

University of Richmond

UR Scholarship Repository

Honors Theses

Student Research

Spring 1990

Leveller democracy : political theory and political reality

Hilary B. Smith

University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Smith, Hilary B., "Leveller democracy : political theory and political reality" (1990). *Honors Theses*. 784.
<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/784>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND LIBRARIES



3 3082 01028 3017

Leveller Democracy: Political Theory and Political Reality

Hilary B. Smith

**Prepared for the Honors European Research Seminar, Spring 1990
Research directed by Dr. John R. Rilling**

Preface

Spelling has been retained as found in contemporary sources.

Dissatisfaction with English monarchy resulted in civil war and victory for the forces opposed to the royalists. Rather than forming a decisive conclusion, the triumph of the New Model Army was a prelude to a period of conflict and confusion. Those who acted against the King wanted a new system of government, but there was little agreement as to the form it should take. Between 1646 and 1649, individuals advocating democratic changes in the political system, referred to as Levellers by their enemies, organized, and influenced political events. In order to understand the Levellers' rise to prominence and later failure to lead events, one must analyze their political theories in relation to the harsh realities of politics. Their politics were radical for the time, but they failed to achieve power because, as a faction, their success depended upon other groups.

Unfortunately, for the fledgling democratic organization, power remained the dominant factor needed for political success. Parliament and the Army maneuvered for control of the government; in order for the Levellers' program to be accepted, an alliance with the victor was necessary. Though influential and invaluable to the Army at critical moments, Cromwell and Ireton viewed the Levellers as a tool to intimidate the Parliament and control the radical army ranks. Because their success depended on the policies of the Army and the Parliament, the Levellers must be evaluated in that context.

The Levellers advocated extending the franchise, freedom of religion, separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial roles of government and other reforms considered radical. By supporting policies which extended liberty, provided freedom for individuals, and subordinated the monarch to popular authority, the Levellers earned the right to be called England's first

democratic political party.¹ In 1647, a party organization existed which had developed from a base of dedicated individual crusaders. John Lilburne led the party, and was the first of the Levellers to be known for out-spoken criticism of the English governmental system.

The Levellers, at the height of their power, advocated a governmental system which would function by approval of the English people. Rights of the individual meant everything to Lilburne, who had been persecuted by Parliament. In the late 1630s, Lilburne began an active career as a writer and publisher of pamphlets proclaiming his martyrdom, and attacking the government forces he deemed responsible for his persecution. Lilburne might appear as an insignificant radical voicing personal complaints, but he used his life as a vehicle for explaining the sufferings of England. In his tract, *A Worke of the Beast*, Lilburne detailed his hearing before the Star Chamber and the punishment he received. Emotional language described Lilburne's suffering: "But I must confesse, if I had had no more but my owne naturall strength, I had suncke under the burden of my punishement, for to the flesh the paine was very greivous..."² Lilburne made his story relevant to all English people by declaring that the *ex officio* oath, which he refused to take, violated, "... the Petition of Right...[and] the Law of God."³ Personal experience, complimented by a knowledge of Sir Edward Coke's work, and religious issues contributed to Lilburne's theory of justice.

¹G. E. Aylmer, ed., The Levellers in the English Revolution, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 9. A discription of the party nature of the Levellers is found in Fener Brockway, Britian's First Socialists, (New York: Quartet Books, 1980), p. 61.

Characteristic of political parties, members of the organization paid dues which varied according to income. The Levellers were organized on the local level. The local unit, which operated from taverns, elected representatives to district committees. From the district level commissioners were selected to determine party politics.

² William Haller, Tracts On Liberty In The Puritan Revolution, vol. II, (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1965), *A Worke of the Beast*, 1638, by John Lilburne, p. 8.

³ *ibid*, p. 15.

In *The Worke of the Beast*, Lilburne presented himself as a martyr, and appealed to God for justice. In his early debates, Lilburne focused on religious issues as they related to personal freedom. Mystical experience, with its emphasis on the individual and God's intimacy with people, influenced Lilburne. He read Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and works by Luther which were influenced by *Theologia Germania*, a continental mystical writing.⁴ As a consequence of such influences, Lilburne believed in a separation of church and state, and that true believers must quit the established church and worship according to their own consciences in their own congregations. Though his ideas about polity were radical, his theology remained Calvinist until his Quaker conversion.⁵ Religion and politics were intertwined in the 1640s; concern for religious freedom united the Levellers in the initial stages of their group's development, and remained an issue of central importance.

Dedication to religious freedom led Lilburne into secular battles, as he found human liberty depended on a cooperative government. Lilburne's, "...active faith...became a source of power to challenge political tyranny, a vital impulse toward democracy."⁶ Criticism of the monarchy and a system of government which ignored most individuals developed during the reign of James I. Lilburne read Coke's *Institutes*, and believed that Magna Carta secured the rights of the people.⁷ By 1646, Presbyterians dominated

⁴ D. B. Robertson, Religious Foundations of Leveller Democracy, (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951), pp. 18-19.

⁵ Aylmer, p. 15.

⁶ Robertson, p. 22.

⁷ Sir Edward Coke challenged James I's authority on legal issues, and maintained that judicial affairs were the business of trained judges and not a king. For Coke, and the common lawyers, law was immemorial, and, therefore beyond the control of the King. Coke was challenged by those, such as Sir Henry Spelman, who maintained England's feudal history determined the country's development. Spelman's analysis discredits

Parliament. Lilburne did not accept the Presbytery system because it called for a centrally controlled church and it denied the individualism that the Congregational church allowed.

Emotional and stubborn at times, Lilburne needed a party organization with people able to balance his personality, and add to his ideas. In 1645, Lilburne was required to appear before a Parliamentary Committee on Examination's to answer charges. Lilburne refused to do so before being informed of the reason for his detainment. He maintained that he had, "...as true a right to all the privileges that do belong to a freeman as the greatest man in England whatsoever he be, whether Lord or Commoner, and foundation of my freedome I bulkd upon the grand Charter of England..."⁸ By using his own problem to address the larger issue, other radicals were able to identify with Lilburne: "The loose organization that grew into the leveller party arose largely in response to Lilburne's present 'martyrdom' in the cause of political liberty."⁹ The core group that developed had qualities of organization, tact, intelligence and emotional appeal. In combination, these qualities enabled the Leveller leaders to establish a program, publish extensively, and develop a network of supporters.

William Walwyn and Richard Overton joined Lilburne to lead the Levellers. Walwyn's attacks on the government and church system were subtle, yet stinging. Because he refrained from overly emotional prose, he attained a reputation of respectability which distressed Leveller opponents.¹⁰ Perhaps the most radical of the Levellers, Walwyn's *Humble*

Coke's arguments. J. G. A. Pocock, The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 63-69, 119-123.

⁸ Joseph Frank, The Levellers, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), p. 57.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Aylmer, pp.18-19

Petition of the Brownists (1641) pleas for religious liberty as a necessity for a good political state.¹¹ *The Power of Love*, written in 1643, uses a religious context to argue for individual liberty. Because God, "...made man righteous...and naturally a rationall creature, judging rightly of all things...",¹² Walwyn maintained, people should have the freedom to use their rationality. Overton advocated a reform program which included free education, a national hospital plan and the return of lands which had been enclosed. Such ideas made Overton the most socialist of the Levellers.¹³ Overton, as well as Walwyn, cautioned Lilburne not to over-use Magna Carta as argument.¹⁴ Although the Stationers Company held a monopoly on the publishing rights for all of England, Overton successfully maintained a secret press, and published many of the Levellers' pamphlets.¹⁵

The Levellers came together as an organization in 1647, but they could not implement their ideas because they did not control the government. In fact, Lilburne spent most of his career as a Leveller in jail for refusing to cooperate with the Long Parliament. The Levellers wanted the war to be a revolutionary movement, as opposed to a reform. The Presbyterians, who controlled Parliament in 1646, had a political agenda, and represented a religious polity, contrary to the Levellers' plan. Parliament was divided using terms of religious preference: Presbyterian and Independent. However, in 1646 these names signified political

¹¹ Frank, p. 29-33. Walwyn was a successful cloth merchant, and lived an upper-middle-class life. A very religious man, Walwyn began writing pamphlets supporting religious liberty.

¹² Haller, *Tracts On Liberty In The Puritan Revolution 1638-1647*, vol. II, William Walwyn, *The Power of Love*, pp. 279-280.

¹³ Aylmer, 82.

¹⁴ Derek Hirst, *Authority and Conflict: England, 1603-1638*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 274.

¹⁵ Frank, p. 53.

preferences more than religious divisions. The Presbyterians were conservative and preferred that the civil war not go too far; they feared a restructuring of the social order. Independents "...wanted an all-out war fought to a decisive conclusion."¹⁶ The Independent leaders of the New Model Army commissioned officers on the basis on merit, and rewarded excellence; traditional policies of recognition due to social position were abandoned in order to win the war. Religious toleration was also part of the Army's policy.¹⁷

The Leveller plan, immediately following the King's surrender at Oxford, called for the House of Commons to assume its "rightful" role as a representative of the people. Between 1646 and 1649, the Levellers fluctuated between Parliament and the Army in an attempt to determine which organization would support its goals. In March of 1647, the Levellers submitted the 'Large Petition' to the House of Commons. At the same time the petition was submitted, the Levellers were gaining support among members of the Army, and tension was developing between Parliament and the Army. It is possible that the Levellers submitted the petition knowing it would be rejected, thereby further alienating the Army and pushing it to the left.¹⁸ However, because the Levellers later attempted to negotiate with the House of Commons, following disillusionment with the Army, there is reason to argue that the 'Large Petition' was submitted with a sincere, if unrealistic, expectation that it would be adopted.

Though not yet recognized as an organization, the Levellers' 'Large Petition' was the first collaborative effort among the movement's leaders.

¹⁶ Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution 1603-1714, (New York: W W Norton & Company, 1980), p. 108.

¹⁷ *ibid*, pp. 107-109.

¹⁸ Frank, pp. 111-116.

The Long Parliament was praised for its past accomplishments, but a sense of urgency was conveyed, as the petition required that Parliament continue its duty to reform. The abolishment of the episcopacy and ship money was a good start, but:

Wee still find the Nation oppressed with grievances of the same destructive nature as formerly though under other notions, and which are so much the more grievous unto us, because they are inflicted in the very time of this present Parliament [under God] the hope of the oppressed;..."¹⁹

Monopolies, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, the unreformed legal system, and the poor conditions of prisons were among the targets of criticism. The Levellers stressed that the time had arrived to frame a settlement for the people:

...observing that you are now drawing the great and weighty affaires of this Nation to some conclusion, and fearing that ere long you may be induced to lay by you strength, which under God hath hitherto made you powerfull to all good works...the people, who have chosen and trusted you will seriously consider that the end of your trust was freedome and deliverance from all kind of grievances and oppressions.²⁰

The conservative Parliament had no use for the Levellers, and, therefore, rejected the petition. During the time of its consideration Parliament and the Army began a struggle which ended with Pride's Purge.

After the King's surrender, the Presbyterians attempted to disband the Army. The ranks responded unfavorably to suggestions that they fight in Ireland without first being paid for services already rendered. According to Clarendon, the Presbyterians regarded the Army as, "...their own...raised

¹⁹Alymer, *The 'Large Petition,'* pp. 76-78.

²⁰ *ibid*, pp. 78-79.

and paid for by themselves..."²¹ The Army disagreed. Initially, the ranks cared primarily about their money; political theory was not a major concern to the average soldier. In the spring of 1647, even a Presbyterian settlement might have been accepted if the soldiers needs were considered. But with the tax payers on strike, Parliament could not easily raise money.²² It was simpler to ignore the complaints, and plan for the disbandment.

Parliament had reasons to assume it could control the Army. The New Model Army had broken from the practice of rewarding the rich with commissions, but the regiments still functioned under traditional military discipline. Furthermore, the Army was not independent from Parliament during the war; the Committee of Both Kingdoms, composed of the Lords denied their commissions by the Self-Denying Ordinance and Scotsmen, controlled the Army. However, by the spring of 1647, the Army was experiencing change. The junior officers obedient to Parliament went to Ireland, leaving behind the radicals.²³ Most importantly, Leveller pamphlets circulated within the ranks.

In response the Parliament's refusal to negotiate with the Army, each regiment elected two representatives from the ranks; these men were called Agitators.²⁴ The Levellers contributed to the Agitators' enthusiasm for questioning Parliament's authority; however, the Levellers did not plan the Agitators' formation, or tell them how to proceed. Their relationship was solid because it was based upon common interest. Liberty of conscience

²¹ Edward, Earl of Clarendon, W. Dunn Macray, ed., The History Of The Rebellion And Civil Wars In England, vol. IV, Books IX-XI, (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 235.

²² Hirst, p. 270. Hirst cites 200,000 pounds as the amount needed to satisfy the soldiers.

²³ Mark Kishlansky, "The Case Of The Army Truly Stated: The Creation of The New Model Army," Past and Present 81 (November 1978) : 55-74.

²⁴ Austin Woolrych, Soldiers and Statesmen, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 61.

topped the list of Agitator concerns, after arrears of pay.²⁵ Most significantly, the Agitator movement was democratic in nature, which coincided with the Levellers' ideas. The Agitators were elected by the ranks; they were not appointed by the officers. Indeed, the officers followed the lead of the ranks, once the power of the movement was understood. As the common men of the Army demanded their rights, the Levellers realized that the Army's concerns could lead to a revolution in government.

At the time of the Agitator elections the radicals in the Army faced an uncertain situation. Just as the Levellers were powerless to act alone, the ranks working against Parliament, royalist sympathizers, and the Army officers could not succeed. Parliament planned to disband the Army on June the first, but the day before the disbandment was to occur, two regiments mutinied. This action demonstrated that the men of the Army would not be ignored, and Parliament conceded to form a committee to meet with a committee from the Army. Rather than improving the position of Parliament, the concession encouraged the ranks and shifted the position of the officers: "And now the army thought itself upon a level with the Parliament...which likewise raised the spirit of Fayrefax..."²⁶ With the Parliament on the defensive, the ranks claiming the rights of a democracy, and the officers falling in behind the men, the Levellers believed they had found the organization to champion their ideas.

Clarendon termed the Agitators Cromwell's "creatures," and maintained that Cromwell directed Agitator action.²⁷ As a royalist, Clarendon thought the worst of Cromwell, and viewed his later actions as

²⁵ A. S. P. Woodhouse, ed., Puritanism And Liberty, (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1951) pp. 21-23.

²⁶ Clarendon, p. 222.

²⁷ Clarendon, p. 123.

part of a grand plan. However, there is reason to believe the high ranking officers of the Army weighed their options before siding with the ranks in the summer of 1647. A letter written to Fairfax from the Agitators on May 29 urged him to support and organize a rendezvous of the Army to discuss Parliament's plan, so that they, "...should not be deny'd to be judged before our Disbanding Considering also the strange, unheard of, and unusual way of Disbanding us apart, one Regiment from another, contrary to the Example of other Armies Disbanded in this Kingdom;"²⁸ Fairfax and Cromwell did not care for the Agitators' appeals to justice or precedent. Theory meant little to military commanders concerned with maintaining power. As Rushworth commented: "...it was thought there was a necessity for the Officers to comply with the Soldiers, who, as indeed was intimated, *would have a Rendezvous without their Officers* which would be *tumultuous* and of dangerous Consequence, to Spoil of the Country, and destructive to the Kingdom."²⁹ The officers decided to support the ranks for practical reasons, thus moving toward the left, where the Levellers waited with a platform.

During the summer of 1647, traditional ideas of order were challenged. Many documents claiming rights for the Army and the nation were published; however, one incident best exemplifies the challenges to the hierarchy. By weakening the opposition, the Agitators would be in a better position to act, and enlist officer support. Though defeated in the war, Charles remained active, and attempted to make beneficial alliances. The Presbyterians planned to use Charles to form an alliance with the Scottish

²⁸ John Rushworth, ed, Historical Collections, vol. VI, part IV, (Oxford, 1721), p. 498.

²⁹ *ibid* Rushworth's italics

army against the New Model Army.³⁰ Charles represented a threat to some, a tool to others.

Cornet Joyce refused to let Charles disrupt the work of the Army. Acting on his own accord, Joyce, with a handful of men, took Charles from the control of Parliament to an Army camp.³¹ When Charles asked by what authority Joyce acted, "Joyce answered, 'By this;' and shewed them his pistol;"³² One of the lowest commissioned officers in the Army acted to change the system. Cromwell probably knew of Joyce's mission, as they had talked on May 29, but it originated from the planning center of the Agitators. Distressed to learn of the action, Fairfax instructed a colonel to relieve Joyce of control.³³ Although Fairfax disapproved of Joyce's actions, Charles was not returned to Parliament. The incident demonstrated that protocol was diminishing, and that the ranks could influence Army policies.

Having the King under control, the Parliament on the defensive, and the ranks seething with anger, Ireton issued *A Representation Of The Army*.³⁴ The petition, issued on June 14, legitimized the officers' support for the ranks. As well as being a politically calculated move by the officers, the *Representation* stated a philosophy with which the Levellers identified. Before disbanding, the Army demanded satisfaction for themselves and the kingdom, "...Especially considering that we were not a mere mercenary army, hired to serve any arbitrary power of a state, but called forth and conjured

³⁰ Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), p. 88.

³¹ Charles had been under house arrest, guarded by Parliament's soldiers.

³² *ibid*, p. 225.

³³ Hill, *God's Englishman*, pp. 88-89.

³⁴ A general in the New Model Army, Ireton became Cromwell's brother-in-law. Ireton played a major role in determining Army policy during these critical years. At times, when Cromwell remained indecisive, Ireton continued with policies to advance the Army's interests.

by the several declarations of Parliament to the defence of our own and the people's just rights and liberties."³⁵ The Army denied that it was subordinate to Parliament, because it fought for the people. A mission of justice did not deserve to be soiled by unthinking bureaucrats.

Just as Parliament was confronted in the 'Large Petition' to support the rights of the people, Overton in *An Appeale from the Degenerate Representative Body of the Commons of England Assembled at Westminster* turned to the New Model Army as the savior of the people. The radicalization of the Army encouraged the Levellers to switch their support from Parliament. Overton admitted that there were no precedents for direct action by the people; however, he maintained that in desperate times the law must give way to equity.³⁶ The *Appeale* and 'Certain Articles,' a postscript to the document, made a formal break from the Long Parliament. Ireton's *Representation* demanded to know by what authority the Parliament unjustly governed the Army. Overton stated that the Parliament, not elected by the people, had no right to office: "...the Assembly of the Parliament, contrary to , and without the free choice and Election of the People,...may be removed from sitting therein."³⁷ A simplified, just legal system, free education and a national hospital plan were Overton's expectations of a democratic England.³⁸ The Levellers supported the Army with this proposal, but the extent to which the officers supported the Levellers remained uncertain.

The most significant document published in the summer of 1647, illustrating the Levellers' position on Parliament and the Army, was *The Case*

³⁵ Woodhouse, *From A Representation Of The Army*, p. 404.

³⁶ Frank, pp. 125-127.

³⁷ Alymer, 'Certain Articles,' p. 85.

³⁸ *ibid*, pp. 84-86.

of the Armie Truly Stated. Both the problems of the Army and the nation were addressed, as the Levellers sought to gain the Army's support and demonstrate their authority on the issues at hand. The first section of the document stated that Army's problems had not been addressed. Much of the *Representation* was restated, as the *Case* justified the Army's grievances. If the problems remained unresolved, the people would stop supporting the Army. With no money to buy food, the Army would become a burden on the people and be perceived as the enemy.³⁹ As with most Leveller documents, the *Case* used an issue: the Army's problems, which related to a larger issue: the needs of the people. Speaking for the Army, the *Case* stated: "...that we minded not our own interest, but the good, freedome, and welfare of the whole Nation."⁴⁰ Parliament, the bane of the Army, if elected by the people, would benefit the entire nation. In addition, the Levellers attacked monopolies, taxes, the legal system, and the common prayer book.⁴¹

The Levellers stated the Army's case without its permission. Three days before the *Case* was submitted to Parliament, a letter was sent to Fairfax justifying Leveller activity in Army business. They maintained that in order to achieve justice and God's plan, Fairfax would, "...not think it strange, or judge [the authors] disobedient or refractory, that we should, as we have presumed, State the Case of the Army,"⁴² In this way, the Levellers showed that the issue of Parliamentary right affected every English person and not just the soldiers. The Levellers justified their role in

³⁹ William Haller and Godfrey Davies, eds., *The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653*, (New York: Columbia Press, 1944), pp. 65-71.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 77.

⁴¹ *ibid*, pp. 77-84.

⁴² Rushworth, p. 845 vol. VII part IV

Army affairs as a personal responsibility; failure to act at such a critical time would be inexcusable: "If our Duty bind us when we see our Neighbour's House on fire, to wave all Forms, Ceremonies, or Complements..."⁴³ Reformation ideas of responsibility and equality are used in their argument.

The relationship between the Agitators and the Levellers strengthen as the Levellers supported their cause. Frank asserts:

The Case of the Army, itself the result of active collaboration between the Leveller and soldier, was thus the wedge by which Lilburne, Walwyn, and Overton finally entered those councils where national policy was actually determined. For a moment the Levellers stood on the threshold of political power.⁴⁴

Indeed, the officers could not ignore an organization which had a strong hold on the ranks. Fairfax's response to the letter was neither positive nor negative; he thought the matter should be presented to the General Council.⁴⁵

The Levellers failed to achieve an alliance with the Army's leadership at the Putney debates. An invitation to talk with the Army was not an endorsement of Leveller policy. Cromwell distrusted the Levellers, and Lilburne suspected Cromwell had no intention to implement Leveller policy. As an Army leader, and the future ruler of England, Cromwell's actions had a direct effect on the success of the Leveller movement. Gooch maintains that an evaluation of Cromwell's actions and motives, after 1646, as either cunningly designed to secure the kingdom for his personal rule, or as sincere

⁴³ *ibid*, p. 846.

⁴⁴ Frank, p. 134.

⁴⁵ The General Council of the Army was composed of officers and Agitators.

and open, provides a limited analysis of a complex individual.⁴⁶ Abbott defends Cromwell from attacks of hypocrisy, by describing Cromwell's motives as those of a practical politician. In an effort to balance factions, Cromwell acted as circumstances demanded to maintain his influence.⁴⁷ Though his actions can be rationalized as practical, he made few friends and was loathed by both royalists and radicals.

Cromwell feared growing Leveller influence in the ranks; he supported the rank's demands to counter-balance radical appeals, because he needed the Army to defeat the Presbyterians, whom he disliked for their religious intolerance. He shared many of the Levellers' concerns, but supported few of their solutions.⁴⁸ Cromwell's commission was not renewed in 1646, and it was as a noninfluential member of Parliament that he talked with the troops in May of 1647. Lilburne preferred that Cromwell remain out of Army affairs, and, upon his return, Lilburne attacked Cromwell. In the months before the Putney debate, Lilburne attempted to secure a release from prison. Cromwell had influence among the Independents of Parliament, but did little to help Lilburne. Enraged by Cromwell's actions, Lilburne stated that the Agitators had been corrupted by officers, specifically Cromwell and Ireton.⁴⁹ Even during times of negotiation, tension characterized the relationship between the Levellers and the Army.

During the Putney debates, the difference of political philosophy among members of the Army and Levellers became clear. Organized to

⁴⁶ G. P. Gooch, English Democratic Ideas In The Seventeenth Century, (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1927), p. 192.

⁴⁷ Wilbur Cortez Abbott, The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, vol. I, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), pp. 463-465.

⁴⁸ Hill, God's Englishman, pp. 85-88.

⁴⁹ Frank, p. 130.

address the Levellers' *Agreement of the People* and relevant issues of policy, the debate centered on the franchise issue. Though the debate lacked organization and focus, the people in attendance attempted to resolve issues of political theory relevant to their situation. Focus was hard to achieve because the debaters lacked philosophical unity. The participants attended to discuss a document, but realized they needed criteria with which to evaluate it.

Cromwell made it quite clear, during the meeting, that he favored conservative reforms. In July, Cromwell had attempted to negotiate with the King, claiming a role of mediator between Charles and Parliament. Cromwell may well have, "...believed that the restoration of the monarchy was essential to the stability of property and the social order."⁵⁰ But more importantly, Cromwell sought to control the heady events of the summer. If working on the King's behalf gave him power, then that was considered solid policy. The generals attempted to reach an agreement with the King based on Ireton's *Heads of Proposals*. Charles cared little for deals, and used Cromwell's advances as a means of stalling, with hopes that the Scots would come to his rescue. At the same time the *Heads* received attention, the Levellers presented their *Agreement of the People* as a just way of organizing government.⁵¹

Very little of the *Agreement of the People* was discussed at Putney. Perhaps the best statement of the Levellers' constitutional plan, the *Agreement* is often considered the political manifesto of the Levellers. Its purpose, as stated in the preamble, was to protect freedom, avoid "returning

⁵⁰ Hill, *God's Englishman*, p. 92.

⁵¹ *ibid*, pp. 92-94.

to a slavish condition" and to avoid another civil war.⁵² The clauses that follow explained the method by which such freedom and peace can be secured. The first clause discussed the issue of rotten boroughs, but did not call for complete manhood suffrage. The second clause demanded the dissolution of the Long Parliament. Though technically a representative body, its long rule caused "inconveniences."⁵³ The third clause stated that the people would chose the Parliament every two years.

The fourth clause of the Agreement made clear the power of the people. Parliament's powers included: making and repealing laws; establishing and abolishing offices and courts; and conducting foreign affairs. Parliament has power, but it is subordinate to those who have elected it. An important part of Leveller political philosophy is the democratic implication of the phrase: "...this [the newly elected Parliament], and all future Representatives of this Nation, is inferior only to theirs who chuse them..."⁵⁴ The Levellers did not want matters of religion to be controlled by the secular world; freedom of conscience was a right of all. Impressment was declared illegal; all people were subject to law regardless of their social position; and all laws were to be just and for the benefit of the people. The *Agreement* was addressed to the people of England, but the people never received it.

Cromwell and Ireton focused on the first clause, which they perceived to advocate universal manhood suffrage. The Levellers faced accusations of advocating communism, and leading the country to anarchy. Cromwell believed that a society of order needed a hierarchy, such as that advocated in *Heads*. The monarchy would be retained with limited power, and

⁵² Almyer, *An Agreement of the People, for a firme and present Peace, upon grounds of Common-Right*, p. 89.

⁵³ *ibid*, p. 90.

⁵⁴ *ibid*

Parliament would be biennial.⁵⁵ The generals supported monarchy in October, but, as Woodhouse notes: "...their attachment to monarchy was, like their attachment to Parliament, less deeply grounded than the 'Presbyterians'; it was more a matter of policy than of principle."⁵⁶ Though Putney failed to evaluate the *Agreement*, the discussion of issues addressed the essence of Leveller theory. All English subjects possessed rights, and government was to function for the people.⁵⁷

On October 28th and 29th at Putney, Cromwell and Ireton represented the conservative side, advocating a limited extension of the franchise and reforms that respected tradition. The Levellers and Agitators, represented by Rainsborough, Petty, Wildman, and others, supported a more significant extension of the franchise, and maintained that bad precedents deserved abandonment. Ireton tried to dismiss the Agreement by acknowledging that while some of it might be valid, the council had no right to adopt it. He maintained that the Army could not break "engagements" already established, even if justice was the cause. Only by sending the issue to another committee, Ireton maintained, could it be settled.⁵⁸ Cromwell feared rash action at a time of great change; distrustful of Leveller ideas he judged to be too theoretical, he argued for caution and the use of a committee. The Levellers did not let the matter so easily die.

⁵⁵ S. R. Gardiner, The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution 1625-1660, (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1906), *The Heads of Proposals*, p. 316.

⁵⁶ Woodhouse, p. 17.

⁵⁷ The Leveller movement was not an active feminist organization; however, it advocated women's rights more than most groups at that time. The wives of the Leveller leaders were politically active, and worked to advance their husband's goals. see Woodhouse, *Petition of Women, Affecters and Approvers of the Petition*, pp. 367-369.

⁵⁸ Woodhouse, Putney Debates, pp. 10-15. Of course, later, Ireton does break with Parliament. His comments at the debate are meant to frustrate the Levellers, but it is also probable that Ireton was still trying to resolve the issue for himself.

The first part of the debate focused on natural rights, and the extent to which circumstances justified breaking agreements. Wildman stated:

Parliament...though they make an unjust law though they make an unrighteous law, yet we must swear obedience. I confess, to me this principle is very dangerous, and I speak it the rather because I see it spreading abroad in the Army again--whereas it is contrary to what the Army first declared: that they stood upon such principles of right and freedom, and Laws of Nature and Nations...⁵⁹

In order to implement the *Agreement of the People*, the Levellers advocated abandoning the unrepresentative Parliament, which they viewed as unjust and not in keeping with natural law. The ideas expressed in the *Agreement* were new, and radical to many. Cromwell and Ireton did not have a moral problem with abandoning the Long Parliament, or making significant changes in government, as just one month later Colonel Pride entered Parliament. The Independent officers distrusted an appeal to natural law which lacked definition and could lead to anarchy. Ireton stated:

If you will resort only to the Law of Nature, by the Law of nature you have no more right to this land, or anything else, than I have...when I hear men speak of laying aside all engagements to [consider only] that wild or vast notion of what in every man's conception is just or unjust, I am afraid and do tremble at the boundless and endless consequences of it...There is a great deal of equivocation [as to] what is just and unjust.⁶⁰

Philosophy was much too inexact for the military men preparing to take action based on self-interest with the goal of control. A discussion of natural rights led to the issue of property rights. Ireton feared a nation of

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

people demanding the property of the rich as part of their natural rights. The Independent generals did not support drastic changes in social order.

After discussing the philosophical direction the nation should adopt, on the second day, the debate shifted to specific questions of the franchise issue. Ireton maintained that, "...no person hath a right to an interest or share in the disposing of the affairs of the kingdom...that hath not a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom..."⁶¹ Ireton continued to defend his position by claiming that many people have influence over local government; he discussed the of rights of foreigners, and maintained that those without an interest in the nation should not control national government.⁶² Rainsborough argued that to disenfranchise a man because he lacked property contradicted God's law. Sexby relates Rainsborough's argument to the case of soldiers. The poor soldiers fought to recover their birthrights which were their interest in the kingdom. To deny the soldiers a role in determining their government because they lack property, Sexby stated, was to label them as mercenaries.⁶³ Ireton's final position on the issue was that property, a human creation, lay outside of God's law, and that while, "...the original of power of making laws, of determining what shall be law in the land, does lie in the people--[but by the people is meant those] that are possessed of the permanent interest in the land."⁶⁴ Although the Levellers stated their case eloquently during the debate, their arguments failed to convince Cromwell, who maintained their ideas would lead to anarchy.

⁶¹ *ibid*, pp. 53-54.

⁶² *ibid*, pp. 54-57.

⁶³ *ibid*, p. 69.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, pp. 67-69.

It is possible that the Levellers had not decided on the details of the franchise issue, and were willing to compromise in order to reach an agreement with Cromwell and Ireton. Petty was willing to accept a franchise policy which excluded servants, apprentices and alm takers.⁶⁵ However, the details of the issue meant little to Cromwell. Ireton and Cromwell have been accused of using the debate as a method of stalling the radicals. Indeed, the debate was not well organized as the same themes were often repeated.⁶⁶ On November 4, over the objections of Cromwell and Ireton, the General Council of the Army voted to extend the franchise to all except servants and beggars. However, the *Agreement of the People* never reached the common people. Because the *Agreement* was not adopted by the powerful generals of the Army, it faded into the background of events.

The General Council passed the suffrage agreement without the support of Cromwell, and in a letter written to several regiments by Agitators the resolution was stated: "*That all soldiers and others, if they be not servants or beggars, ought to have voices in electing those which shall represent them in Parliament, although they have not forty shillings per annum in freehold land.*"⁶⁷ The Agitators stated the resolution in their own terms, but it affected the Levellers as well. The General Council, dissolved by the generals, was not allowed to continue with scheduled debates. Cromwell feared that the Council would pass more resolutions contrary to his plans. The Council had scheduled a general rendezvous of the entire Army. However, Fairfax fear mutiny if the Army met as a whole. Therefore, Fairfax arranged for the Army to meet in three separate groups. These

⁶⁵ Christopher Thompson, "Maximilian Petty And The Putney Debate On The Franchise," *Past & Present* 88 (August 1980), pp. 63-68.

⁶⁶ Woodhouse, p. 28.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, A Letter from Several Agitators to their Regiments, p. 452.

actions angered the Agitators who wrote to the soldiers: "...you may observe the strange inconstancy of those that would obstruct our way,...But we hope it will be no discouragement to you, though your officers--yea, the greatest officers--should oppose you."⁶⁸ The conflicts between the Agitators and the generals brought the Levellers and the soldiers to common ground.

Cromwell tried to control the Agitators by putting restrictions on their ability to act, but this created more opposition to his authority. On November 11, the day the Agitators sent the letter attacking the officers to the regiments, an event occurred which hurt the Agitators' ability to rally the Army to their program.

Charles' escape to the Isle of Wight enabled Cromwell to appeal to the soldiers' sense of loyalty to the Army as a fighting unit. Unsure of the location of the King and his immediate plans, many in the Army feared a return to war. Dramatic occurrences focused attention on political realities, and detracted from the Levellers' appeal to theories of justice. Cromwell could not have hoped for a more timely crisis, and he has been accused of organizing Charles' flight. There is little evidence to support the theory that Cromwell arranged the escape; however, Cromwell's cousin, Robert Hammond, commanded the island, and Cromwell visited the Isle between September fourth and twelfth.⁶⁹ Regardless of who helped Charles to Wight, attention was diverted from the officers' problems at Putney. Writing to Hammond, Cromwell expressed his optimism: "How good has God been to dispose all to mercy! And although it was trouble for the present, yet glory has come out of it;...But, dear Robin, this business hath been, I trust, a mighty

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 455.

⁶⁹ Hill, *God's Englishman*, pp. 96-98.

providence to this poor Kingdom and to us all."⁷⁰ The Second Civil War did occur, but rather than a curse, it proved to be to Cromwell's advantage.

At Ware, one of the three rendezvous points of the Army on November 16, the Levellers and Agitators attempted to lead the soldiers in a mutiny against the officers. Rather than using the Army organization by working with the officers, a direct appeal was made to the common soldiers. At the heart of all Leveller philosophy, were the rights of the common people to control their lives and influence the destiny of the nation. The failure of the Ware mutiny demonstrated that the Levellers could not succeed by appealing directly to the people, but rather needed to work with those in power.

The failed mutiny succeeded in strengthening the generals' position. In a letter written to the House of Commons, Fairfax explained the occurrences of the mutiny. Colonel Eyre and Major Scot, two known Agitators, "...had dispersed divers of those Papers amongst Col. Lilburne Regiment of Foot, the most mutinous Regiment in the Army..."⁷¹ In an effort to get support and weaken the generals, the Agitators and Levellers campaigned among the soldiers. Some soldiers, upon learning that Fairfax did not support the Agreement, abandoned the Levellers:

Colonel Rainsborow and some others, presented a *Petition and the Agreement of the People*, to *his Excellency*, at his first coming, Colonel Harrison's Regiment, who had Papers in their Hats, with *this Motto, England's Freedom, and Soldiers Rights*, when they understood their Error, by the Generals severe Reproof, of their so doing, tore them, and expressed their Resolution to be obedient to his Excellency's Commands.⁷²

⁷⁰Thomas Carlyle, ed., Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches, vol. 1, (New York: Scribner, Welford & Co., 1870), p. 316

⁷¹ Rushworth, vol. VII, part. IV, p. 875.

⁷² *ibid*, p. 867.

Of course not all soldiers fell in behind the officers, but those who did not understand the philosophy of Leveller theory had little reason to disobey the generals. Fairfax and Cromwell maintained control of the Army, and also gave the Parliament cause to worry. In a letter written to Fairfax, the House of Commons expressed their thanks for his role in quelling the disturbance, and promised to find a satisfactory way to raise money for the Army.⁷³

By December 1647, the initial hostility toward the generals, following Putney, subsided as a result of common concerns. Charles began negotiations with the Scots which threatened the success of both the Army and the Levellers. Cromwell and Rainsborough agreed that, "[i]f the King and his Scottish allies were to be opposed, it was only in the name of the existing Parliament, whatever its demerits, that the battle could be fought, and to gain that end, subsidiary questions must for the present be waived."⁷⁴ The Agitators ceased to advocate mutiny, the Army council pardoned mutineers, and Fairfax appointed Rainsborough to the post of Vice-Admiral, though the Lords refused to consent. In addition to the external threat posed by the Scots, English royalists demonstrated and published in support of a restoration.⁷⁵

Even with an alliance, the Levellers continued to distrust Cromwell, and view him as a, "dastardly time-server."⁷⁶ Cromwell had supported the monarchy when to do so served his needs, and in December he sided with Parliament. The *Putney Projects*, a significant Leveller tract written by Wildman, accused Cromwell of hypocrisy. Whatever Cromwell's motivations,

⁷³ *ibid*, p. 876.

⁷⁴ S. R. Gardiner, History Of The Great Civil War 1642-1649, (New York: Longmans, Green, And Co., 1893) p. 44.

⁷⁵ *ibid*, pp. 45-46.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 47

the Army easily defeated the Scottish force, and put down royalist revolts in South Wales and Colchester. A new threat to Cromwell's control came as Parliament attempted to negotiate with the King and make the Newport Treaty.

The Presbyterians wanted to establish order in the name of a weakened monarchy which they would control. Members of Parliament, who disliked the Presbyterians' plans of religious organization, supported resolving the conflicts in order to strengthen Parliament. Before such an agreement could be reached, Parliament had to negotiate with the King and be assured of his sincerity. Perhaps the more difficult task would be to reach an agreement which the Army would accept.⁷⁷ Cromwell found unacceptable any treaty between the King and Parliament, which gave Parliament authority over the affairs of state. In response to the threat posed by such an alliance, the Army appealed to the Levellers for support, and promised them a role in establishing a new form of government.

The Levellers ultimately agreed to support the Army in return for negotiations, which Army leaders promised would adopt an agreement of the people. However, they did so reluctantly, and after a final attempt to ally themselves with the House of Commons failed. *The Bloody Project*, submitted to Parliament in late August 1648, stated that if the King must be restored so as to bring peace to England than it must be done, "speedily and honorably."⁷⁸ The pamphlet called for, "...the establishment of a progressive and constitutional democracy in England...[and] that any political coalition formed to achieve this positive aim ought to be under the leadership of the

⁷⁷ David Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 105.

⁷⁸ Frank, p. 166.

Levellers."⁷⁹ As long as the House of Commons had power and shared it with the Levellers, the restoration of the King as a figure-head was acceptable.

In September, the Levellers submitted *The Humble Petition*, similar to the 'Large Petition,' to the House of Commons. The petition appealed to the Commons not to forsake their duty to the people. Believing that the Long Parliament could still be the instrument of the Leveller program, the House of Commons retained the faith of the Levellers: "...we judged this honorable House chosen by, and representing the People..."⁸⁰ The Commons was praised for past achievement; however:

...no sooner God vouchsafeth you victory, and blesseth you with success, and thereby enablet you to put us and the whole Nation, into an absolute condition of freedom and safety: but according as ye have bin accustomed, passing by the ruine of a Nation, and all the bloud that hath bin spilt by the King and his Party, ye betake your selvs to a Treaty with him, thereby puting him that is but one single person, and a publike Officer of the Commonwealth, in competition with the whole body of the people, whom ye represent;..⁸¹

The restoration of the King threatened to be detrimental to the Levellers and the House of Commons. Though not immediately rejected by the Commons, the petition did not result in an alliance with the Levellers.

Cromwell convinced the Levellers that an alliance with the Army was their only option. Indeed, the Levellers could not afford to be excluded from the final outcome of the civil war. The Commons ignored their appeals and continued negotiating with the King. The Levellers' role as a faction was painfully apparent in months before Pride's Purge. Unable to settle the

⁷⁹ *ibid*, pp. 166-167.

⁸⁰ Alymer, *The Humble Petition*, p. 132.

⁸¹ *ibid*, p. 133.

affairs of the kingdom alone, the Levellers, reluctantly, consented to the generals' plans, though serious doubts remained.

Before the Army asked for Leveller support, the officers needed to agree on a plan of action. Ireton's *Remonstrance* called for descisive action against the King and a purge of Parliament. Cromwell and Fairfax were less anxious to abandon diplomatic channels, and supported a final attempt to reach an agreement with the King. However, on November 18 the General Council adopted Ireton's plan. On November 15 the Commons voted to allow the King to come to London, and restore his lands and legal revenues. Parliament was willing to compromise with Charles to frustrate the Army and radicals, even though the King had not accepted the Treaty of Newport.⁸² Parliament meant to burn all bridges with the Army.

Ireton's *Remonstrance* provided a plan for dealing with Parliament, the King, and establishing a new system of government. Leveller ideas were included in the document in an attempt to attract them to the program; however, the details, vague at points, were less democratic than the Levellers desired.⁸³ The *Remonstrance* stated that: "...nor without their advice and consent may anything be imposed upon, or taken from, the people;..."⁸⁴ The first part of the document provides a philosophical justification for the specific recommendations of the second part. Parliament was instructed to chose a time to dissolve and return power to the people. Annual or biennial elections were to be held to assure a system of just government. The details of the settlement were to be established by an agreement of the people. The *Remonstrance* closed by praising the 'Large

⁸² Underdown, pp. 115-122.

⁸³ *ibid*, pp. 123-125.

⁸⁴ Woodhouse, *A Remonstrance of Fairfax and The Council of Officers*, p. 458.

Petition,' and challenging the Commons to act wisely.⁸⁵ The Army advocated some principles of government which the Levellers supported, and appealed to the Commons in similar language as that of the 'Large Petition' and a *Humble Representation*. However, the Army's motivation for writing the *Remonstrance* was not philosophical; the document was less of a plan, and more of an apology for the action soon to be taken against the Parliament. Viewing the *Remonstrance* as a tool of a policy already planned, the appeal to the Levellers is easily seen as part of a limited plan and not a commitment for future cooperation.

Not surprisingly, members of Parliament were outraged by the document. William Prynne stated that: "'So far from being seasonalbe'...the *Remonstrance* 'was subversive of the law of the land', leading only to 'desolation and confusion'".⁸⁶ The Army was ready to act, but the Levellers remained skeptical. Ireton met with Lilburne and Wildman on 25 November to discuss their differences. The Levellers rejected his stance on liberty of conscience, which they found too strict, and disapproved of the power Parliament was to retain in judicial cases.⁸⁷ In addition to disagreeing with details of Ireton's plan, the Levellers had no guarantees that the Army would include them in a settlement of the nation's affairs after gaining control. Lilburne wrote in his account of the negotiations:

And besides we plainly told him: we would not trust their bare words in general only, for they had broke their promise once already both with us and the kingdom, and he that would break once would make no conscience of breaking twice if it served for his ends, and therefore they must come to some absolute

⁸⁵ *ibid*, pp. 462-464.

⁸⁶ Underdown, p. 126.

⁸⁷ Woodhouse, *The History Of The Second Agreement, From John Lilburne, Legal Fundamental Liberties*, (1649), pp. 344-345.

particular compact with us, or else, some of us told him, we would post away to London and stir up our interest against him.⁸⁸

Lilburne's statement was prophetic, but he had to risk betrayal. Ireton confirmed the truth of Lilburne's words; however, he insisted that the Army did not have time to reach a final agreement before settling affairs with Parliament. If the Army delayed and a treaty was concluded between the King and Parliament, the Army would, "...be commanded...to disband...And then...we shall never be able to fight with both the interest of King and Parliament, so that you will be destroyed as well as we."⁸⁹ As a faction, with little independent power, the Levellers had no choice but to agree to Ireton's terms. Opposing the Army, and hurting its base of support, could result in a royalist victory. The generals wanted the Levellers' endorsement in order to unify the ranks, and the Levellers had much to lose by not backing the Army.

The Levellers proposed that a committee of sixteen draw up an agreement for the people. Members of the committee would include: four of the Army's "honest friends" from Parliament; four Levellers; four Independents; and four members of the Army. The Levellers sought to settle matters, and the committee would be a vehicle of cooperation and commitment. Ireton enthusiastically accepted the plan, proclaiming it, "...*as just, as rational, and as equitable, as possibly could be*."⁹⁰ Ireton, happy with the committee plan which placated the Levellers, wasted no time before marching to London. The perceived urgency to purge the Parliament, disrupted the committee's work.

⁸⁸ *ibid*, pp. 345-346.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 346.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p. 347. quoted by Lilburne in the paper

The formation of the committee gave the Levellers hope that an agreement based on democratic ideals would be adopted by the Army. Just as the election of Agitators indicated the democratic tendencies of the ranks, a committee approved by the generals showed a willingness to work with the Levellers. However, after the purge, the Levellers were not treated as members of a democratic process. After a slow beginning, Lilburne and the remaining thirteen members of the committee drafted a new agreement of the people. Ireton agreed that the work of the committee was to have been the final form of the agreement. Much to the distress of the Levellers, the committee's draft was submitted to the Council of Officers for review.⁹¹

The Army dominated power politics after purging Parliament. Once in control, Ireton did not need to worry about the Levellers' outcries. Issues involving the second agreement were discussed at Whitehall; however, the Army's agreement was published on December 15, just a day after the start of the debates, which indicated the officers did not intend to negotiate.⁹² Lilburne expressed the Levellers' anger, and explained his view of the Army's actions: "...they undertook merely to quiet and please us (like children with rattles) till they had done their main work...that so they might have no opposition from us but that we might be lulled asleep in a fool's paradise with thoughts of their honest intentions till all was over..."⁹³ On December 15, Lilburne published the original draft of the committee under the name, *Foundations of Freedom*. The Levellers continued to attack the generals, and argue for the adoption of their program. However; the moment of opportunity was gone. Regardless as to whether the Levellers were

⁹¹ Frank, p. 175.

⁹² Alymer, p. 139.

⁹³ Woodhouse, *Legal Fundamental Liberties*, p. 351.

manipulated, or allowed to fall into a trap they set for themselves, the party no long functioned as a faction.

The Levellers advocated a system based on democratic ideals in a situation which was dominated by military superiority. Opponents of the Levellers argued against their progressive notions. However, the Levellers' radicalism paled in comparison to that of the Digger's and the Fifth Monarchy Men. During the Putney debates, the conservatives in the Army tried to equate the Leveller's democratic notions with communism. However, the Leveller's did not favor agrarian communism, and by 1648 Lilburne tried to disassociate his program from that of the Digger's.⁹⁴ The Fifth Monarchy Men were a millenarian group, which maintained that the Civil War was a struggle to establish the proper government in anticipation of the Second Coming. They favored social equality which denied privileges to the gentry and aristocracy. However, the fifth monarchists were not egalitarian; they would be the new elite. Strict discipline would be imposed by the government which they would control.⁹⁵ In contrast to more extreme groups, the Levellers' ideas followed a logical development of English democratic thought.

Lilburne referred to Cromwell and other Army officers as levellers in the respect that they, "...levelled the law and the principles of justice down to their own selfish interests."⁹⁶ In the final days before Cromwell secured control of the nation, his actions were radical and not in keeping with the spirit of the Civil War. The war was fought to rid the country of arbitrary

⁹⁴ Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down, (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985), p. 119. Some times referred to as true Levellers, the Diggers are noted for protesting enclosures on St George's hill.

⁹⁵ B. S. Capp, The Fifth Monarchy Men, (Totowa: Rowman And Littlefield, 1972), pp.131-156.

⁹⁶ Robertson, p. 3.

rule, but the Levellers charged that Cromwell and Ireton acted without authority in purging the Parliament and executing Charles.

By appealing to reason, and demanding that law govern the actions of the Army, the Levellers seemed less radical than Cromwell. It is true that the Levellers advocated changing the system of government, but they sought authority from the people of England. At no time did they plan to implement policy without approval. Lilburne stated the Army's position for the purge: "For where we, say they, either law, warrant or commission to purge it?"⁹⁷ The Army maintained that they could not obtain an endorsement from any source, and that urgency necessitated speed of action. The Levellers disagreed with the Army's interpretation of events and regarded Charles' execution as a logical step in the establishment of an authoritarian government based on military rule. Lilburne refused to act as a judge at the King's trial, because he believed the proceeding to be unjust and not in keeping with the laws of England. Lilburne stated that the trial was to be, "...extraordinary...[having] no real footsteps nor paths in our law," and to have such a trial, "...would be a thing of extraordinary ill precedent..."⁹⁸ The Levellers believed that executing the King was of little importance; however, the manner used in dealing with Charles could set the tone of the settlement. By treating Charles as any other man accused of a crime, all thoughts of divine right would be crushed, and the new system of government would be perceived as fair. Lilburne did not trust a system which, to secure power, quickly dealt with problems out of fear, and he maintained that the people should not accept such a system.

⁹⁷ Woodhouse, *Legal Fundamental Liberties* p. 348.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, p. 355.

After Charles' execution, the Levellers were not needed by the generals. The Army's policy had been to compromise with the Levellers, but never to cooperate. Lilburne opposed the King's execution because he believed that a tyrant balanced the tyrannical tendencies of the Army. Lilburne was correct with regard to his own fate. Advocating a democratic system, based on an agreement of the people meant that the Levellers' base of support was to be the common person. However, the mass of people had no power to implement the Levellers' ideas. In addition to lacking the tools and conditions necessary for the establishment democratic government, most English people did not relate to the Levellers' concerns. Local problems and regional alliances tended to occupy their attention.⁹⁹ The Levellers successfully appealed to the common men in the Army ranks by focusing on issues important to the soldier. There is little evidence that the average soldier understood the Levellers' philosophy. Lacking a solid and effective base of support, the Levellers were victims of circumstance. When the Army secured control of the government, Cromwell turned on Lilburne. The Levellers gained influence as a factional group, but they could not gain control.

⁹⁹ for one example see David Underdown, "The Chalk and The Cheese: Contrasts Among The English Clubmen," Past & Present 85 (November 1979) : 25. Underdown maintains that rural people had political attitudes but, "...ones visible only as reactions to external threats to the integrity of their communities."

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Abbott, Wilbur Cortez. ed. The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell. New York: Russell & Russell, 1970.

The extensive explanations, which are included among the documents, provide a context with which to evaluate Cromwell's actions and writings.

Aylmer, G. E. ed. The Levellers in the English Revolution. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.

The documents are well chosen and edited. Aylmer included documents which are not found in other volumes of Leveller works. The notes preceding the documents provide important contextual information.

Carlyle, Thomas, ed. Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches. Vol. I. New York: Scribner, Welford & Co., 1870.

Gardiner, S. R. ed. The Constitutional Documents Of The Puritan Revolution 1625-1660. Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1906.

Haller, William. ed. Tracts On Liberty In The Puritan Revolution 1638-1647. Vol. II. New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965.

Haller presents the Levellers' writings in the form of facsimiles. Volume I, of the three volume set, contains commentary about the documents which appear in volumes II and III.

Haller, William. and Davies, Godfrey. eds. The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653. New York: Columbia University Press, 1944.

Together with Haller's three volume work, the essential primary sources are available. This volume does not present the works in their original printed form.

Rushworth, John. ed. Historical Collections. Oxford, 1721.

Rushworth served as secretary to Fairfax and the Council of War. Later, he was Cromwell's secretary. In these positions, he collected numerous documents related to the civil war period. Included in the collection is correspondence between the Army and Parliament.

Woodhouse, A. S. P. ed. Puritanism And Liberty. Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1951.

Woodhouse compiled the Clarke's manuscripts, and included addition documents which add to ones understanding of the Army debates.

Secondary

Brockway, Fenner. Britain's First Socialists. New York: Quartet Books, 1980.

Capp, B. S. The Fifth Monarch Men. Totowa: Rowman And Littlefield, 1972.

An excellent monograph, it explains the origin, development and beliefs of the English millenarian group.

Clarendon, Edward. Macray, W. Dunn. ed. The History Of The Rebellion And Civil Wars In England. Vol. IV. Books. IX-XI. Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1958.

Clarendon was a royalist, and his history reflects his bias. Most of his accounts of events are correct and well reported.

Frank, Joseph. The Levellers. New York: Russell & Russell, 1969.

Frank's discusses the development of the Leveller group. He analyzes the origins and contributions of the leading Levellers by examining their writings.

Gardiner, S. R. History Of The Great Civil War. Vol. IV. 1647-1649. New York: Longmans, Green, And Co., 1893.

The eighteen volume work provides an excellent narrative of events.

Gooch, G. P. English Democratic Ideas In The Seventeenth Century. Cambridge: At The University Press, 1927.

Hill, Christopher. God's Englishman. New York: The Dial Press, 1970.

_____. The Century Of Revolution 1603-1714. New York: W W Norton & Company, 1980.

_____. The World Turned Upside Down. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985.

Hill describes various radical groups who challenged the established social and political norms during the civil war period.

Hirst, Derek. Authority and Conflict. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Kishlansky, Mark. "The Case Of The Army Truly Stated: The Creation Of The New Model Army." Past & Present 81 (November 1978) : 51-74.

Pocock, J. G. A. The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Robertson, D. B. The Religious Foundations Of Leveller Democracy. New York: King Crown Press, 1951.

Thompson, Christopher. "Maximilian Petty And The Putney Debate On The Franchise." Past & Present 88 (August 1986) : 63-69.

Underdown, David. Pride's Purge. Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1971.

———. "The Chalk and The Cheese: Contrasts Among The English Club men." Past & Present 85 (November 1979) : 25-48.

Woolrych, Austin. Soldiers and Statesmen. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.