



EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

十八世纪英国： 宪制建构与产业革命

Paul Langford 著 刘意青 康 勤 译



通识教育
双语文库

A VERY SHORT
INTRODUCTION



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Socrates	众说苏格拉底
The World Trade Organization	权力、政治与 WTO

List of Illustrations

- 1 The Church in danger:
design for a fan, 1711 10
Courtesy of The British Museum
- 2 The politics of Robinocracy:
political cartoons of the
Walpole era 24–5
Courtesy of The British Museum
- 3 Latitudinarian learning:
charity school at Burrough
Green, Cambridgeshire,
founded 1708 28
Courtesy of Cambridge County
Records Office
- 4 Ladies at leisure: John
Collet's popular
studies 46–7
Courtesy of The Courtauld Institute of
Art
- 5 The shadow of the gallows:
public execution and
anatomical dissection of
Lord Ferrers 51
Courtesy of The British Museum
- 6 The 'bon ton': cartoon,
1777 53
Courtesy of The British Museum
- 7 Science for the layman:
James Ferguson's orrery
(contemporary print, and
painting by Joseph Wright
of Derby) 54–5
Courtesy of The Bodleian Library
(page 54) and Derby Museums and
Art Gallery (page 55)
- 8 The seaside: early sketch
of Blackpool, and engraving
of Ramsgate by William
Birch, 1788 60–1
Courtesy of The Mansell Collection

- 9 Royalty refulgent: Zoffany's painting of the royal family, and cartoon of Bute, 1767 75-6
Courtesy of Her Majesty The Queen (page 74) and The British Library (page 75)
- 10 The Younger Pitt: for and against (portrait by Gainsborough and cartoon by Gillray) 83-4
Courtesy of The Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood (page 82), and The British Museum (page 83)
- 11 Father and son: George III and his wife by Gillray, and Prince George with Mrs Fitzherbert 85-6
Courtesy of The British Museum
- 12 Civilizing mission: a Scotsman in London, at the time of the Forty-Five 91
Courtesy of The British Museum
- 13 Civilizing mission: Lee Boo and Ludee 93-4
Courtesy of The British Library

Contents

List of Illustrations VII

List of Maps X

- 1 Revolution and its Repercussions 1
 - 2 The Rise of Robinocracy 13
 - 3 Industry and Idleness 32
 - 4 The Making of Middle England 50
 - 5 The Politics of Protest 67
 - 6 Rebellion and Reform 82
 - 7 Endpiece 100
- Further Reading 103
- Chronology 107
- Prime Ministers 1721–89 110
- Index 111

目录

插图目录 ix

地图目录 xi

第一章 革命及其反响 119

第二章 罗宾政府的兴起 133

第三章 工业和赋闲 153

第四章 英国中产阶级的形成 171

第五章 不同政见的斗争 189

第六章 叛乱和改革 205

第七章 结束语 224

年表 226

历任首相名录 1721—1789 年 230

译后记 231

插图目录

- 图 1. 教会陷入危难：1711 年的一个扇面图案 129
- 图 2. 罗宾政府的政治：沃波尔时代的政治漫画 145-146
- 图 3. 宗教自由主义式的办学：1708 年创建于剑桥郡巴勒·格林镇的慈善学校 149
- 图 4. 悠闲的贵妇们：约翰·科利特的大众文化研究 167-168
- 图 5. 绞刑架的阴影：费尔斯伯爵被公开处决，其尸体被解剖 172
- 图 6. “时髦社会”：1777 年的漫画 174
- 图 7. 外行人的科学：詹姆斯·弗格森的太阳系仪（德比的约瑟夫·赖特绘制，当时的印刷品） 175-176
- 图 8. 海边：描绘黑潭魅力的早期独特速写，以及威廉·伯奇于 1788 年创作的描绘拉姆斯盖特的雕版图 181-182
- 图 9. 王室的辉煌：佐法尼描绘王室家族的画作和 1767 年描绘比特的漫画 198-199
- 图 10. 小皮特：赞许和反对，庚斯博罗的肖像画和吉尔雷的漫画 206-207
- 图 11. 父与子：吉尔雷创作的乔治三世与他的妻子，以及乔治亲王与非茨赫伯特夫人 208-209
- 图 12. 文明教化的使命：1745 年时一个苏格兰人在伦敦 214
- 图 13. 文明教化的使命：Lee Boo 和 Ludee 216-217

List of Maps

- 1 The turnpike road network in 1741 34
- 2 The turnpike road network in 1770 35

地图目录

地图 1. 1741 年收税路网络	155
地图 2. 1770 年收税路网络	156

Chapter 1

Revolution and its Repercussions

The historical importance of the Revolution of 1688 – the ‘Glorious Revolution’ – has inevitably fluctuated in the process of constant reinterpretation by successive generations. It fared particularly badly at the hands of the twentieth century, and threatens to disappear altogether under the demands of modern historical scholarship. The decisive triumph of the liberal and democratic spirit, beloved of Thomas Macaulay and the Victorian Whigs, has dwindled into the conservative reaction of a selfish oligarchy. Especially when compared with modern revolutions, it seems rather to resemble a palace coup than a genuine shift of social or political power. Yet it had important and enduring consequences, not less significant than those of more spectacular convulsions. Even the relative absence of physical violence can be exaggerated. In Scotland, the supporters of the deposed king had to be crushed by force of arms, a process which was completed in 1689. In Ireland there was positively a blood-bath, one which still holds a prominent place in Irish myths and memories. When the siege of Londonderry was lifted, and James II decisively defeated at the battle of the Boyne, Ulster Protestants certainly considered their salvation to be glorious, but they can hardly have thought of it as bloodless.

1

Legitimizing the Illegitimate

The story might easily have been the same in England. The former royalist Nicholas L’Estrange testified that only chance, the disarray of

James II's friends, and above all the king's surprising failure to raise the royal standard in his own realm, prevented a civil war as ferocious as those of the mid-century. Yet Estrange's very relief that his family had been saved further sacrifices in the cause of the Stuarts perhaps provides a clue to the comparative tranquillity associated with the making of the revolution in England. A perceptible sense of compromise, of the need to step back from the brink, carries over the centuries from the debates of the assembly which met in London in January 1689. The Convention, which transformed itself into Parliament by the simple expedient of passing an act to that effect, displayed an understandable desire to legitimize what was manifestly illegitimate by following as far as possible the procedural forms employed at the Restoration in 1660. On matters of substance, the priority was plainly to find a common core of agreement rather than to test the more extreme solutions offered by either side. William of Orange was made king, with Mary as queen. Tories, led by Danby, would have preferred Mary as sole monarch, or some species of regency ruling technically in the name of James II. But the Protestant saviour would accept nothing less than the crown, and so it was.

Nonetheless, every effort was made to conceal the revolutionary nature of what was being done. Though James's supposedly illegal acts – particularly his reliance on a standing army and his recourse to the dispensing and suspending powers – were formally condemned, the Bill of Rights went out of its way to pretend that the deposed king had in effect abdicated, leaving a deserted realm no alternative but to seek the protection of the House of Orange. Implausible though this appeared, it was sufficient to secure the assent of a majority of the ruling class. There were, inevitably, exceptions. Some churchmen, led by Sancroft, the archbishop of Canterbury, and two of the bishops who had helped bring James II down in the Seven Bishops Case, declined to take even the cautiously worded oaths designed by the Convention. Others, like the Nottingham Tories, old champions of the court in the reaction of 1681–7, wrestled with the concept of a rightful king who

owed his title to a *de facto* decision of Parliament, but not to the *de jure* ordinance of heaven.

Parliamentary Monarchy

Yet the substantive acceptance of parliamentary monarchy was achieved. The profound importance of this achievement was obscured not merely by conscious attempts to avoid dogmatic prescriptions in 1689 but by the long agonies which followed. Passive obedience and non-resistance continued to be influential concepts, buttressed as they were by elaborate arguments stressing the providential nature of the Protestant Wind in 1688, and the duty of every citizen to co-operate with any form of authority rather than submit to anarchy. For a generation, these notions continued to work on people's minds, bestowing a sense of legitimacy on the rage and despair felt by many who had seen the necessity for what had happened in 1688 but found it difficult to live with all the consequences. Beyond that, they sank into the Anglican orthodoxy of the eighteenth century and helped secure the underlying authoritarianism which was to remain an important element of political ideology in the age of the American and French Revolutions.

But, with this reservation, the major change of course carried out in 1688 can be seen to have been truly revolutionary. The Bill of Rights clearly over-rode the hereditary right which formed the basis of the restored constitution of 1660 and replaced it with the will of the nation expressed through Parliament. First William and Mary, then Mary's sister Anne, and finally, after the death of the latter's son the duke of Gloucester in 1700, the Electors of Hanover (descended from James I through the female line) all owed their title to the determination of the propertied classes. At a time when absolutism, both in theory and in practice, seemed to be in the ascendant in the Western world, the importance of this transformation should not be underestimated. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Whigs exaggerated the coherence



and completeness of the contract theory which seemed to have triumphed in 1689 and they under-rated the tensions, contradictions, and conflicts which it entailed. But they were fundamentally correct in seeing it as a historic turning-point involving the decisive rejection of an entire conception of government.

Foreign Relations

The status of the monarchy was the conscious concern of the revolutionaries of 1688. It is doubtful whether many of them foresaw the consequences of their actions in terms of England's relations with foreign powers. In this respect, indeed, the importance of the Revolution is undenied and undeniable. Before 1688, the policy of successive rulers, Oliver Cromwell, Charles II, and James II, had been largely pro-French and anti-Dutch. After 1688 France was to become a more or less permanent enemy, and certainly a constant rival in the battle for supremacy overseas. The scale of conflict was also novel. The Nine Years War (1688–97) and the War of Spanish Succession (1702–13) involved Britain in both Continental and colonial warfare as it had not been involved since the Elizabethan struggle with Spain, and in the interim the technological and strategic complexity of warring had vastly increased.

The part of the English in this unexpected, if not unpredictable, consequence of the Revolution was affected by various considerations. In terms of grand strategy, the priority was to combat Louis XIV's expansionist policies in the Low Countries, and to prevent the erection of a mighty new Bourbon empire comprising the Spanish as well as French monarchy. The interests of commerce, which once had required protection against Dutch economic enterprise, could now be said to dictate an aggressive stance towards the more sustained challenge of French competition, and especially the assertion of Britain's right to a share in the trade if not the territory of the Spanish empire. These arguments were woven by the Whigs into a systematic case for an





interventionist foreign policy, expressed most clearly in the Continental campaigns of William III and the duke of Marlborough. But such considerations would not have led many of the English to approve the formidable outlay of expenditure and resources in these years if it had not been for the dynastic issue. The Nine Years War has appropriately been called the War of the English Succession. William would hardly have made his armed landing at Torbay in 1688 if he had not assumed that the English alliance against France would follow logically from his own intervention in English affairs. Yet in fact diplomatic and military support from his new subjects was made much more likely by Louis XIV's imprudent championship of James II. For a while, French backing for the Jacobite camp was withdrawn when an uneasy peace was negotiated in 1697. But four years later, with the Spanish succession at stake, and Europe on the verge of war once more, it was again Louis's support for the Stuarts, this time in the shape of James's son the Old Pretender, which convinced many reluctant English people of the case for involvement in a Continental conflict.

One of the most startling aspects of the wars was the success of English arms, particularly under Marlborough in the War of Spanish Succession. It was not just that the Protestant succession was effectively secured at least for the present. More striking still was the new reputation earned by a country widely regarded as little more than a pensioner of France only a short time before. Marlborough's triumphs at Blenheim and Ramillies, not to say Sir George Rooke's at Gibraltar and James Stanhope's at Minorca, established Britain as a major force in Continental politics, a substantial power in the Mediterranean, and a worthy competitor for France overseas. The latter stages of the war, in which military progress seemed to diminish in direct proportion to national expenditure, removed the loftier ambitions suggested by the dazzling victories of the Blenheim period, but when peace was made at Utrecht in 1713 sufficient was secured to retain the essential impact of the successes, and even to create the impression of what French diplomatic historians have termed the 'English hegemony' in Europe.