

# POLITICS AND THE PROTECTOR

John Barwick (1612–1664)

to Sir Edward Hyde (1609–1674)

*John Barwick, a fellow of Saint John's College (Cambridge), wrote several tracts condemning Oliver Cromwell. Removed from his university position, by 1644 Barwick had settled in London, collecting intelligence for the Royalists. Imprisoned (1650–1652) for espionage, Parliament eventually released him without a trial. He resumed spying for Charles II, in which capacity offered this summary of Richard Cromwell's position to Sir Edward Hyde, Charles II's Lord Chancellor in exile.*

16 February 1658/1659

The proceedings at Westminster are so full of distraction that it is probable they will end in confusion. For the one party thinks the protectorists cannot stand, and the other that the commonwealth cannot rise. And those that are indifferent men hope both may be true, and then the conclusion will be easy to foresee and foretell.

Since their first convention, the two Houses have never owned one the other. Those they call Lords meet and adjourn and consult about making a catechism, and make speeches against plays and the common-prayer-book. But all men's eyes are upon the Commons, for it is clearly foreseen the Petition and Advice will not support the Other House for want of expression rather than intention. For the words of it are that the Protector (without mentioning his successors) may call such a number to sit in the Other House, and thereupon the Commons look upon it as a personal privilege of the last Protector.

To prevent this mischief, the Protector's party brought in a bill 31 January for a recognition of the Protector,<sup>1</sup> wherein were some comprehensive phrases for the Other House, the militia, and negative voices. But now that it comes to scanning, it finds no small opposition. From their first meeting the Commons have consisted of two extreme parties (one for the Protector, the other for a commonwealth), and a moderate party between both, which being more or less moderate, as occasion serves, are able to cast the scales on which side they please, and this makes the foresight of things very obscure, though most men think it will end in a titular Protector without either militia or negative voice, if he be so tame as to submit to it.

The republicans are the lesser party, but are all speakers, zealous, diligent, and have the better cause, admitting those common principles (which are not yet exploded) by which they destroyed monarchy in the Long Parliament. And yet the other can out-vote them when they please, for the old paralogism holds (as well as their other principles) to deny the conclusion, though they take the premiss for granted.

The great contest has been, and still is, concerning the recognition, etc. After seven days' debate (all other business set apart) they came to a vote on Monday night at 10 o'clock that this Protector shall be chief magistrate, with such powers and limitations as they shall agree upon, yet so as this vote shall signify nothing till they come to that agreement.

Upon the second of those seven days (8<sup>th</sup> instant), a petition was brought up by several well-wishers to a commonwealth in and about London; but such interventions being precluded by a vote of the House, four Members were sent out to complement them and promise their petition should be read and taken into consideration when their present debate was over, which the petitioners looked upon as a reprieve after execution. And yesterday the petition was received and read, but no thanks returned to the petitioners, as they expected. But we hear there is a petition or remonstrance to the same effect now subscribing by several of the army, which likely will find a better and quicker admittance.

Both these petitions (or either of them) may still find them work enough; for there are two or three difficult questions to be decided before the previous vote (as they call it) can take effect—concerning the militia,

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Cromwell (1626–1712), Lord Protector (1658–1659)

negative voice, and the Other House—wherein the moderate party are not so zealous as they were to have the government continue in the same frame they found it. And if some of the most considerable persons of the Other House could but get the House established, they would put hard to lodge the militia and negative voice in that House, which perhaps in time they would have consist wholly (as it does for the most part) of the chief officers of the army.

Since the previous vote on Monday night, that bill has slept and the protectorists are willing it should do so for some time, that the House may slide on into other business that may require a bill to be passed, on purpose that by signing of it the Protector may take possession of his chief magistracy according to the previous vote.

But the difficulty is the Commons will not own the Other House, and the Protector cannot well sign anything without passing both Houses, though otherwise the temper of some leading men in the Other House begins already to show itself to be such as he could wish he were fairly rid of them, for the republicans reckon of twelve colonels (now in command) that will be for them, and six of them at least are of that House.

If this petition of the army goes on, the Houses will not signify much after a while. The Protector already relies upon the great officers of the army, and the republicans on the under-officers more than upon the votes of either party. But it is thought the Protector will be mistaken in some of those he relies upon if the other party appears any whit considerable.

Monk has given him a caution already to carry fair with the Parliament; for he finds some reason to suspect his army will divide upon these matters. And I am told by one of the House he verily believes they will shatter all to pieces when the point of the militia comes to be debated, for though the last vote was carried three to one, yet he thinks the Protector will never get more as to the militia than to be such a general as must be accountable to the Parliament. Others think Fairfax will have that office, some commissioners being joined with him, because they will hardly trust so much power in any one man's hand. He sides with the republicans, and carries a name above Lambert for the present.

It is still a great question whether or no there will be any assizes this vacation. It is said there are 150 lawyers that sit in the House; and the Protector cannot want them during the circuit, and dare not disoblige them by having none. He has been on and off two or three times about it, and at last he has put it upon the Commissioners of the Great Seal and judges to consider, so that it is likely he would be dissuaded from it by their advice.

I cannot learn what cabals and juntos are working underhand, but I am told the protectorists had their night-meetings at Fleetwood's house till three or four days ago, which being not so now, it makes some suspect he is fallen off to the republicans. Others more probably think he is the leader of that third party who are for a mere titular Protector.

The Commons are now about examining the accounts of the Treasury for this last year. The public debt (it is thought) will amount to a million-and-a-half at least.

Some contests there have also been about calling persons to account upon failures in government; and there have been somewhat tried on both sides by way of crimination and recrimination before and since the dissolution of the Long Parliament; but hitherto it has not broke out into good earnest, excepting the main question of the government in one person or many.

Only this day Young of Shropshire, a protectorist, and Neville of Berkshire, a prime republican, have been accused of atheism and have time allowed them to answer their several charge. If all atheists be expelled the House, there will be work enough for new elections.

In all their late contests about monarchy, I have not heard of any (even of the Long Parliament), excepting Mr. Scot, that have spoken any way reproachfully of His late Majesty; only Sir Henry Vane said (and truly enough) that if the power of government was not in the people, the guilt of the King's blood would lie upon them

forever. Some glances also have been made upon His present Majesty's cause, and most of them in the better sense; but none as yet has had the courage to speak to any purpose.

There was never greater complaints in the city for want both of trading and money, and that they are real, appears by the falling of house-rent in the city ten percent. The Spanish merchants especially go down the wind; not one in ten but finds himself a loser upon his audit this last year. What is got by commodities of Spanish growth in England is pocketed by the Dutch, insomuch as some suggest to have a law made to lower (or otherwise destroy) all commodities of Spanish growth that shall be brought into England. No marvel, then, the city should be so desirous (for so they are always) to have peace with Spain and war with the Dutch. The former, I hear, has been endeavoured underhand, and Whitlock is made one of the Keepers of the Great Seal to give him a title with a greater noise for an ambassador (as is thought) in order to such a treaty. And yet in this tottering condition they foresee none will treat with them, however otherwise inclinable. But whether the Spaniard be inclinable or no, I know not. It should rather seem not by some endeavours there are now on foot to settle an intelligencer for Spain here in England, wherein they desire the assistance of some of the English nation; and this I am well assured of, if it signify anything.

Great preparations are making for sea. It is said they will have forty sail at sea by the middle of the next month, and thirty more as fast as they can after. It seems they are in good forwardness, for there is a press out for 1500 seamen, and a good many are pressed already. The Sound in likelihood will be the chief cause of this expedition, and yet I believe they have one eye upon their own security at home, in case there should be any intestine division.

Thomas Birch, ed. *A Collection of State Papers of John Thurloe...* (London: Woodward, 1742), VII:615–616.