

REPORT ON ENGLAND

Don Alonso de Cárdenas, Spanish Ambassador to the Commonwealth (1644–1655)

to Felipe IV (1605–1665), King of Spain (1621–1665)

London, 18 February 1650

In my dispatch of the 12th of this month, I informed Your Majesty of the melancholy end of the King of Great Britain. I have reserved for my present letter an explanation of the turn which the affairs of this country are likely to take. The general opinion is that the monarchical government will give place to a popular government, by the establishment of a republic, the plan of which, as I have been assured, has already been prepared for some time, and will be published ere long.

It is also stated that the present Parliament will only last until the end of the month of April following. It will then dissolve, leaving a committee of twenty-five persons, or more, invested with the supreme authority, until the first Thursday in June, at which period it will resign its powers to a new government, composed of a national Representative of four hundred persons, appointed by the counties and towns of England. Each electoral district will have to elect a certain number of delegates, in conformity to the Act which the Parliament is to pass before its dissolution. These delegates will be, as it were, the proxies of the town or county which may choose them, as were those who up to this time formed the House of Commons. By this arrangement, there will no longer be a Parliament, and the body which it is proposed to create, will differ from Parliament by the fact of its sitting permanently; but those who compose it will be elected for only two years.

It is believed that this plan has been invented for the purpose of excluding from the government of the country all the nobility and persons of title unless they are elected by some county or town. As the Independents did not think this sufficient, the House of Commons decided by vote, on the 16th of this month, that in future there should be no upper house or House of Lords. This is part of a system they have adopted with a view to efface from the minds of many the grief caused by the execution of the King, by making it appear that, when the House of Lords is once removed from all share in the government, the affairs of the country will remain altogether in the hands of the people, whose power and authority will thereby be largely increased.

In consequence of these resolutions, there will be great changes made in the laws, which, hitherto, have been framed in accordance with the monarchical constitution of the country; these changes are already under discussion, and statutes are being prepared abrogating the ancient laws. It is hoped that, among the laws destined to be thus abrogated will be included the penal laws concerning the Catholics; a matter which, if it really occurs, must be ascribed to the special decrees of God, Who has desired to manifest the immutability of His designs by affording relief, in ways so mysterious and unexpected, to the poor Catholics, who have suffered such terrible persecution. Even now, thanks to the Independents, the Catholics can appear freely in this capital and throughout the country without anyone doing them any harm; although it may be feared that this is only a ruse of the Independents in order to conciliate the Catholic party by modifying the severities with which they have been treated by the Presbyterians.

As the King is no longer living and his descendants are excluded from the Throne, it appears that the credentials of all the ambassadors are expired, and that every sovereign will have to grant new letters of credence to his envoy, to accredit him not only to the present Parliament so long as it lasts, but also to the government which it is proposed to introduce.

It appears that these credentials must be preceded by a recognition of this government as a lawful power, and that it will be necessary to use appropriate formalities in addressing it and to treat it as a sovereign, to which title it will lay claim. As this is a point of great importance, I have thought it my duty to call Your Majesty's attention to this subject that you may be pleased to give me such instructions as you may think fit.

Through having anticipated these inconveniences, I thought it my duty to represent to Your Majesty, in my dispatch of 20 August of last year, which I transmitted through the Secretary Geronimo de la Torre, that it would be to the interest of Your Majesty's service that there should be no ambassador here from Your Majesty, but only an agent who might give an account of all that occurred until such time as matters resumed their stability, and it became possible to perceive in what this government was likely to end.

Now, I am inclined to believe that if Your Majesty adopted this resolution, we should avoid the embarrassment which could not fail to arise in case Your Majesty should not deign to recognize the government which it is proposed to create, and to renew my credentials. If that government were to demand them of me, and I could not present them, it would cease to regard me as invested with a public character and as the ambassador of Your Majesty.

The States of Holland had sent two ambassadors to the Parliament to intercede on behalf of the late King. They arrived here on the 5th of this month, during the night preceding the day on which sentence was pronounced against the King. On the 8th, they had an audience of the Parliament and proposed various combinations. They offered their mediation on behalf of the King who, they said, should appear for trial whenever required, and the States engaged to give sureties for the performance of the promise. But as this proposition was not accepted, the ambassadors begged the Parliament to rest satisfied with deposing the King and sparing his life, and to accept the Prince of Wales as king in his stead. They offered the same mediation and the same sureties in relation to the accomplishment of any agreement that might be made with the Prince.

But the Parliament, before even giving an answer to the ambassadors, ordered the execution of the sentence and forbade all persons to proclaim the Prince of Wales King of England and Ireland. The ambassadors are consequently in a state of much dis-satisfaction and irritation; one of them is Adrian de Pauw, our old friend in Holland—the same who was plenipotentiary for Holland at Münster at the conclusion of the general peace. I have seen them already and have been on terms of friendship and correspondence with them. Yesterday they paid me a visit and manifested great affection and satisfaction.

The Archduke¹ wrote me a letter on the 6th of this month; I received it on the 10th, the day after the execution of the King. In it he ordered me to employ my good offices with all the earnestness necessary in requesting a delay in the King's trial until the arrival of a person whom his sovereign had resolved to send specially on his behalf.

But even if the Archduke's letter had not arrived too late, it is certain that no human efforts could have prevented the Independents from pursuing towards the King the course they had once adopted. Their obstinacy in procuring his death was incredible; it was based on their fears, for his death alone could secure them against the consequences of the offence of which they had been guilty against him, and his existence was an obstacle to the plans which they wish to put in execution. This was very evident, not only from the strange and violent manner in which his trial was conducted, but also from the rapidity with which its conclusion was hastened. On 23 January the King arrived during the night in London; on the following day he was brought to trial; on the 6th of the present month of February he was condemned and on the 9th he was executed, without the loss of a single hour either for his trial or for his execution. And, indeed, nothing less was to have been expected from his judges, for not only were they perfectly illegal and without any authority to sit in judgment upon him, but they were his enemies and the men most interested in his ruin. No titled personage or baron took part in his trial; on the contrary, most of them have left London; a great many have not yet returned, and others keep themselves out of sight.

The ambassadors of France and Holland have put themselves and their households into mourning. I have done the same; it was a mark of respect due to the memory of the King, and besides, anyone who neglected to do so would be looked upon unfavourably. May God keep Your Majesty! ...

¹ Charles Joseph (1649–1664), Archduke of Austria and son of Ferdinand III (1608–1657), Holy Roman Emperor (1637–1657)

M. Guizot, *History of Oliver Cromwell and the English Commonwealth* (London: Bentley, 1854), I:373–377.