**Oliver Cromwell and the Interregnum, 1649-1660**

**The Problem of Divine-Right Monarchy**

The next eleven years are known as the Interregnum, the interval between two monarchical reigns.

From the start, the Commonwealth was a dictatorship of a radical minority come to power through the tight organization of the New Model Army led by Oliver Cromwell. From the star, Cromwell dominated the new government. He was a patriotic Englishman, strong-minded, stubborn, but by no means unwilling to compromise, Cromwell was nevertheless a prisoner of his position.

Cromwell faced a divided England, where the majority was “royalist” at heart and certainly sick of the fighting, the confiscations, the endless confusing changes of the last decade. He faced a hostile Scotland and an even more hostile Ireland. Disorder in England had encouraged the Catholic Irish to rebel once more in 1649. In 1650 Charles II, eldest son of the martyred Charles I, landed in Scotland, accepted the Presbyterian faith, and led a Scottish army against the English.

Once more the English army proved unbeatable, and young Charles took refuge on the Continent after a romantic escape in disguise. Cromwell then faced a war with Holland (1652-1654) brought on by a law which forbade the importation of goods into England and the colonies except in English ships or in ships of the country producing the imported goods, thus striking at the Dutch carrying trade.

In time Cromwell mastered nearly all his foes.

* He himself went to Ireland and suppressed the rebellion with extreme bloodshed. In the so-called Cromwellian Settlement of 1652-1654, he dispossessed rebel Irish landholders in favor of Protestants, achieving order in Ireland but not peace.
* He brought the naval war with the Dutch to a victorious close in 1654.
* Later Cromwell also waged an aggressive war against the Spanish (1656-1658), from whom the English acquired the rich Caribbean sugar island of Jamaica. Even in time of troubles, the British Empire kept growing.

Cromwell, however, could not master the Parliament, which brushed aside his suggestions for an increase in its membership and a reform of its procedures. In April 1653 he forced its dissolution by appearing in Parliament with a body of soldiers. In December he took the decisive step of inaugurating the regime called the

Protectorate, with himself as lord protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and with a written constitution, the only one Britain has ever had: the Instrument of Government.

This new Instrument of Government provided for a Parliament with a single house of 460 members, who were chosen solely by Puritan sympathizers since no royalist dared vote. Even so, the lord protector had constant troubles with his Parliament, and in 1657 he yielded to pressure and modified the Instrument to provide for a second parliamentary house and to put limits on the lord protector’s power. Meanwhile, to maintain order, Cromwell had divided the country into twelve military districts, each commanded by a major general.

Oliver Cromwell died in 1658 and was succeeded as lord protector by his son Richard. The army soon seized control, and some of its leaders regarded the restoration of the Stuarts as the best way to end the chronic political uprising.

To ensure the legality of the move, the commander of the Protectorate’s forces in Scotland, summoned back the old parliament (who had royalists in it) and in 1660 Charles Stuart accepted an invitation to return from exile and reign as Charles II.

**[Oliver Cromwell and the Interregnum](http://www.mrprokop.net/resources.cfm?subpage=1682139)**

1. What does the term "interregnum" mean?

2. What did Cromwell have that made him able to control the new Commonwealth?

3. Why were there rebellions in Ireland and Scotland?

4. What did Charles II do to try and regain control of the monarchy for his family?

5. Why did England go to war with Holland? Explain

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6. Describe how Cromwell resolved all of the issues in Ireland, Holland, and Spain.

7. What did he eventually do to resolve his problems with Parliament?

8. What did the *Instrument of Government* do?

9. How was Cromwell able to maintain order throughout England?

10. What changes made Parliament ask Charles to come back and be the King of England?