

Charles I

His Majesties Answer to the Nineteen Propositions of Both Houses of Parliament

(1642)

... We call to God to witness that, as for our subjects' sake these rights are vested in us, so for their sakes, as well as for our own, we are resolved not to quit them, nor to subvert (though in a parliamentary way) the ancient, equal, happy, well-poised, and never enough commended Constitution of the Government of this Kingdom; nor to make ourself of a king of England, a duke of Venice; and this of a kingdom, a republic.

There being three kinds of government among men (absolute monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy), and all these having their particular conveniences and inconveniences, the experience and wisdom of your ancestors has so moulded this out of a mixture of these as to give to this kingdom (as far as human prudence can provide) the conveniences of all three, without the inconveniences of anyone, as long as the balance hangs even between the three states, and they run jointly on in their proper channel (begetting verdure and fertility in the meadows on both sides), and the overflowing of either on either side raise no deluge or inundation. The ill of absolute monarchy is tyranny; the ill of aristocracy is faction and division; the ills of democracy are tumults, violence and licentiousness. The good of monarchy is the uniting a nation under one head to resist invasion from abroad and insurrection at home; the good of aristocracy is the conjunction of council in the ablest persons of a state for the public benefit; the good of democracy is liberty, and the courage and industry which liberty begets.

In this kingdom, the laws are jointly made by a king, by a house of peers, and by a house of commons chosen by the people, all having free votes and particular privileges. The government, according to these laws, is trusted to the king. Power of treaties, of war and peace; of making peers, of choosing officers and counsellors for state, judges for law, commanders for forts and castles; giving commissions for raising men to make war abroad, or to prevent or provide against invasions or insurrections at home; benefit of confiscations, power of pardoning, and some more of the like kind, are placed in the king. And this kind of regulated monarchy, having this power to preserve that authority, without which it would be disabled to preserve the laws in their force, and the subjects in their liberties and properties, is intended to draw to him such a respect and relation from the great ones as may hinder the ills of division and faction; and such a fear and reverence from the people as may hinder tumults, violence, and licentiousness.

Again, that the prince may not make use of this high and perpetual power to the hurt of those for whose good he has it, and make use of the name of public necessity for the gain of his private favourites and followers to the detriment of his people, the House of Commons (an excellent conserver of liberty, but never intended for any share in government, or the choosing of them that should govern) is solely entrusted with the first propositions concerning the levies of moneys (which is the sinews as well of peace as of war), and the impeaching of those who, for their own ends, though countenanced by any surreptitiously gotten command of the king, have violated that law which he is bound (when he knows it) to protect; and to the protection of which they were bound to advise him, at least not to serve him in the contrary. And the lords, being trusted with a judicatory power are an excellent screen and bank between the prince and people, to assist each against any encroachments of the other, and by just judgements to preserve that law which ought to be the rule of every one of the three. For the better enabling them in this, beyond the examples of any of our ancestors, we were willingly contented to oblige our self both to call a parliament every three years, and not to dissolve it in fifty days, and for the present exigency, the better to raise money, and avoid the pressure (no less grievous to us than them) our people must have suffered by a longer continuance of so vast a charge as two great armies, and for their greater certainty of having sufficient time to remedy the inconveniences arisen during so long an absence of parliaments, and for the punishment of the causers and ministers of them, we yielded up our right of dissolving this parliament, expecting an extraordinary moderation from it, in gratitude for so unexampled a grace, and little looking that any malignant party should be encouraged or enabled to have persuaded them, first

to countenance the injustices and indignities we have endured, and then, by a new way of satisfaction for what was taken from us, to demand of us at once to confirm what was so taken, and to give up almost all the rest.

Since, therefore, the power legally placed in both houses is more than-sufficient to prevent and restrain the power of tyranny, and, without the power which is now asked from us, we shall not be able to discharge that trust which is the end of monarchy; since this would be a total subversion of the fundamental laws and that excellent constitution of this kingdom which has made this nation so many years both famous and happy to a great degree of envy; since to the power of punishing (which is already in your hands according to law) if the power of preferring be added, we shall have nothing left for us but to look on; since the encroaching of one of these states upon the power of the other is unhappy in the effects, both to them and all the rest; since this power of at most a joint government in us with our counsellors (or rather our guardians) will return us to the worst kind of minority, and make us desppicable both at home and abroad, and beget eternal factions and dissensions (as destructive to public happiness as war) both in the chosen, and the houses that choose them, and the people who choose the choosers; since so new a power will undoubtedly intoxicate persons who were not born to it, and beget not only divisions among them as equals, but in them contempt of us, as become an equal to them, and insolence and injustice towards our people, as now so much their inferiors, which will be the more grievous unto them, as suffering from those who were so lately of a nearer degree to themselves, and being to have redress only from those that placed them, and fearing they may be inclined to preserve what they have made, both out of kindness and policy; since all great changes are extremely inconvenient, and almost infallibly beget yet greater changes, which beget yet greater inconveniences.

Since as great an one in the church must follow this of the kingdom, since the second estate would in all probability follow the fate of the first, and by some of the same turbulent spirits jealousies would be soon raised against them, and the like propositions for reconciliation of differences would be then sent to them as they now have joined to send to us, till (all power being vested in the House of Commons, and their number making them incapable of transacting affairs of state with the necessary secrecy and expedition, those being retrusted to some close committee) at last the common people (who in the mean time must be flattered, and to whom license must be given in all their wild humours, how contrary soever to established law, or their own real good) discover this *arcanum imperii*, that all this was done by them, but not for them, grow weary of journey-work, and set up for themselves, call parity and independence liberty, devour that estate which had devoured the rest; destroy all rights and properties, all distinctions of families and merit; and by this means this splendid and excellently distinguished form of government end in a dark equal chaos of confusion, and the long line of our many noble ancestors in a Jack Cade, or a Wat Tyler.

For all these reasons to all these demands our answer is *nolumus leges Angliae mutari*; but this we promise, that we will be as careful of preserving the laws in what is supposed to concern wholly our subjects, as in what most concerns our self. For, indeed, we profess to believe that the preservation of every law concerns us, those of obedience being not secure when those of protection are violated; and we being most of any injured in the least violation of that by which we enjoy the highest rights and greatest benefits, and are therefore obliged to defend no less by our interest than by our duty, and hope that no jealousies to the contrary shall be any longer nourished in any of our good people by the subtle insinuations and secret practices of men who, for private ends, are disaffected to our honour and safety, and the peace and prosperity of our people. . . .