

DEFINITION OF TREASON

17 July 1650

Whereas the Parliament has abolished the kingly office in England and Ireland, and in the dominions and territories thereunto belonging; and having resolved and declared that the people shall for the future be governed by its own representatives or national meetings in council, chosen and entrusted by them for that purpose, has settled the government in the way of a commonwealth and free state, without king or House of Lords. Be it enacted by this present Parliament, and by the authority of the same, that if any person shall maliciously or advisedly publish, by writing, printing, or openly declaring, that the said government is tyrannical, usurped, or unlawful; or that the Commons in Parliament assembled are not the supreme authority of this nation; or shall plot, contrive, or endeavour to stir up, or raise force against the present government, or for the subversion or alteration of the same, and shall declare the same by any open deed, that then every such offence shall be taken, deemed, and adjudged by authority of this Parliament to be high treason.

And whereas the keepers of the liberty of England and the Council of State constituted, and to be from time to time constituted, by authority of Parliament, are to be under the said representatives in Parliament entrusted for the maintenance of the said government with several powers and authorities limited, given, and appointed unto them by the Parliament. Be it likewise enacted by the authority aforesaid that if any person shall maliciously and advisedly plot or endeavour the subversion of the said keepers of the liberty of England or the Council of State, and the same shall declare by any open deed, or shall move any person or persons for the doing thereof, or stir up the people to rise against them, or either of them, their or either of their authorities, that then every such offence and offences shall be taken, deemed, and declared to be high treason.

And whereas the Parliament, for their just and lawful defence, has raised and levied the army and forces now under the command of Thomas, Lord Fairfax, and are at present necessitated, by reason of the manifold distractions within this Commonwealth and invasions threatened from abroad, to continue the same, which under God must be the instrumental means of preserving the well-affected people of this nation in peace and safety. Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that if any person, not being an officer, soldier, or member of the army, shall plot, contrive, or endeavour to stir up any mutiny in the said army, or withdraw any soldiers or officers from their obedience to their superior officers, or from the present government as aforesaid; or shall procure, invite, aid, or assist any foreigners or strangers to invade England or Ireland; or shall adhere to any forces raised by the enemies of the Parliament or Commonwealth, or keepers of the liberty of England; or if any person shall counterfeit the Great Seal of England, for the time being used and appointed by authority of Parliament; that then every such offence and offences shall be taken, deemed, and declared by authority of this Parliament to be high treason, and every such persons shall suffer pains of death, and also forfeit unto the keepers of the liberty of England, to and for the use of the Commonwealth, all and singular his and their lands, tenements and hereditaments, goods and chattels, as in case of high treason has been used by the laws and statutes of this land to be forfeit and lost.

Provided always that no persons shall be indicted and arraigned for any of the offences mentioned in this Act unless such offenders shall be indicted and prosecuted for the same within one year after the offence committed.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that if any person shall counterfeit the money of this Commonwealth, or shall bring any false money into this land, counterfeit or other, like to the money of this Commonwealth, knowing the money to be false, to merchandise or make payment in deceit of the people of this nation; or if any person shall hereafter falsely forge and counterfeit any such kind of coin of gold or silver as is not the proper coin of this Commonwealth, and is or shall be current within this nation, by consent of the Parliament, or such as shall be by them authorized thereunto; or shall bring from the parts beyond the seas into this Commonwealth, or into any the dominions of the same, any such false and counterfeit coin of money being current within the same, as is above said, knowing the same money to be false and counterfeit, to the intent to

utter or make payment with the same within this Commonwealth, by merchandise or otherwise; or if any person shall impair, diminish, falsify, clip, wash, round or file, scale or lighten for wicked lucre or gain's sake any the proper monies or coins of this Commonwealth, or the dominions thereof, or of the monies or coins of any other realm, allowed and suffered to be current within this Commonwealth, or the dominions thereof, that then all and every such offences abovementioned shall be and are hereby deemed and adjudged high treason, and the offenders therein, their counsellors, procurers, aiders, and abettors being convicted according to the laws of this nation of any of the said offences shall be deemed and adjudged traitors against this Commonwealth, and shall suffer and have such pains of death and forfeitures, as in case of high treason is used and ordained.

Provided always, and be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that this Act touching the monies and coins aforesaid, or anything therein contained, nor any attainder of any person for the same, shall in any wise extend or be judged to make any corruption of blood to any the heir or heirs of any such offender, or to make the wife of any such offender to lose or forfeit her dower, of or in any lands, tenements, or hereditaments, or her title, action, or interest in the same.

G.B. Adams and H.M. Stephens, eds., *Select Documents of English Constitutional History* (London: MacMillan, 1901):400–402.
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