

## Rise of Parliament 2-2



### Charter of Liberties

Going back to Anglo-Saxon times, kings often made promises to their subjects to rule fairly and maintain the peace. Often kings failed to fulfill those promises. In 1087, William II became king and immediately went to work to find ways to increase his income to pay for wars against Wales and Scotland and to support a luxurious lifestyle. The king increased taxes on land owned by monasteries and barons, children had to pay a tax before inheriting land, the king left openings unfilled in the English Church so that collected money went to the crown instead, and women who were to inherit large amounts of land

often had to marry friends of the king. The English people twice rebelled unsuccessfully against William's rule. Eventually, William II was "accidentally" killed by an arrow during a hunting trip.

When William II died in 1100, Henry I became king of England. To gain acceptance of the barons and the Church, Henry I issued the *Charter of Liberties*, the first surviving written English coronation promise. Henry I promised to repeal the harsh policies of the previous king. He established a national court run by unbiased judges trained in the law, reduced taxes, left the Church alone, and created a government run by people of intelligence rather than status or wealth.

In 1106, Henry I invaded the kingdom of Normandy in France and defeated his rival and older brother, Duke Robert, who also claimed the English throne. Henry I brought Normandy under English control and remained a popular king for the duration of his rein.

### Magna Carta

In 1154, the Plantagenet dynasty came to the throne of England. Under their rule the power of the monarchy increased. The crown ultimately controlled the courts and tended to favor those who gave more money and support to the king than those who did not.

John Plantagenet became king in May 1199. King John raised taxes on the barons to pay for the defense of English lands in Normandy. John confiscated and jailed anyone who did not pay. Despite John's ruthlessness at home, he failed to protect Normandy and lost it to the French king Philip Augustus who took away all English land holdings there. Many English barons blamed King John's inattention to the war in France as the main cause of English defeat.

King John, ever in search of more money, quarreled with Pope Innocent III over who should run the English Church. King John wanted his own official in charge so that money could be

diverted from the Church to the king. John eventually made peace with the Pope, but it was not enough.

The English barons wanted reforms. In May 1215, they raised an army of over two thousand men and marched on the city of London. The popular support for the barons forced King John to negotiate for peace. The two sides met at Runnymede, where King John on 15 June 1215 signed the *Great Charter* or *Magna Carta*. This document has been called the beginning of English liberties. *Magna Carta* demanded that the law applied to all freemen—including the king, granted rights to individuals, everyone deserved a fair trial, and required a Great Council of twenty-five barons to approve new taxes. An important part of the document stated:

“No freeman shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land. . . . To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice.”

Although signed by both parties, neither side obeyed the document’s guidelines and civil war followed. The document was reissued several times and eventually became the basis for English common law.

## **Parliament Forms**

Magna Carta gave the English people the idea that they had rights. Decades later, when King Henry III needed vast amounts of money to support foreign wars for the Church, he had to call together a meeting of the Great Council in 1258. The barons agreed to a tax increase in exchange for reforms in the government. These councils began to be called Parliament. Over time, Parliament’s influence in government grew. The call for Parliament in 1265 included not only barons and church officials

(Lords) but also elected representatives (Commons) from towns and shires. The need for money to fight wars forced monarchs to continually call Parliament into session and, when possible, Parliament used that crisis to bargain for more power.

In the 1290s, hostilities grew with Scotland, Wales, and France. King Edward I called Parliament together in 1295 to approve new taxes to finance the wars. He insisted that both Lords and Commons attend as “What touches all should be approved of all.” However, when Parliament refused to fund an invasion of France, Edward I confiscated English property and held it for ransom to raise money; Parliament captured the king’s son and held him until Edward I agreed that henceforward all taxes must be approved by Parliament. The king agreed. This Parliamentary power became official law in 1362. Parliament’s authority also increased when Edward I encouraged people to send to Parliament petitions, formal requests asking for help to deal with problems. Thus Parliament became involved in making decisions that affected all of society.

Edward II became king 1307 and it was clear he lacked the leadership ability of his father, Edward I. In 1314, the Scots defeated the English army at Bannockburn which led to a power struggle between Parliament and the increasingly ineffective king. Then Edward’s estranged French wife Isabella and her son raised an army on the European continent and successfully invaded England. The despised King Edward II attempted to flee but was captured. In January 1327, Parliament removed Edward II from power and replaced him with his son, Edward III. Afterward, Edward II was murdered at Berkeley Castle on, it was believed, Isabella’s orders.

Until 1341, the nobles, clergy, and commons met together at Parliament. However, in that year, the commons met separately for the first time creating what became known as the House of Commons. The nobles and clergy eventually formed the House of Lords. In time, Parliament became a two house legislative body that worked with and competed with the monarch for political power.