obtain more resources for his French campaigns (Claydon 2002: 73–77; Reitan 1970). Parliament's power of the purse was further strengthened early in William's administration, when he relinquished several of the questionable revenue sources used by Stuart sovereigns for most of the past century. Resistance, at this point, would have undermined his efforts to fund military campaigns (i.e., to pay the Dutch and English armies) and to build a more powerful British navy to confront France on the continent and abroad.¹⁶⁸

The power of the purse had always provided parliament with some indirect control over the military, but parliamentary involvement in military matters expanded greatly during William III's period in office. This was perhaps most apparent, when following the peace of Ryswick in 1697, the British army was reduced to less than a third of William's request, about an eighth of its peak during the nine-year war with France. Parliament had always been opposed to and unwilling to finance standing armies. In 1699 parliament induced William to disband his trusted Dutch guards (Claydon 2002: 146–52).

Parliament's greater budgetary authority was also expanded by a new division of funding responsibilities that emerged during and after the war with France. William III's revenue stream had always been more uncertain than even that of the previous Stuart kings. This was largely because of the nature of wartime finance in parliamentary systems and his interest in rapidly expanding it, but also a consequence of the manner in which he and Mary had come to the crown. They had essentially inherited James II's standing revenues, rather than formally obtaining new ones on accession. Instead of pressing for a resolution of his finances in 1689, William pressed for new military funding. After a decade of negotiation, permanent (lifetime) revenues were finally secured after the conflict with France was settled. In 1698 the Civil List Act provided William III with permanent revenues, but provided only for domestic (nonmilitary) expenditures (Reitan 1970). Military expenditures would be paid for with a separate budget.

¹⁶⁸ William himself spent the summers of the eight-year war on the continent leading military campaigns against the French.

It bears noting that William's domestic budget was somewhat larger than accorded previous kings, although it included the new caveat that only tax revenues up to £700,000 per year could be used for royal purposes. Revenues beyond that could only be used by the king with parliamentary permission. This prevented William and his successors from profiting from economic growth, as previous kings had, and also limited the sovereign's ability to maintain a standing army, the responsibility for which was entirely shifted to parliament for the first time (Reitan 1970). Revenues for support of the military in times of peace continued to be granted only for relatively short periods, as they had been in most past periods, but the parliamentary "subsidies" became the entire budget of the English army, rather than subsidies in the contemporary and medieval sense.¹⁶⁹

Had government expenditures not increased so much, the income from royal properties together with the customs revenues for life might have been sufficient to fund peacetime governance, as £2,000,000 had been sufficient a decade or two before. In the present environment, royal incomes were far below that required for peacetime government finance. This, together with the new method of financing the army, made William and his successors far more dependent on parliamentary tax bills, whether at peace or a war. The bargaining power associated with the governmental purse was now continuous, rather than available only during times of war.

In 1701 William also accepted the Act of Settlement. This act did not affect William, but was to bind his successors. The first part of the act affirms Princess Anne's position as next in line to the throne and greatly elevated the German Electors of Hanover in the line of succession. (William and Marry had no children.) Anne was Mary's sister, another daughter of James II, and married to the brother of the king of Denmark at the time of her accession. Her successor, George I of Hanover, was her second cousin, the great grandson of James I. George was the closest Protestant relative of Anne. There were more than fifty closer relatives, but all were Catholics.

The second part of the act is of greater constitutional interest, because it changed the rules for succession, imposed a number of new restrictions on future sovereigns, and increased judicial independence. For example, it required future kings and queens to "join in communion with the Church of England." This new religious requirement was more restrictive than required under the 1689 Bill of Rights. Mary, who had died in 1694, would have been eligible for the Sovereign under the new rules, but not William. William was himself Protestant and satisfied the 1689 requirements,

¹⁶⁹ Charles II and James II had received permanent revenues that were about twice as large as William's, but included funds for routine military expenditures. The civil list thus reduced the king's fiscal responsibilities and allowed for a somewhat more comfortable private life, but also greatly reduced his ability to shift resources among government services (Reitan 1970).

but he was brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church, which was more Presbyterian than Anglican (Claydon 2002: 99). The Act of Settlement also forbade future kings (from other lands) from engaging in wars outside England without the permission of parliament and prevented all future sovereigns from leaving “the domains of England, Scotland, or Ireland without the consent of parliament.”

The act of settlement also elevated the privy council (the cabinet of this period) somewhat and specified that, “no persons born out of the kingdoms of England, Scotland, or Ireland ... shall be capable to be of the Privy Council, or a member of either House of Parliament.” The latter ended the centuries-old custom by which the king was automatically a member of the House of Lords, which reduced the ability of foreign born kings, such as the German born George I and George II, to monitor and negotiate directly with members of the House of Lords.

The act of settlement also reduced royal opportunities for influencing the parliament by declaring that “no person who has an office or place of profit under the king, or receives a pension from the Sovereign, shall be capable of serving as a member of the House of Commons.” (This last provision was, subsequently, weakened by the Regency Act of 1706, which required new elections for members of parliament who became Sovereign employees. This was a much milder restriction, because elections at the time were rarely contested.) In addition, the settlement increased judicial independence by giving senior judges lifetime appointments during good behavior, “judges commissions be made *quamdiu se bene gesserint*,” that is, subject only to parliamentary impeachment.

By the time of William’s unexpected death in 1702, the formal and informal constitutions of England had been rewritten to increase parliamentary independence and control over governance.¹⁷⁰ Parliaments could meet regularly—with or without royal invitation—and electorates, however small and elite they might have been, routinely judged their representatives at least once every three years. Parliament’s power of the purse had been increased by shifting more control over revenue sources to the parliament, many of which had previously been independently claimed by kings, at the same time that the size and cost of governance expanded to beyond the royal household’s remaining standing revenues.

The precedent of audit and earmarked budgets reduced the sovereign’s discretion to use tax receipts as they might desire and further reduced opportunities for a king to buy support in parliament. Freedom of speech and petition opened up the domain of public discussion on a variety

¹⁷⁰ William, the heroic military leader of many campaigns, died from injuries sustained after falling off a horse.

of matters that previously might have been deemed treasonous and punished accordingly. The judiciary was more independent than it had been in past centuries.¹⁷¹

Royal Authority after William III

It was not necessarily the case that these late seventeenth century precedents and unvetoes acts of parliament would continue to bind future queens and kings. All English constitutional changes are reversible, as the 1706 Regent Act undid reforms of parliament adopted by the 1701 Act of Settlement. A clever king who obtained a supportive parliament could, in principle, repeal or amend any of these acts through majority votes. Precedent is to a significant extent in the eye of the beholder. Just as many routine disputes under common law are based on disagreements about what “the law” is, so were many of the constitutional disputes between parliaments and kings in previous centuries. Moreover, then as now, there is no formal procedure in England through which constitutional violations can be set aside.

Although it is often written that the Glorious Revolution created parliamentary governance in England, royal power did not disappear with the Bill of Rights, nor with the death of William III. The last sovereign to veto a parliamentary decision formally after it was passed by majorities in both houses was William’s successor, Queen Anne, who vetoed the Scottish militia bill in 1707. However, she was not the last to affect the course of public policy in the small or large. The division of power between king and parliament had clearly shifted from king toward parliament between 1689 and 1702, but to an intermediate point, rather than from one extreme to the other.

The sovereign continued to have and exercise the power to appoint and dismiss ministers, call and dismiss parliament, and could directly affect the composition of parliament through town charters and elevation to the nobility. The power of royal patronage, although reduced after the budgetary and audit practices implemented during William’s reign, continued to be a useful method of influencing the behavior of members of parliament. Although there were many patrons who employed members of parliament, the king or queen was by far the largest patron. Queen Anne had 100 “placemen” in her parliament (Field 2002: 141). A third of the House of Commons was on the executive payroll during George I and George II.

¹⁷¹ In this, it could be argued that William achieved his stated goal, announced on October 10, 1688 just before the invasion in his *Declaration of Reasons*: “a free and lawful parliament . . . and securing to the whole nation the free enjoyment of all their laws, rights, and liberties under a just and legal government.” The complete text of William’s declaration is available at <http://www.jacobite.ca/documents/16881010.htm>.

The necessity of parliamentary to obtain tax revenues, new constraints on royal finance, and greater expenses indirectly increased the importance of political parties and the leaders of those parties after William III's bargains. Insofar as a particular leader could deliver a majority, they could bargain directly with the sovereign. However, the sovereign was often the most important of such "parliamentary" leaders. They had the ability to create "court majorities" in the Houses of Commons by bargaining with prominent local families that controlled seats in the House of Commons, by employing members in the executive, and by simply appealing to voters. Such residual authority provided kings and queens with a good deal of control over public policies decisions and naturally reduced the need for explicit vetoes.

That royal veto power continued to exist during the century after Anne's 1707 veto became obvious in 1801, when Minister Pitt's powerful cabinet resigned over the king's threatened veto of the cabinet's proposed Catholic Emancipation legislation (Hill 1996: 157). Indeed, the most important of the electoral and parliamentary reforms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the election reform of 1832 and the Parliament Act of 1911, occurred in large part because of threatened interventions by two Kings in support of constitutional reforms desired by majorities in the House of Commons.

B. The Balance of Authority between British Sovereigns and their Parliaments in the Eighteenth Century

Several significant reforms of the written constitution were adopted during the first decades of the eighteenth century that affected the balance of authority between the sovereign and the parliament. The Scottish Union Act of 1707 brought Scotland firmly into the England sphere of influence by abolishing the Scottish parliament and formally linking the crowns of Scotland and England. Forty-five new seats were created in the House of Commons for Scottish town and county representatives and nine new nobles seats for the House of Lords. A revised property qualification for the House of Commons was adopted in 1711. County representatives (knights) had to have 600 pounds of income per year and burgesses 300 pounds per year. The Septennial Act of 1716 revised the Triennial Act and extended the maximum length of parliament from three to seven years, reducing what little electoral competition there was and by most accounts increasing royal authority by strengthening the effects of patronage.

To some extent, these constitutional reforms can be interpreted as "ordinary" partisan majoritarian politics, in that the reforms were intended to advance Tory or Whig political objectives,

or royal ones. For example, the Scottish Union was adopted by a Whig majority, and the new Scottish members subsequently voted with the Whigs. The Tories supported the property qualification in 1711 to reduce part of the Whig electoral support, as the Tory base of support was in the upper middle gentry (Field 2002: 143; Hill 1996: 51). The Septennial Act of 1716 allowed an existing Whig parliament to be extended without an intervening election and provided it (and George I) with four more years to use patronage to cement the Whig faction's control of parliament.

After the Septennial Act, the written rules of the national political game remained stable for more than a century, but the unwritten procedures of governance continued to be revised to take account of the rising cost of governance and a century-long sequence of foreign kings.¹⁷² Many of these informal revisions were indirect consequences of the new budgetary circumstances of the sovereign. As the size of governance increased well beyond the sovereign's own revenues, parliamentary "subsidies" became essential for day-to-day governance (Mathias 2001: 39). The short-term tax bills passed by parliament, in turn, necessitated annual meetings of parliament and cabinet ministers who could deliver majorities in both the Houses of Lords and Commons.

The use of ministerial councils was an ancient royal management technique, but in the eighteenth century, the need for ongoing parliamentary majorities substantially reduced the range of ministers that could be hired (or fired) by the sovereign. The king or queen remained the principal, but more and more authority was delegated to his or her agents. The ministers, in turn, became increasingly independent of the sovereign, because their authority was increasingly based on the extent of their support in the two chambers of parliament. It became commonplace for the sovereign's top minister to be a member of parliament who could deliver reliable majorities.

The reliance on a single parliamentary leader to craft majority support through policies and royal patronage, as with Walpole and Pitt, helped established organizational patterns and norms that allowed the modern office of prime minister to emerge. Once selected, these early "prime" ministers would be allowed to dispense the sovereign's patronage (jobs) to increase support for the sovereign in the parliament.¹⁷³

¹⁷² William III (1689–1702), George I (1714–27) and George II (1727–60) were foreign by birth. Anne (1702–14) had lived in Denmark with her husband for nearly 20 years before her ascension to the throne. George III (1760–1820) was born in Britain, but evidently spoke English with a German accent, possibly because he had a German-speaking mother, father, and wife.

¹⁷³ Walpole (1721–42) is often regarded as the first Prime Minister. He had the support of both

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The use of a parliamentary “prime minister” to create and manage majorities in the House of Commons and Lords also gradually led to cabinet governance. As the scope of government increased and sovereign interests focused on foreign policies and expanding the empire, more and more domestic policy decisions were turned over to the royal council of ministers. Cabinet governance in its modern sense, however, did not emerge until well into the nineteenth century.

This was partly because disciplined, well-organized, political parties had not yet emerged. Parties in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were loose coalitions of members with common interests, rather than disciplined national organizations that crafted platforms and provided substantial electoral support. British politics in the eighteenth century was not characterized by the competitive elections and intense electioneering that are the hallmarks of modern democracies. Many borough elections and most county elections were uncontested and were substantially controlled by local elites (O’Gorman 1989: 334). In 1761, for example, only 4 of 40 county elections were contested, and only 42 of 203 borough elections (Field 2002: 143).

Indeed, the number of seats controlled by local elites expanded during the eighteenth century, as the number of “nomination” boroughs in the House of Commons increased from about 60 to more than 200 during the course of the century. It also became increasingly common to purchase nominations, which became more valuable as the authority of parliament increased. The price of a seat in the House of Commons was bid up from 1,000 pounds to 5,000 pounds in the course of the eighteenth century. (O’Gorman 1989: 13, 21). Local elites who sold “their” seats would deliver the necessary votes and/or prevent opposition. (A few such seats were simply attached to ownership of particular pieces of land.) These nomination seats allowed the sovereign to exercise significant influence over the composition of parliament, because only a relatively small number of local sponsors needed to be influenced.

The sovereign influence within parliament was strengthened by his or her authority to elevate families to noble ranks. This allowed kings and queens to affect the composition of the House of Lords, and to influence members of both chambers of parliament, many of whom sought noble titles and/or elevations for themselves and their sponsors. Patronage also affected the distribution of

George I and George II, and used both parliamentary and royal patronage to his and the Sovereign’s mutual advantage.

The Whigs essentially excluded Tories from government positions. On the other hand, it was the Whigs’ superior access to foreign credit as well as the latent Jacobism of many Tories that initially predisposed George I to favor Whig ministers (Field 2002: 146; Hill 1996: 59, 77).

persons who would actually attend meetings of parliament, by providing a subset of both Lords and Commons with paid positions based in London.

Consequently, kings and queens were normally “blessed” with parliamentary majorities whose interests were well aligned with their own interests throughout the eighteenth century. George I and George II preferred Whigs to Tories, in part because of Tory support for James II and James III’s claims to the throne—and, sure enough, Whig majorities were had by George I and II. George III was less partisan and less predisposed toward Whigs, and the Whig dynasty fell (Field 2002: 136–37, 146,149).

This royal influence on the composition of parliament continued well into the nineteenth century. George IV (1820–30) was known to favor Tories, and managed to have a Tory majority in parliament—partly because he expanded Lords from 339 to 400 members (Field 2002: 164). William IV (1830–37) was known to favor Whigs, and the Tory majority was replaced by a Whig majority in the election that followed his accession to the crown (Pugh 1999: 48; Lee 1994: 58–59).

In 1800 parliament had more control over public policy than it had ever had before, but the British sovereigns retained considerable direct and indirect control over public policy.

C. Politically Active Interest Groups in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century England

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, a series of economic, technological, political, and ideological shocks began to transform the still largely medieval lifestyles and political outlooks of British commoners and nobles. International and intranational trade expanded rapidly during the eighteenth century, reflecting agricultural innovation, declining transportation costs, and population growth (Mathias 2001: 66–7, 88). English turnpike and canal systems expanded dramatically during the mid- to late eighteenth century, which helped create a more integrated domestic economic market (Morgan 2001: 428–29, 483). Prosperity in northern Europe, improved ship designs, and expanding European trade networks (which were only partly a consequence of Empire building) increased international trade worldwide (Mathias 2001: 87–88).

New large-scale techniques for spinning thread and weaving cloth led to major new manufacturing centers (Mathias 2001: 243–45), and the Industrial Revolution was beginning to gather steam with Watt’s modifications of Newcombe’s engine in the 1774 and 1781 (Morgan 2001: 480). Expanding commerce and population growth caused new urban centers to emerge, as noted

above, and older commercial centers to grow larger. Large-scale manufacturing became more and more commonplace and less tied to particular cities as trading networks expanded and became more dense.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, reduced transportation costs and somewhat less intrusive censorship allowed a broader and more rapid dissemination of news and opinion, which led to a more truly national political system. For example, newspapers became commonplace during the eighteenth century, which increased knowledge of national and international political controversies and scandals. The (London) *Times* began publication in 1785. A number of influential books were published in the late eighteenth century by thoughtful men also helped stimulate interest in liberal economic and political reform. Adam Smith's (1776) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* provided a thorough attack on the monopoly practices of previous centuries and defense of free trade and specialization, which helped to energize economic liberals for the next two centuries. Jeremy Bentham's (1789) *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* challenged the customary foundation of law and suggested that laws and institutions should promote the greatest happiness to the greatest number. Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790) argued that major institutional reforms, particularly revolutionary ones are unlikely to improve long-standing institutions. Paine's rebuttal the following year, *Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, focused additional attention on individual rights and civil liberties, as opposed to family or aristocratic rights.¹⁷⁴

A variety of organized groups took up the cause of parliamentary reform at the end of the century: The Society for Constitutional Information (1791), the Friends of Universal Peace and Rights of Man (1791), the London Correspondence Society (1792), Friends of the People (1792), and Sheffield Association (1792). These were largely middle class groups, but their memberships extended into parliamentary elites and the working class (Lee 1994: 16; Hill 1996: 150–51, Pugh 1999: 22–23). These groups organized large-scale and more or less peaceful demonstrations and petition drives that promoted reform, rather than revolution. Petitions and mass demonstrations became more common events in the early nineteenth century. Earl Grey, who was a member of Friends of the People, sponsored a series of parliamentary reform bills beginning in 1793. Such proposals revealed that significant support for reform already existed, but not enough to adopt

¹⁷⁴ All three books were widely read and translated. They continued to be widely read and cited throughout the nineteenth century, and are still on college reading lists today. Locke's book was an immediate best seller, selling 200,000 copies in 1793 (Field 2002: 156).

reforms. Grey's proposals attracted yes-votes from about 25 percent of the members of the House of Commons (Hill 1996: 233).¹⁷⁵

Groups of men and women organized to increase their own wealth through collective bargaining and also to achieve political reforms. The new middle and upper-middle classes were largely excluded from political life by the wealth requirements for suffrage and seats in the House of Commons. The 1711 property qualifications for the House of Commons prevented middle class and poor Anglicans from sitting in Commons (until 1859). Population shifts had reduced the representativeness of borough governments, to the extent that it had ever existed. The Test Act of 1673 prevented dissenters and Catholics from seeking parliamentary office. The Test Act of 1673 prevented dissenters and Catholics from seeking parliamentary office (until 1829). Many joined or supported groups that lobbied for expansion of suffrage and reapportionment (Pugh 1999: 22; Mathias 2001: 334).

Interest in parliamentary reform, of course, was not a new phenomenon in England. Parliamentary reform had been seriously debated in England at least since the Leveler's "Agreements" of 1647 and 1649.¹⁷⁶ However, the late eighteenth-century revolutions in America and France had renewed interest in civic equality, suffrage reform, and the proper assignment of seats across the country.

Interest in reapportionment was largely a consequence of the new factory-based production of textiles in northern England, where new urban centers emerged that were underrepresented in the House of Commons. The new industrial centers of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, and Sheffield were among the seven largest cities in England, but they had only county representation (two MPs) in Commons, while 49 two-member districts existed with fewer than 50 eligible voters (Field 2002: 142). Industrialists organized groups such as the General Chamber of Manufactures and petitioned parliament for favorable economic policies and also reforms of parliament (Morgan 2001: 482).

¹⁷⁵ Some three decades later, Grey became Prime Minister in more favorable circumstances and finally passed a bill very similar to his early proposals. (He served in the House of Lords at the time, inheriting the family title after the death of his father in 1807. See <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRgrey.htm> for a short biography.)

¹⁷⁶ Grey's 1792-97 bills, however, were not the first late eighteenth century efforts at reforming the rotten boroughs. Reform bills had been offered even before the French Revolution. In 1785 Pitt had proposed shifting seats from smaller boroughs to larger ones in his reform bill, which included compensation for the "owners" of the small borough seats. In that case, as in 1797, George III was opposed to reform and helped marshal opposition to the bill (Hill 1996: 145). Grey's 1792-97 efforts were largely opposed by his own party, as Pitt's interest in reform had disappeared after the French Revolution (Hill 1996: 50-51).

Reapportionment was also supported by many politically-active liberal groups of the time, in part because many liberals lived in the underrepresented parts of the country.

Curtailing Political Interest Groups

Although free speech had been obtained for members of parliament by the Bill of Rights, political speech remained circumscribed outside the parliament. For example, Thomas Paine had to flee the country for France in 1792 (or face trial for sedition) after Pitt condemned his “monstrous doctrine” (Pugh 1999). Paine’s critique of monarchy was unacceptable political discourse in England at that time. Rumors of revolt and revolutionary plots were abundant during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

When the first French Republic declared war in 1793, England shifted to a war footing and curtailed civil liberties to quell demonstrations in favor of constitutional reform. The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended in 1794. The Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act and the Seditious Meeting Act were passed in 1793 by large supermajorities. Treasonable practices included the transport and publication of writing opposed to the constitution. (Paine’s publisher was sentenced to a year and half in jail for selling the *Rights of Man*.)

Meetings of more than 50 persons were allowed only with magistrate approval. Moreover, large demonstrations in opposition to the Seditious Meetings Act were themselves seditious and broken up. In 1799 correspondence societies and trade unions were banned under the Corresponding and Combination Acts (Lee 1994: 19; Field 2002: 157). These political “gag acts” as well as medieval laws defining treason were used to prosecute reform, antiwar, and labor organizers, which postponed large-scale efforts to promote constitutional reform until well after the war with Napoleon ended in 1814.¹⁷⁷

Not all organizations were affected by the anti-sedition acts, or the subsequent restrictions passed in 1819 (the Six Acts). For example, “friendly societies” continued to flourish as did reform-oriented, local newspapers. In 1801 about 700,000 people belonged to such local service and insurance clubs. By 1815 membership approached a million and by 1830 about one in four males were members (Gerrard 2002: 169). The Masons continued to expand their membership and influence.

¹⁷⁷ See Field 2002: 156–62; Pugh 1999: 22–24; Hill 1996: 155; Lee 1994: 54; Morgan 2001: 486–88; and Holmberg 2002.

After the Napoleon's defeat and the restoration of the French monarchy, these laws were repealed or weakened, which allowed reform groups to be organized again. During the following decades, well over 100 politically active groups organized mass meetings, petition drives, and demonstrations, issued pamphlets, and lobbied ministers behind the scenes (Hamer 1977: 8; Lopatin 1999: appendix). Correspondence societies provided links between the clubs with shared interests, including public policy (Lee 1994: 54; O'Gorman 1989: 312).

Such groups sponsored large-scale demonstrations and petition drives. For example, in 1816 more than 400 petitions favoring the abolition of the income tax arrived in parliament (Hill 1996: 176). Although the economic and anti-tariff efforts were successful, the constitutional reform movements were not. Indeed, parliament responded to large-scale demonstrations with legislation curtailing those groups, the Six Acts of 1819, rather than reform. Jury trials lessened the impact of these laws in that juries would not very often convict those charged or apply maximal sentences. The treason act of 1351 still defined seven offenses as high treason, including various assaults on the royal family and "levying war against the king within his realm or adhering to his enemies" (Holmberg 2002).

Most public gatherings that pressed for reforms were peaceful, but the reform movement naturally induced the formation of antireform groups, which intensified verbal conflicts and occasionally led to violence. The language of politics often tends to be hyperbolic and emotional, and although there was no counterpart to the American or French Revolutions in the United Kingdom, there were outspoken demonstrations and petition drives that focused attention on constitutional issues.¹⁷⁸ The repeal of the 1799 combination act in 1824 allowed local trade associations and unions to organize.

D. Constitutional Bargaining and the "Great Reform" of 1800–35.

The bargaining models developed in part I of the book imply that constitutional exchange is most likely to be observed during unsettled times, because the economic and political interests of kings and parliaments are also unsettled in such times. The analysis also predicts that constitutional bargaining to be relatively commonplace, although not constitutional reforms. It also predicts that

¹⁷⁸ No coordinated uprisings or attacks on government buildings or persons took place. Indeed, it was often quite the reverse, as in the Peterloo "massacre" in 1819 when 11 persons were killed at a parliamentary reform assembly by a cavalry charge during a very large but, evidently, peaceful meeting at St. Peter's Field in Manchester. The speakers were arrested, as were the newspaper reporters who wrote up accounts of the meeting and cavalry charge (A nice overview is provided by: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peterloo_massacre).

constitutional bargaining will be multidimensional and that tax reforms will often be associated with the bargains struck. Such predictions are largely borne out by the course of constitutional reform in England during the nineteenth century.

The British Parliament in 1830

In 1830, the House of Commons included about 270 seats (of 658) from “nomination boroughs,” in which a very small number of persons could select a candidate for the House of Commons, who would (usually) run unopposed (Lee 1994: 57–59; O’Gorman 1989: 26). Seats in the House of Commons were disproportionately allocated to the south and the new northern industrial centers were essentially unrepresented in the House of Commons. Cornwall with a population of 300,000 elected 42 members of parliament, while the county of Lancashire with a population of more than 1.3 million elected just two members. Southern electorates were often even smaller than these numbers suggest, as for example Old Sarum’s electorate consisted of just 11 voters.¹⁷⁹

The least representative boroughs had suffrage rights that were attached to particular pieces of property, “burgages,” which could be assembled under a single ownership, which in a few cases allowed a single person to select a member of parliament. Others were selected by very small electorates, as with the “rotten” borough of Sarum. At the other extreme were town (boroughs) in which all freeholders or all taxpayers were entitled to vote (O’Gorman 1989: 21–33). Overall, about 10–12 percent of the adult male population were eligible to vote, and the typical voter was surprisingly middle class. For example, Garrard (2002: 26) reports that the electorate in 1830 was composed as follows: landed gentry (13.6 percent), merchants and manufacturers (5.8 percent), retailers (20 percent), skilled craftsmen (39.5 percent), semiskilled workmen (19.2 percent), and those employed in agriculture (6.4 percent).

Partisan Interests in Reform

Neither of the mainstream parties favored a wholesale redistribution of seats nor universal suffrage, but many Whigs favored a reallocation of seats and revisions of borough suffrage rules. The Whigs had long been a liberal reform coalition by the standards of the early nineteenth century

¹⁷⁹ It is interesting to note that the Pitt family owned much of the real estate and voting rights in Old Sarum in the eighteenth century. Their Sarum real estate entitled them to nominate 2 members of parliament. Members of the Pitt family, thus, often sat in parliament during this period. They sold their lands in Old Sarum during the nineteenth century. The price paid was said to be 60,000 pounds which suggests that the value of seats in Commons had risen to nearly 30,000 pounds.

(Hill 1996: 178). For example, the Whig coalition had long opposed restrictions on freedom of the press; pressed for free trade, including repeal of the corn law act of 1815; opposed laws forbidding Catholics and dissenters from holding public office; and had proposed several parliamentary reform bills. Of course, reapportionment and suffrage reform were politically easier for the Whigs to support, because the preponderance of the reallocated seats would come from conservative (Tory) districts. Of the 270 nomination districts most likely to be affected by reform, only 70 routinely returned Whigs (Lee 1994: 57).¹⁸⁰

Liberal arguments and lobbying campaigns gradually persuaded a majority of the electorate that reform was inevitable and may have also influenced the sentiments of a future king. George IV's brother William IV, who had served in the House of Lords, and generally supported the Whigs during his time there.

George IV died in 1830, and the election associated with William IV's accession returned a pro-reform Whig government later that year, thanks in part to William IV's support for Whigs (Phillips 1992: 18–21). The new Whig government proposed a suffrage reform bill that called for a substantial reallocation of seats, uniform rules for the election of borough MPs, and a substantial expansion of suffrage. That proposal was defeated, however, narrowly in the House of Commons at its second reading. Twelve hundred petitions were presented to the 1830 parliament in support of suffrage reform (O'Gorman 1989: 310).

Reform Tactics

Earl Grey asked the new king to call for new elections, and parliament was dismissed. The ensuing campaign focused largely on suffrage reform, and returned a large Whig majority to the House of Commons. Grey's coalition received 71.1 percent of the votes cast in Great Britain (Rallings and Thrasher 2000: 3). In 35 of the 40 county elections, the Whigs took both seats. Of the 187 Tories elected, 90 percent came from districts that would lose their seats if the Whig reforms were adopted (Hill 1996: 193). This time the reform easily passed in the House of Commons, but a majority of the House of Lords opposed the reforms, 199 to 158.

¹⁸⁰ Although completely isolating pragmatic and ideological interests is beyond the scope of the present paper, it is also clear that as support for popular sovereignty expanded within England (and Europe), the relative importance of the House of Commons and of the liberal factions within Commons (and their continental counterparts) increased as well. This provided some members, at least, with pragmatic interests in supporting greater openness in politics.

The rejection of reform by the House of Lords led to scattered riots, a few of which were targeted at peers and bishops who had opposed reform. It also induced a middle-class tax revolt and bank boycott. The unenfranchised middle class (widely) withheld taxes and withdrew funds from the banks. As a consequence, the Bank of England's reserves fell by 40 percent (Hill 1996: 195).

After the defeat in the House of Lords, Grey's ministry resigned, and William IV encouraged the formation of a minority Tory government. When this failed, he invited Grey to return to government and agreed to create 41 pro-reform peers, if necessary, to assure passage of the reform act (LeMay 1979: 32). Correspondence between the king and Earl Grey reveal concerns about royal property claims and assurances that royal property claims would not be challenged by parliament (Grey 1867: 9-14.) A third reform bill, slightly modified to please the House of Lords, again easily passed the House of Commons. The changes, the external pressure, and the royal threat to create new Whig lords induced a majority of the House of Lords to accept the reform.¹⁸¹ The king accepted the bill, and the first substantial reform of election laws in 400 years took effect.

Reforms of the House of Commons

The great reform approximately doubled the electorate to about 20 percent of adult males by broadening the franchise in most boroughs. All households with property holdings rated at 10 pounds per year were entitled to vote in boroughs. County roles were expanded to include 50-pound renters as well as the 40-shilling householders already enfranchised under the medieval suffrage law of 1430. (There are 20 shillings to the pound.) One hundred and forty-three seats were taken from the smaller boroughs, including 112 from towns and villages with populations under 1,000 that previously had their own members of parliament. Sixty-five seats went to the new industrial centers, sixty five more to county representatives, and the remainder were redistributed among London, Scotland, and Ireland.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ The conservatives (Tories) could, thus, continue to control one house of parliament even if the liberals (Whigs) would win the next several elections for the House of Commons. Had the conservatives in the House of Lords failed to pass the electoral reform and that chamber given a liberal majority, the pace of subsequent constitutional reforms is likely to have been much faster. The liberal coalition did win the next three elections, but lost in 1847. Between 1830 and 1885, liberals won 11 of 13 elections. The modifications implied that fewer seats would be shifted from England to Scotland (6) and Ireland (5).

¹⁸² Lang (1999: 31–37) provides a nice overview of the details of reform. He reports that the 1832 reforms increased the electorate (those actually voting) from about 500,000 to about 800,000 of

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The great reform did not eliminate the over representation of the south relative to the north, radically expand suffrage, or end patronage, but it did make patronage less decisive in future elections and increased electoral competition (Lee 1994: 61). Before 1820, it was rare for even a third of the English elections for seats in Commons to be contested (Lang 1999: 19). After the reform, it was rare for less than two thirds of the English seats in Commons to be contested (McLean 2001: 90). The 1832 reforms also changed the basis for representation within the House of Commons from more or less equal representation of boroughs and counties to a system more or less based on electorate size (Jennings 1961: 13).

Many members of parliament continued to draw salaries from royal appointments and from other wealthy individuals and interest groups. Indeed, changes in the economic production and transport associated with industrialization had created new groups who were in a position to support and reward MPs. An extreme example of this occurred in the mid-nineteenth century when a large number of the members of parliaments served on the board of directors of major railroad companies. Parks (1957) notes that

of the 815 M.P.s who sat from 1841-47, **145 were railway directors** ... in 1867 there were 179 ... as a result railway bills poured through Parliament.

Members of parliament did not receive a salary for their services to the central government until 1911 (Machen 2001: 102).

The new industrial interests and new urban centers were now better represented, as were the interests of what might be called upper middle class. This together with more competitive elections tended to make the House of Commons a more liberal body, whether seats were occupied by Whigs or Tories. Liberal interests were evident in education reform (1833), the abolition of slavery (1833), poverty law reform (1834), child labor acts (1833, 1842), and trade liberalization (1846) (Morgan 2001, Floud 1997).¹⁸³

a population of 26 million. All such numbers, however, are estimates, as many votes in small districts were done through temporary physical means, rather than paper ballots: voice votes, counting of hands, and the like. The electorate increased as a consequence of economic growth, inflation, and tax increases. Turnout was, however, evidently not particularly high, except for a short time after the reforms. The number of votes cast actually shrank from about 800,000 in 1837 to about 570,000 in 1859 (Craig 1977).

¹⁸³ It bears noting that liberal interests were more often utilitarian than natural rights oriented or libertarian during this period. For example, those supporting education reform and factory acts generally recognized that reducing child labor would increase education levels (although some

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Increasing the number of seats in Commons held by representatives of the industrial districts also made pivotal members of the House of Commons more interested in industrial development than before. Trade policies were liberalized, as noted above, monopolies reduced, and the free trade zone of the empire expanded. Innovations and economies of scale in manufacturing gave British manufactures a cost advantage in many markets, which generated large trade surpluses and capital inflows. As a consequence, per capita income grew four times faster in 1830–50 than it had in the previous century (Pugh 1999: 36). Suffrage also expanded during this period, because more persons met the property and income requirements of the 1832 reforms.

E. Party Cabinets and Parliamentary Rule in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Reapportionment, redistricting, and the expansion of suffrage had significant effects on the distribution of authority between the king and parliament, even though the reforms only directly affected parliament. Much broader campaigns were subsequently necessary to obtain seats in Commons. This made parliamentary majorities in the House of Commons more difficult for kings and queens to engineer than they had been in most past centuries. Before the reform, the majority of the English members of the House of Commons ran unopposed. Before 1832, it was rarely the case that more than a third of the seats were contested (Lang 1999: 19). Although those elected to office were still often from the landed elite (Pugh 1999: 82), they had to be responsive to local economic and political interests to hold office (Schonhardt-Bailey 2006).

In addition to the indirect effects of suffrage reform and electoral competition, the sovereign's control over public policy was also reduced by other reforms that indirectly affected negotiations between the king and parliament. For example, Curwen's Act of 1809 made the sale of seats in parliament illegal. Many sources of royal income were phased out and a new income tax was phased in. The protectionist Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, which somewhat reduced the income of the large landholders, including the king. It also eliminated tariffs on 600 articles and reduced them on 500 others, which reduced, or at least limited, one of the most important sources of executive income.

factory owners had their own schools for children) and thereby improve child welfare in the long run, even if it reduced their family's liberty and income in the short run.

(Adults that competed for the jobs held by children would have pragmatic reasons to reduce child labor, but few of these were represented in parliament under the suffrage laws of nineteenth century England.)

As part of the bargains used to reduce tariffs, “temporary” income taxes (in a series of three-year tax bills) were introduced (Edwin 1914: 138–142, Lee 1994: 81). Together with increased commerce and industrialization, this implied that more and more of the government’s revenues were provided by temporary tax bills that had to be renewed to keep it up and running.¹⁸⁴ It bears noting, however, that the use of the income tax for public finance allowed government budgets to increase. Government expenditures rose from about 133 million pounds in 1856–57 to 143 million pounds in 1859–60 (*Historical Statistics of Europe 1750–1988*).¹⁸⁵

The king or queen continued to appoint cabinet ministers, but the appointments was increasingly constrained by parliament’s budgetary authority at the same time that the scope of royal patronage and other sources of influence over members of parliament was reduced. New cabinets could be appointed, but could not govern without parliamentary support and there was less and less that the sovereign could do to persuade members of parliament to vote the “right” way. By refusing to approve new taxes and other policies, parliament could essentially shut government (and the royal household) down during times of peace as well as war.

The cumulative effects of the restrictions on royal revenues and adjustments to elections laws were increasingly evident in the policy bargains reached between the sovereign and parliament. That parliament had become the dominant policymaking body, rather than simply delegated authority in areas of little interest to the sovereign, had become undeniable by 1858.

¹⁸⁴ The expanding potential tax base is evident from all accounts of this period. For example, data for the English experience are developed by Lindert (1986). Lindert’s table 1 indicates that the value of noble estates averaged £ 2032 in 1810 and rose to £9,855 in 1875. Merchant estates averaged £608 in 1810—far less—but had risen to £11,804 in 1875, both in constant 1875 British pounds sterling. Other classes/occupations also had significant increases in wealth, although not as great as that of merchants or the “titled persons.” Overall, it is clear that the fraction of wealth controlled by those outside the royal family increased substantially during this period. The population of nobles was essentially stable between 1810 and 1875 (rising from 22,000 to 25,000), while the population of merchants and professionals, and members of the industrial and building trades increased substantially—rising from 42,000 to 61,000 and from 638,000 to 2,835,000, respectively. Similar changes in the distribution of wealth and occupation were under way in much of Europe, although in most cases the expansion of commerce and industry came later than that in England. (Increases in parliamentary power also occurred somewhat later.)

¹⁸⁵ It was only after the Queen’s acquiescence on Gladstone’s appointment that the income tax came to be regarded as a permanent tax (Edwin 1914: 166). Here, it should be acknowledged that the need to keep government up and running also constrained Parliamentary tax policies, because voters and their patrons demanded it. In 1875 Gladstone campaigned on a promise to abolish the income tax, and he and his liberal allies were soundly defeated (Edwin 1914: 172–73).

In that year, the liberal government headed by Palmerston resigned and was replaced with a minority Tory government preferred by Queen Victoria. New elections were called, but unfortunately for the queen, her favored conservative (Tory) coalition lost the 1859 elections. Queen Victoria did not care for Palmerston, whose liberal coalition had won the election, and reappointed the conservative Derby to the office of prime minister. Her preferred prime minister, however, could not assemble a majority to pass legislation or taxes. Given the necessity of parliament's continuing financial support, Victoria grudgingly accepted Palmerston and subsequently Gladstone in 1860 (Pugh 1999: 96).

In this manner, a long series of minor constitutional bargains had gradually produced a parliament that was independent from the sovereign and had essentially complete control over legislation and taxation. Consistent with the analysis above, a series of constitutional and quasi-constitutional bargains had gradually increased parliament's control of public policy. In the British case, the nineteenth century reforms were substantially a consequence of industrialization and liberalism. Industrialization changed the distribution of wealth between the sovereign and parliament and created new potential tax bases. Liberalism provided a reform agenda that helped motivate politically active groups and gradually produced free internal and external trade, and other electoral and fiscal reforms.

The new procedures for selecting the cabinet and prime minister were rarely formally codified in constitutional documents or new legislation. Indeed communications between parliament and the Queen remained formal and deferential, and continue to be so.¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, after 1860, the cabinets were party cabinets that reflected electoral results in the House of Commons. This transfer of policymaking authority from king and queen to parliament took place without significant internal revolutionary threats and without substantial democratization of politics. Only about 20 percent of adult men could vote in 1860.

Universal suffrage which did not emerge for another half century, which suggests, as implied by the analytical history of part I, that parliamentary authority over public policy and the degree of suffrage are generated by substantially independent mechanisms. The predicted ideological and partisan basis of suffrage expansion is evident in subsequent reforms of suffrage.

¹⁸⁶ Victoria's role in government, however, did not end in 1858. That she continued to play a role, especially in foreign policy, is evidenced by a steady flow of very deferential letters to Victoria from Palmerston and his successors.

F. The Gradual Expansion of Suffrage during the Nineteenth Century: The Second Reform of 1867 and the Third Reform of 1884

A number of groups pressed for suffrage and constitutional reform during the nineteenth century. Some of these groups were quite large and well organized. Among the most prominent groups was a group that lobbied for a written constitution, universal male suffrage, the secret ballot, free trade, and the reform of the poor laws. The Chartists organized large public demonstrations and produced several large petitions in favor of their reform agenda. However, they failed to obtain sufficient support in parliament for their reforms, in part because some prominent members of the movement threatened law and order, which induced a conservative backlash against their reform agenda.

Interest in suffrage reform and the secret ballot, however, did not end with the Chartist movement, as other groups organized and pressed for suffrage extension and ballot reform. Suffrage extension bills were introduced by “radical liberals” in 1852 and 1854 and defeated by overwhelming, but diminishing, majorities (Smith 1966: 29). Voter interest in reform was sufficient to induce the conservative members of parliament to take up the reform issue, and in 1859 the conservatives introduced a reform bill (Smith 1966: 41), partly with the aim of protecting conservative interests in the face of “inevitable” reform.¹⁸⁷

New regional reform organizations, with roots in the Chartist and anti-Corn Law leagues, added to the pressure in the 1860s (Smith 1966: 29, 39–40, Park 1931). A new Reform Union was formed in the northern industrial centers by “radical liberal” politicians, merchants, and prominent reformers in 1864 to press for liberal reforms, including the secret ballot, a return to triennial parliaments, redistributing seats in the House of Commons in proportion to borough and county populations, and a very broad franchise to include all males not on poor relief. They emphasized the

¹⁸⁷ In May of 1859, Disraeli argued in the House of Commons that parliamentary reform had become a pressing matter of public policy. “Thus Parliamentary Reform became a public question, a public question in due course of time becomes a Parliamentary question; and then, as it were, shedding its last skin becomes a Ministerial question. Reform has been for 15 years a Parliamentary question and for 10 years it has been a Ministerial question” (Quoted in LeMay 1979, 180). Disraeli’s remarks clearly imply that interest groups may directly establish an issue as a “public question” and indirectly establish an issue as a ministerial issue.

universality of the interests advanced by their programs, citing Mill and Gladstone, rather than class-based arguments (Cowling 1967: 243–52).¹⁸⁸ The Reform League was founded in London during 1864 by middle- and working-class activists. Its funding came from lesser lords, industrialists, and from the Trade Council. It promoted a similar constitutional agenda, but used somewhat more aggressive and radical language to promote reform (Cowling 1967: 246, 248). In 1865, the London Working Men’s Association was formed largely from members of the trade unions to campaign for expanded suffrage, including lodgers not on poor relief (Cowling 1967: 247). These three groups organized numerous talks in medium-size towns and cities throughout England. Their members included journalists as well as elected politicians, and so their views were widely reported in the press throughout the country.

After three decades, constitutional reform was again part of the mainstream political agenda, and there is evidence that changes in taxes were part of the bargaining over suffrage. Consider, for example this excerpt from a letter from Palmerston to Queen Victoria on January 27, 1861:

If Mr Gladstone were to propose a democratic budget making a great transfer of burdens from indirect **to direct taxation**, and if, the Cabinet refusing its concurrence, Mr Gladstone were to retire, the Conservative Party would **give the [Queen’s] Government substantial support** except in the case of the Government wishing to take an active part in war against Austria. ... by the end of that time [of Conservative governance] the country, it might be hoped, would be prepared for a **good and real Reform Bill...**

The Second Electoral Reform of 1867

In the 1865 elections, there was a changing of the guard as a new generation of members entered the House of Commons and leadership posts were passed on to a new generation of leaders. Earl Russell with the assistance of Gladstone formed a liberal reform government, with the support of Whigs (right liberals), liberals, and radicals (left liberals).

Early in 1866 Russell proposed a major reform expanding the national suffrage laws substantially beyond that of 1832, although less than advocated by many reform groups. The

¹⁸⁸ Gladstone normally argued for a limited expansion of suffrage, to include those “fit” to participate in national politics. For example, in the House of Commons on May 1864, he suggested that: “every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the constitution. [That is to say,] fitness for the franchise, when it shown to exist—as I say that it is shown to exist in the case of a select portion of the working class—is not repelled on sufficient grounds from the portals of the Constitution by the allegation that things are well as they are” (quoted in LeMay 1979: 184).

Russell-Gladstone reform bill obtained a slim majority in the House of Commons on its first reading—one that was much smaller than anticipated because of large-scale defections among Whig MPs (who by the standards of this period were right liberals). The bill failed on its second reading (after amendment) in the face of conservative and Whig opposition. Parliament was recessed, and during the recess, the Reform League and Working Men’s Association organized large-scale demonstrations in favor of expanding the suffrage throughout the country, including several large and occasionally disorderly demonstrations within London (Cowling 1967: 11–12; Smith 1966:135, 160).¹⁸⁹

The Russell cabinet resigned without requesting new elections, and the queen asked the leader of the conservative opposition, Derby, to form a new government. A new cabinet was formed in 1867 with the assistance of Disraeli. The new government was a right of center coalition of conservatives and conservative Whigs in the House of Commons (the “Cave” faction of right liberals). As in 1832, there was again royal support for suffrage reform. In her speech to parliament and in subsequent letters to Derby, the Queen Victoria insisted that electoral reform should be addressed by the new government (Smith 1966: 135).

The Disraeli reform proposals were in some respects more liberal than those rejected in the previous year, but were crafted at the margins to benefit conservative electoral interests in light of demographic research (Machin 2001: 65).

Three suffrage issues were addressed by the Derby-Disraeli reforms: extension of suffrage for national elections, a modest redistribution of boundaries and seats in the House of Commons, and suffrage extension in the towns (boroughs) for local elections beyond that for national elections. (i) The borough franchise was expanded beyond the level sought by the Liberals to include renters (who might be influenced by their conservative landlords). *Renters* of £12 properties were now eligible to vote in the boroughs and residency requirements in the towns and villages were reduced from three years to one year. Ownership requirements for suffrage in the counties were reduced

¹⁸⁹ One of the demonstrations is often referred to as the Hyde Park Riot. The riot began as a peaceful march, but involved an unlawful trespass in Hyde Park and some destruction of park property. The police tried to disburse the 20,000-person crowd, at which point a riot ensued. The police were rebuffed with sticks and stones. Several dozen demonstrators and policemen were injured in the fray. One policeman subsequently died from injuries. The cavalry was called out, and the crowd disbursed. The demonstrators were not entirely political, nor surly revolutionists, as the demonstrators played games and climbed trees throughout the park. All this took place within sight of Disraeli’s apartment, which may have contributed to the demonstrators’ influence. Mrs. Disraeli reported that “the people in general seem to be thoroughly enjoying themselves” (Smith 1966: 129–131, 135).

from £15 to £12. (ii) The boundaries of boroughs were expanded to shift liberals from county electorates, where suffrage remained subject to a higher property restriction. Only 30 seats from the smallest districts were redistributed, and only about half went to boroughs. After a good deal of debate and amendment, the bill was passed by a coalition of radical liberals and conservatives over the opposition of mainstream liberals, who objected to the conservative biases in Disraeli's bill.¹⁹⁰

The second reform bill of 1867 nearly doubled the electorate, increasing it from just more than a million in 1866 to just under two million in England, and from 1.35 million to 2.48 million in the United Kingdom as a whole (out of a population of 30 million).

The wealth and tax thresholds for voting were lowered more in the boroughs (town and urban districts) than in the counties. Borough electorates rose from 600,000 to 1.43 million, while those in the counties rose from 758,000 to just over a million (Smith 1966: 236). Although the borough seats became more representative in the sense that a broader cross-section of society could vote, boroughs did not have representation in the House of Commons that was proportional to their populations. The 19 largest boroughs with a combined population of 5 million returned 46 MPs, while the 68 smallest boroughs with an aggregate population of 420,000 returned 68 MPs (Smith 1966: 240).

The "advanced" (left) liberals from the industrial midland and northern boroughs had obtained increased suffrage, but not increased representation, while the country gentry were protected from a substantial increase in electoral competition. About one in eight persons living in boroughs were eligible to vote after the reforms, but only about one in 15 persons residing in counties.¹⁹¹ The conservative advantage in the counties was evident in subsequent elections (although they won majorities in Commons only in 1874). In 1874, the conservatives received 38.32 percent of the votes cast in England and Wales, which elected 154 MPs. The Liberals received only about 1 percent fewer votes, 37.39 percent, but elected only 101 MPs (Smith 1966: 225).

The expansion of suffrage further increased the importance of partisan organizations for election campaigns and, consequently, also increased party discipline, which pushed British politics

¹⁹⁰ One of the many proposed amendments that was rejected was sponsored by J. S. Mill, who attempted to replace the word "man" with the word "person" throughout the suffrage bills, which would have expanded suffrage to women. Mill's women's suffrage proposal received only 73 votes in support (Smith 1966: 204).

¹⁹¹ The expansion of suffrage in Scotland and Irish counties was passed in separate bills in 1868 and was more substantial, although the final fraction of voters was smaller than in England and Wales, 1 in 24 and 1 in 26 respectively (Smith 1966: 239). These ratios include women and children.

and parliamentary voting patterns toward their modern partisan forms. In 1860 only about 58.9 percent of liberals voted with their party leaders in the cabinet and only about 63.0 percent of conservatives routinely opposed them. By 1881, 83.2 percent of the liberals supported their party leaders on critical votes and 87.9 percent of conservatives. Party-line voting reached the 90 percent level in both parties in the following decade (LeMay 1979: 178, Stephens and Brady 1976).

The Third Electoral Reform of 1884-85

The reform act of 1867 reduced, but did not eliminate the disproportionate representation that had long characterized the House of Commons. In terms of population, the ratio between the largest and smallest district of a member of parliament was about 250 to 1. Together with the wealth tax requirements, the distribution of seats in the House of Commons allowed the landed gentry to retain disproportionate influence within government, even as the importance of land holdings per se decreased. Electoral districts were rooted in historic town-county divisions and larger towns and counties had multiple representatives (normally two or three) elected simultaneously in district elections. The House of Lords continued to be populated by nobles and senior church officials.

Moderate and left-liberal organizations lobbied for further reforms. In the late nineteenth century, they were joined by labor unions, whose policy agendas normally included support for suffrage expansion. The secret ballot was introduced in 1872.

In 1884 the liberal government of Gladstone proposed a significant increase in the franchise by placing county voters under the same rules adopted for the towns in 1867. The conservatives were opposed to this reform, unless it was combined with a redistribution of seats to protect “their” seats. There were speeches throughout the country on the issue, and the queen encouraged conservative and liberal leaders to find a compromise. As had always been the case, assembling simultaneous majorities in a liberal House of Commons and conservative House of Lords was a nontrivial task that required a good deal of negotiation, bargaining, and compromise (Chadwick 1976, McLean 2001: 79–83, Machin 2001: 94–102).

In the end, a compromise was worked out in which two separate bills would be adopted (one extending the franchise and one redrawing electoral district lines and reallocating seats). The second reading of the redistribution bill took place in the House of Commons on December 4, 1884, and the franchise bill passed Lords on December 5 (Chadwick 1976, Machin 2001: 97).

A variety of possibilities had been discussed before the final agreement, including: a shift to single-member districts, proportional representation, and women’s suffrage, but these more radical

reforms were rejected in favor of more modest reforms. The proposed redistribution bill was read in the House of Commons in December 1884, and the boundaries, which were partially settled by bargaining among leaders, would be finalized by a boundary commission in early 1885. The boundary commissions' proposal would be voted on in the House of Commons soon after the report was made (Chadwick 1976, Machin 2001: 97).

The new districts were to be linked to population, rather than historical town and county boundaries. There would be more single-member districts, although multiple-member districts were retained. New districts were developed on a more uniform basis for Scotland, Ireland, and England for the first time. Towns with populations less than 15,000 would be merged into county districts. The ratio between the largest and smallest districts shrank to 8:1, one fortieth of their previous ratio.

The 1884 suffrage bill extended suffrage in the countryside without very much affecting the urban electorate, which enfranchised a broad cross-section of the rural middle and working class. The redistribution of seats (mostly accomplished by creating new seats) gave somewhat greater weight to urban voters in subsequent parliaments. The electorate again nearly doubled in size to about 5.5 million voters (Machin 2001: 97). About two-thirds of adult men had the franchise—essentially all male heads of households that met residency requirements.

G. Parliamentary Democracy Emerges 1906–28

British politics at the end of the nineteenth century was very different from that at its beginning. The shift to parliamentary dominance was essentially complete, with partisan cabinets and with the center of parliamentary authority increasingly in the elected chamber of parliament. Suffrage had expanded from less than 10 percent of adult males to more than 60 percent. This was a more restrictive suffrage than in several other European countries in 1900, but comparable to most countries undergoing liberal reforms in the nineteenth century. The electoral reforms had made British electoral politics more competitive and the House of Commons more representative of the average person's interest than it had ever been before. Corruption and vote buying had been reduced by several pieces of legislation, including the 1883 parliamentary elections (corrupt and illegal practices) bill. Political parties had emerged as increasingly modern and disciplined organizations, although they had not entirely taken their contemporary form.

The distribution of election districts were more equal than in the past, although there were still a large number of relatively small districts. The larger districts selected several MPs simultaneously. Graduates of the major universities also had plural votes in that they could vote for university

representatives and in any district in which they met wealth and residency requirements. Wealthy persons had “plural votes” in that they could vote in any district in which they met wealth and residency (property) requirements. About 10 percent of the electorate had plural votes (Morris 1921: 10).

The hereditary House of Lords retained veto power on legislation, which tended to bias legislative results and constitutional reforms in conservative directions. The sovereign formally retained considerable authority, but most of it had long been informally ceded to parliament. The sovereign, however, as a popular, well-informed participant in political life, could influence policies through public statements, access to the elites in the Houses of Lords and Commons, and contacts with other European sovereigns and influential families. The sovereign also retained the right of “elevation” through which new member of Lords could be created, which gave the king or queen an indirect veto over the House of Lords—although one that could not be exercised routinely. The latter had played a role in the reforms of 1832 and would again play a role in constitutional reform in 1911.

Many of the new rural voters were culturally conservative and supported the expansion of the British Empire during this period, which gave conservative parties considerable support within the newly enfranchised middle class (McLean 2001: 100–101). The reforms of 1885 together with disagreements within the Liberal coalition on “home rule” for the Irish shifted control of the House of Commons to conservatives for most of the next two decades.

Few significant constitutional reforms were proposed in this period, although universal male suffrage and freer trade remained goals for many liberal reform groups. The British women’s suffrage movement came to its own in that period. The labor movement became more politically active towards the end of the century. A new labor party was added to the mix of liberal and conservative coalitions, and an Irish coalition labored for greater independence (home rule), although relatively few Labor MPs were elected before 1918. (Liberal and labor parties coordinated their campaigns for several elections prior to 1918.). Smaller groups lobbied for proportional representation.

In 1906 the liberals won parliamentary elections to an extent not seen since 1832, based partly on constitutional issues. Four hundred liberals were elected, which along with the support of 40 members of labor and 83 Irish nationalists gave them a large supermajority in the 670 member House of Commons. The House of Lords, however, with a large conservative hereditary majority

continued to oppose liberal legislation and constitutional reforms, such as ending plural voting in the counties (which tended to favor conservatives).

In 1909 the House of Lords vetoed the budget for the national government, after several decades of deference to the House of Commons on budgetary matters (LeMay 1979: 189–192; Machin 2001: 129). The bill included new taxes on inherited wealth and introduced the principle of progressive taxation, which directly threatened conservative and aristocratic interests (Lang 1999: 137–38). This was not the first House of Lords veto of legislation passed in the House of Commons in the twentieth century, but it led to new elections and a series of major constitutional reforms. The most important of these was a major reduction in the authority of the House of Lords, which cleared the way for many of the major reforms that followed.

As in 1832, the king supported liberal proposals from the House of Commons by threatening to add liberals to the House of Lords until the measure passed. The 1911 constitutional reform reduced the influence of the House of Lords from an absolute veto to the ability to temporarily block bills favored by the House of Commons (for up to three years). Although this compromise did not completely end bicameralism, it ended nearly five centuries of formal equality between the Houses of Commons and Lords on legislation, and created a new very asymmetric bicameralism that assured the continued dominance of the House of Commons¹⁹²

By removing a long-standing veto player with predictable conservative interests, this constitutional reform potentially opened the door to many other reforms, although such reforms did not immediately take place. Minor reforms such as the end of plural voting were vetoed (delayed) by the House of Lords for the next few years, while others such as women's suffrage were delayed within the House of Commons (Morris 1921: 85–117). World War I naturally caused public and parliamentary attention to be shifted to foreign affairs and away from constitutional reform issues.

The end of the war, however, combined with the new constitutional procedures created new opportunities for reform. The term of the 1910 parliament had been extended beyond the normal limit, because of its role in managing the war. This allowed the House of Lords to play a significant role in the constitutional negotiations. The Lords ability to delay proposed reforms meant that some reforms could not be adopted by the first “long parliament” of the twentieth century.

¹⁹² It bears noting that such inter-parliament conflicts had been less frequent before 1866, because the House of Commons had been less liberal and more members of that chamber had been members of noble families, on noble payrolls, or supported by them in other ways (Sack 1980).

A broad package of constitutional reforms was introduced at the end of the great war, the details of which reflected a good deal of bargaining among Liberal and Conservative party leaders during the war (Morris 1929: 113–99). The Representation of the People Act of 1918 included another major expansion of suffrage, another redistribution of seats in parliaments among districts, and a reduction of plural voting (to a maximum of two members of parliament). Essentially all adult men over the age of 21, except those on poor relief or with criminal records, and women over the age of 30 were now entitled to vote. The new electorate more than doubled, increasing from 8 million to more than 21 million (Morgan 2001: 592.).

Proportional voting for the seats in the large urban multiple-member districts was finally rejected as a compromise between the Houses of Lords and Commons (Machin 2001: 146). Perhaps surprisingly, the number of university seats in the House of Commons was increased from 9 to 15, and graduates from several relatively new universities were given the right to cast votes for university seats, which were normally conservative ones at that time (Morris 1921: 197–200).¹⁹³

H. Conclusion: Parliamentary Democracy in the U.K. Emerged through Constitutional Bargaining and Reform

The English parliament emerged in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries from earlier forms of the king and council architecture. During most of its first three centuries, parliamentary power ebbed and flowed with the king's need for new tax revenues and the bargaining skills of parliamentary leaders. Only the veto power the parliament on new taxes continued essentially uninterrupted. Other protections and powers were obtained by various parliaments and then lost or ignored according to the interests and ambitions of the king or queen of the day. Parliaments were called and dismissed by the Sovereign and were normally called only when the Sovereign needed additional revenues (subsidies) from parliament. Medieval parliaments, consequently, met irregularly and for relatively short periods. The power of the medieval English parliament was nontrivial, but very limited by contemporary standards.

¹⁹³ The parliamentary seats for Oxford and Cambridge Universities date to the thirteenth century, when Henry III granted these towns monopolies in higher education (Brooke, Highfield and Swaan 1988: 56). Their monopolies ended in the early nineteenth century when a handful of new universities were founded, as with University College in London (1826), King's College London (1829) and the University of Durham (1832). Several polytechnic universities were founded in the late nineteenth century. (Five other universities existed in Ireland and Scotland.)

A gradual shift of policymaking authority from the king to the parliament began at the end of the seventeenth century, during the reign of William III. This is nearly a century earlier than in most of the other countries focused on in this book and reflects unusual opportunities for constitutional exchange between William III and parliament in the decade after William and Mary's accession to their royal offices. These changes, and a series of somewhat disengaged sovereigns in the first half of the eighteenth century allowed parliament and cabinet ministers to gain additional authority¹⁹⁴

Trends in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries Favored Parliament

The center of policymaking power did not shift back to the sovereign as it had on previous occasions. Instead, parliament continued to bargain for and to obtain additional authority over public policy. More or less stable political factions of MPs emerged in both chambers toward the end of the seventeenth century as noted in chapter 12 (Hayton 2002; Hill 1996: ch. 2); however these voting blocks did not account for the whole of parliament, nor were these voting blocks organized in the contemporary manner. Relatively few elections were contested, MPs were unpaid, and MPs attended parliament more or less at their convenience. Being a member of parliament was not a full-time salaried position.

The lack of party discipline and professionalism, along with the preponderance of uncontested elections, allowed patronage to affect the balance of power (Field 2002: 140–41). The sovereign, consequently, continued to have significant influence over electoral outcomes to the House of Commons. For example, the Whigs took power shortly after George I's accession to the Sovereign, in part, because George only appointed Whigs to senior positions in government. The Whigs remained largely in control until George III's accession in 1760, who was less favorably disposed toward partisan politics in general and to Whigs in particular than his grandfather and great grandfather had been. Under George III, the Tories assumed power for the first time in 50 years.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Queen Anne (1702–14), whose succession was an unexpected consequence of the 1689 Bill of Rights, which elevated her above her father and brother, had lived in Denmark with her husband for many years before inheriting the crown, was not trained for leadership, and often suffered from ill health. The first two Hanoverian kings, George I and II (1714–60) were, like William, foreign born. George I spoke German rather than English at court and was at least as interested in political developments in Hanover and the Holy Roman Empire, as in the United Kingdom. George III controlled the course of policy on many occasions, he was mentally ill and incapacitated during several periods of his long reign (1760–1820).

¹⁹⁵ In his words, George III wanted to “put an end to those unhappy distinctions of party called

Continued on next page...

Neither the party system, nor cabinet governance had yet emerged. Nonetheless, the sovereign could not always control electoral outcomes, nor the members elected. Shifts in the composition of the House of Commons, thus, somewhat limited the king's choice of ministers and, thereby, affected the ordinary course of public policy. Men like Walpole and Pitt who could deliver majorities in parliament (using the king's patronage) became powerful and influential statesman.¹⁹⁶

In the nineteenth century, trends favoring parliament continued and strengthened. A series of reforms to suffrage law, tax law, and to the national bureaucracy made the House of Commons substantially independent of the sovereign at the same time that the interests represented in Commons became more commercial and liberal. Shifts in finance, new demands for government services and reform, and the need for reliable majorities in parliament induced kings and queens to appoint members of the leading parties of the House of Commons to posts in the executive cabinet.

This gradually shifted effective control domestic policy and foreign policy to the House of Commons.

Independence of Suffrage and Parliamentary Authority

From 1689–1860, parliament's authority expanded without significantly expanding suffrage. This demonstrates that it is possible to have parliamentary rule without highly contested elections or broad suffrage. The determinants of suffrage reform, as hypothesized in chapters 7 and 8, evidently differ from those that determine the balance of authority between kings and parliaments. Groups outside of government pressed for constitutional and other reforms, as had often been the case in previous centuries, but the nineteenth century interest groups were more successful than previous centuries. New technologies for organizing and coordinating demonstrations were available, and new economic and ideological support for suffrage expansion emerged, which made constitutional bargains on suffrage possible.

Whigs and Tories by declaring that I would countenance every man that supported *my* Administration.” Quoted in Hill 1996: 105–106. He proceeded to appoint his nonpartisan tutor, the Earl of Brute to be his chief minister. The king, true to his word, subsequently appointed men who would put king over party, both Tories and Whigs, to posts in his administration (Hill 1996: 106).

¹⁹⁶ The term prime minister was coined with Robert Walpole in mind; however, this title was not meant as a complement, but as an insult composed by Walpole's enemies (Field 2002: 145). Perhaps, Walpole appeared to be too deferential to George I and II. Walpole was not, of course, the first minister in English history to have had a great effect on English public policy, but he was the first to do so in the post-William III era when parliamentary majorities played a more important role in policy formation. Robert Walpole is often regarded as the first Prime Minister of Great Britain. He led the majority in the House of Commons from 1721–42.

Constitutional Bargaining, Rather than Revolutions

The constitutional bargains struck reflected the political interests of those engaged in negotiations, which were partly induced by preexisting political institutions and partly grounded in their evolving ideological and economic interests. The interests represented in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords changed as industrialization took place and as liberal ideology penetrated into the highest levels of government. There were many lobbying groups, petitions, and mass demonstration in support of constitutional reform, but no credible or immediate threats of revolution. Institutions were not ignored or destroyed by revolutionary constitutional negotiations, but rather were reformed a little at a time using standing procedures for intra-governmental negotiation and reform. There is evidence of compromise and bargaining in every reform. Most reforms were modest, and most remained in place for several decades at a time.

Through a long series of reforms, parliament gradually obtained complete control over public policy. Cabinets became increasingly determined by the electoral outcomes and majority parties in the House of Commons. Suffrage gradually expanded and by 1930 was essentially universal.

Most of these reforms took place at approximately the same time that they were occurring in the other European kingdoms, largely between 1825 and 1925—a period in which manufacturing and commerce replaced agriculture as the main source of wealth and in which liberal ideas and reformers favored increasingly open political and economic systems.

Table 13: Major Constitutional Developments in English Constitutional History

Date	Event	Description
1215	Magna Carta	Establishes right to jury trial, and Council of Barons (including bishops and abbots) with veto power of new taxes
1265	Montefort Parliaments	Invites four knights from each shire (county) to his first parliament. Two burgesses from every major town are also included in his second parliament.
1414	Equality of Commons and Lords	Proclamation of Henry V that laws be adopted with the assent of both the Houses of Commons and Lords
1429	Election Law Statute	49 shilling franchise established in the shires (counties), allowing 5 percent of adult males to vote for shire representatives to the House of Commons.
1445	Election Law Statute	Boroughs to have two elected representatives each, who must be residents and possess the wealth of a knight (or squire).
1489		Court decision holds that legislation requires the assent of both the Houses of Lords and Commons.
1533	Act of Appeals	Appeals by ecclesiastical courts to the Pope eliminated (makes the Sovereign the final level of appeal in both secular and religious courts).
1534	Act of Supremacy	Sovereign as head of English Church (rather than Pope), creation of Anglican Church
1534	First Act of Secession	Parliament passes and the king accepts rules for future accession to the Sovereign. (The rules were suggested by the king.)
1536	Bill for the Dissolution of the Lessor Houses	Dissolution of smaller monasteries with all their assets turned over to the Sovereign. Abbots and priors are subsequently removed from the House of Lords, ending the majority of the "Lords Spiritual."
1536	Union of Wales and England	English law extended to Wales, 24 Welsh MPs join Parliament.
1641	First Triennial Act	Parliament to be called at least once every three years, will be "self-calling" if the Sovereign fails to issue writs
1641	Act Against Dissolution	Forbids the king from unilaterally dissolving Parliament
1642–60	Civil War and Commonwealth	Period of parliamentary rule (by a subset of the 1641 Parliament) followed by the authoritarian rule of Cromwell
1660	Breda Proclamation	Restoration of parliamentary monarchy: England returns to constitution of August 1641 (prior to Act Against Dissolution)
1664	Second Triennial Act	Requires parliaments to be called at least once every three years, but eliminates the self-calling provision.
1673	The Test Act	Forbids Catholics and dissenters (mostly Presbyterians and Puritans) from holding public office
1689	Bill of Rights	William and Mary offered joint sovereignty, right to jury trial affirmed, right of free speech in Parliament affirmed, forbids a standing army in peace time, and excludes Catholics from the Sovereign.
1694	Third Triennial Act	Modifies the previous Triennial Act. A meeting of Parliament is required at least once every three years, and the maximum duration of Parliament is set at three years
1689-1702	Precedents of William III	Annual tax bills, earmarked taxes, earmarked budgets, audit of Sovereign accounts, parliamentary consultation on military and foreign affairs, Bank of England is established.
1698	Civil List Act	Provides William III with additional tax sources for life, but caps the new revenues at £700,000/year, beyond which approval of Parliament is required.
1701	Act of Settlement	Advances the Hanovers in the line of secession (as the nearest Protestants), future kings and queens can only leave Great Britain with permission from Parliament, MPs are forbidden from being on the royal payroll.
1706	Regency Act	Provides for a regent council after Queen Anne's death, naturalized all Protestant Hanoverian successors. It also weakens the 1701 provision regarding MPs on the royal payroll. MPs may now take paid positions, but must stand for reelection after taking a new position.
1707	Union of Scotland and England	Scottish Parliament abolished, 45 Scottish members join the "English" House of Commons and nine elected peers join the House of Lords.
1711	Property Qualification Act	County representatives to the House of Commons (knights) required to have 600 pounds of income per year and town representatives (burgesses) 300 pounds per year.
1716	Septennial Act	Modifies the Third Triennial Act, by setting the maximum duration of Parliament at seven years.
1801	Union with Ireland	The Irish Parliament is abolished, 100 Irish MPs join the "English" House of Commons, and 32 new peers join the House of Lords.
1828	Repeal of the Test Act	Allows Catholics and dissenting Protestants to run for office and hold appointed positions in government

Perfecting Parliament

1829	Catholic Emancipation Act	Allows Catholics to sit in Parliament.
1832	Great Reform Bill	Major reform of the House of Commons: the borough franchise is made uniform, which doubles the franchise from 10 to 20 percent of male voters; and seats are redistributed from very small boroughs to the new industrial centers and counties.
1833		Slavery outlawed in the British Empire
1835	Municipal Corporations Act	Replaces 178 unelected corporate borough governments with elected town councils. Extends local franchise to all male taxpayers with a three-year residency, mandates poor relief.
1859		Repeal of wealth qualification for members of parliaments.
1867	Second Reform Act	Approximately doubles franchise for parliamentary elections by extending the vote to all male property owners; redistribution of seats; expansion of borough boundaries; ends requirement of new elections for member of parliaments who take or change posts in the government.
1869	Municipal Franchise Act	Extends right to vote in municipal elections to women taxpayers.
1872	Ballot Act	Secret ballot introduced for parliamentary elections
1883	Corrupt Practices Act	Places limits on election expenditures by candidates according to a schedule that varies by size of electorate.
1884	Third Reform Act	Extends the franchise to occupants (renters) of properties worth more than 10 pounds per annum.
1885	Redistribution of Seats Act	Reallocates seats, and divides most of the remaining two-seat boroughs to establish single-member districts.
1911	Parliamentary Act	Eliminates the House of Lords' veto power (House of Lords can only delay legislation for two years). It also revises the Septennial Act so that the maximum term of Parliament is limited to five-year terms, members of Parliament receive salaries for the first time.
1918	Fourth Reform Act: Representation of the People Act	Universal suffrage for men older than 21 and for women older than 30 (with some minor residency restrictions); polls to be held on the same day; free postage for candidate mail associated with elections.
1918	Redistribution Act	Increases the size of the House of Commons, formally adopts principle of equal-sized districts, and redistributes seats accordingly.
1922	Irish Free State Act	Irish Parliament re-established, Irish MPs no longer called, except those from Northern Ireland.
1928	Equal Franchise Act	Women's suffrage put on same basis as men's suffrage (21 years of age).
1948	Representation of the People Act	The remaining two-member constituencies are eliminated (12), as are the university seats; redistribution of seats.
1949	Parliament Act	Delaying ability of House of Lords further reduced to one year for legislation
1958	Life Peerage Act	Provides for the creation of life peers and allows women to sit in the House of Lords.
1973		United Kingdom joins the European Union, confirmed by national referendum in 1975 (67.2 percent yea).
1981	Representation of the People Act	Disqualifies those serving prison sentences of more than 12 months in the United Kingdom from serving in the House of Commons.
1998	Registration of Political Parties Act	Political parties are required to register names (to prevent attempts to confuse the electorate).
1999	Devolution of Powers	Substantial decentralization of policymaking to Wales and Scotland. First elections to the "new" Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.
1999	House of Lords Act	Restricts the number of hereditary memberships in the House of Lords to 92.

Sources: Morgan (2001), Field (2002), Rallings and Thrasher (2000), and Stephenson and Marcham (1938). See also *A Brief Chronology of the House of Commons*, House of Commons, 2002.