

## Coffeehouses, the Shift in English National Sentiment in 1673 and the Glorious Revolution

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to explore and explain some of the distant causes of the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. It argues that without the fundamental change in English public opinion at the beginning of the 1670s, the Glorious Revolution – which was an Anglo-Dutch achievement – would have been impossible. It discusses the foreign policy of Charles II, the consequences of the third Anglo-Dutch War and some domestic developments, which all combined to change the way well-informed people in England perceived continental affairs. The article also touches upon the role of coffeehouses in the development of a public sphere in later Stuart England.

**Key words:** later Stuart England, public opinion, third Anglo-Dutch War, Catholicism, causes of the Glorious Revolution.

### 1. Introduction

“On 5 November 1688, William of Orange, the Stadholder of the United Provinces, landed in the south of England with a large army<sup>1</sup>, and forced James II (his uncle and father-in-law) into exile. A few months later William and his wife, Mary were proclaimed king and queen of England” (Borus, 2015, p. 127). These events have been known as the *Glorious Revolution*.

The events of 1688-89 had important internal and external causes as well. By 1688, James II had alienated the Anglican majority in England with his Catholic policies.<sup>2</sup> It is clear, however, “that without the military intervention of William of Orange” (Borus, 2015, p. 127) – who wished to protect the United Provinces against French threats by involving England in the anti-French coalition – the Revolution would have been impossible. William’s intervention also had a number of preconditions. One of these was the change in English popular feeling from anti-Dutch to anti-French around 1672-1673. The aim of this essay is to explore how all this came about.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on his own archival research, Jonathan I. Israel has demonstrated that William’s army was much larger than historians had thought. He crossed the English Channel with about 40.000 people on the whole, and his army was at least 21.000 strong. See Israel, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> The openly Catholic James wanted to grant religious freedom and civil equality to his co-religionists. He wished to abolish the laws (the *Corporation Act* of 1661 and the *Test Acts* of 1673 and 1678) that excluded Catholics from public offices and Parliament and prevented them from worshipping freely. For details see Speck, 1989, pp. 129-131; Miller, 1978, pp. 126-127; Miller, 1988, pp. 21-23; Coward, 1994, pp. 336-339.

## 2. Research Context and Objectives

For almost three hundred years, the Glorious Revolution was seen by historians<sup>3</sup> (and, as a result, by most of those who were interested in the topic) primarily as a domestic event. In 1688, people in England rebelled – they argued – against the Catholic absolutism of James II. The tercentenary of this important turning-point in British and European history generated new interest in the event and revealed that, in fact, the external and long-term causes of the Revolution were more important than the more immediate internal ones.<sup>4</sup> Without going back to the 1660s and the reign of Charles II, it is impossible to understand why James II was dethroned.

Fear of France, Catholicism and absolutism, which was one of the fundamental causes of the Glorious Revolution, was already very strong when James II came to the throne in 1685. Section 3 of this paper explains why this type of fear was still limited until the early 1670s. In Section 4 we need to refute the view of Jürgen Habermas on public opinion in England in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. It was not after the Glorious Revolution that the public sphere emerged in England but much earlier than that. From the 1660s onwards, there was a lively discussion of politics and foreign affairs in coffeehouses in the various parts of Britain. Without this, the shift in English national sentiment from anti-Dutch to anti-French – one of the preconditions of the Glorious Revolution – would not have occurred. Section 5 seeks to explain and elaborate on the actual causes of this shift: Charles II's pro-French foreign policy and his Declaration of Indulgence, the various consequences of the third Anglo-Dutch War, the revelation that James, Duke of York was a Catholic, his marriage to a Catholic princess, as well as the effects of Dutch propaganda.

## 3. Public Opinion in England in the Restoration Era

During the 1660s, English public opinion was greatly split in its interpretation of European politics. Adherents of the restored monarchy believed that the Dutch Republic threatened England, while the monarchy's opponents considered Louis XIV's France as the main enemy. Until the early 1670s it was possible to accept both of these interpretations (Pincus, 1995a).

What the English feared throughout the seventeenth century was, what they called, 'universal monarchy', that is world domination by a continental power. People in Restoration England knew that long-distance sea trade was the basis of great power. The Dutch dominated trade in many different parts of the world (the East Indies, the Caribbean, the West Coast of Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Baltic); they were the greatest rivals of the English in foreign trade and were even more successful than the

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<sup>3</sup> Burnet, 1833; Lecky, 1907; Macaulay, 1934; Trevelyan, 1938.

<sup>4</sup> See Miller, 1988; Speck, 1989; Israel, 1991; Jones, 1991; Schwoerer, 1992; Holmes, 1995.

islanders. As Wilson has observed, they were especially strong in carrying trade:

“By extraordinary enterprise and efficiency, they had managed to capture something like three quarters of the traffic in Baltic grain, between half and three quarters of the traffic in timber, and between a third and a half of Swedish metals. Three quarters of the salt from France and Portugal that went to the Baltic was carried in Dutch bottoms. More than half the cloth imported to the Baltic area was made or finished in Holland. The flow of colonial wares into European consumption was also to a large extent in their hands...” (Wilson, 1978, p. 41)

It is easy to understand, therefore, that the claims that it was the Dutch who were seeking universal monarchy appeared credible. Many were convinced that the United Provinces would soon monopolize all trade and crush her rivals.

Political change in the United Provinces also strengthened these fears in England. In 1650, William II, Prince of Orange (the father of William III who later on carried out the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89) died. Republicans (the Loevestein party) came to power – led from 1650 to 1672 by the Grand Pensionary of Holland, Johan de Witt – who appeared to be the natural enemies of the English royalists. The United Provinces became a haven for English radicals and a secure base for a new attempt to overthrow the English monarchy. Thus, monarchists after 1660 wanted war against the Dutch.

The second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-67) ended in an unexpected way. It was the aggressive foreign policy of France that made the quick settling of differences necessary. The French gave their Dutch allies only minimal military help, and in secret they prepared for the occupation of the Spanish-Netherlands, which Louis XIV demanded for his own wife. The invasion was launched after the death of Philip IV of Spain, the French king's father-in-law. The Dutch feared that France might annex the Spanish-Netherlands and become the threatening immediate neighbour of the small United Provinces. The English, who have always been anxious to guarantee the neutrality and independence of the territories closest to them on the Continent, were equally alarmed by the French ambitions. The Anglo-Dutch peace treaty was signed in July 1667. Six months later, the Triple Alliance of England, the United Provinces and Sweden was born, the aim of which was to mediate between Spain and France and to force the French to give up the majority of the occupied territories (Holmes, 1995; Coward, 1994).

Louis XIV was shocked by the betrayal of Johan de Witt and wanted revenge against the Dutch. He realised that if he wanted to gain the Spanish-Netherlands, he would first have to break the resistance of the United Provinces. It was also clear that the Triple Alliance might become the core of a great anti-French coalition. The alliance of the two maritime powers, England and the Dutch Republic presented a major strategic problem for France, since she would have to divide her energies between continental and naval campaigns (Rowen, 1954; Kennedy, 1989).

After the French invaded the Spanish-Netherlands in 1667, it was the second interpretation of international affairs that started to appeal to more and more people in

England. The religious and political radicals had already maintained that the actual threat to England was the absolutist ruler of France, Louis XIV, who was trying to build up a new universal monarchy, and that the Dutch, in reality, were defenders of Protestantism and liberty. The Anglo-Dutch wars only contributed to the rise of France, they argued. While the rival sea powers were destroying each other, the French king was able to increase his power at sea (Pincus, 1995a).

#### **4. The Debate Concerning the Public Sphere in Later Stuart England**

This is the point where we need to elaborate on the character of the public sphere in later Stuart England. The German sociologist and social theorist Jürgen Habermas (1989) has defined public sphere as an arena for public discussion, a space created for the “people’s public use of their reason” (p. 27). The political task of this public sphere, he argues, was the criticism of the state. For Habermas, the archetypal public space is the coffeehouse, which started to appear in England in the middle of the seventeenth century. The German social theorist nevertheless believes that it was only “after the Glorious Revolution” that the public space really emerged (p. 32). He claims that “a public sphere that functioned in the political realm arose first in Great Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century” (p. 57). What is more, Habermas – along with the great Whig historian, Thomas Babington Macaulay, as well as a number of twentieth-century historians – believes that coffeehouses existed only in London, and that women and the lower classes were excluded from them (Habermas, 1989; Macaulay, 1855; Jones, 1979; Ellis, 1956; Clark, 1983).

This delimitation of the public sphere in England at the end of the seventeenth-century has been challenged by some historians, especially Steven C. A. Pincus. Using the evidence provided by surviving records (diaries, journals, pamphlets and letters) Pincus (1995b) has demonstrated that public opinion in later seventeenth-century England was more developed than Habermas believes and that coffeehouses were neither confined to the metropolis, nor class or gender exclusive.

The very first coffeehouse probably opened in Oxford in 1650. It is, of course, true that the overwhelming majority of the coffeehouses (hundreds of them) were to be found in London, but they soon appeared in the provinces and in Scotland and Ireland as well. During the 1660s, these institutions of the public sphere were opened in York, Bristol, Harwich, Yarmouth and Nottingham. The first coffeehouse in Dublin was opened as early as 1664. Those in Glasgow and Edinburgh appeared in 1673 (Pincus, 1995b).

The public sphere, therefore, was far from being limited to the metropolis. At the same time, instead of being exclusive institutions, they welcomed everyone regardless of social status or gender. The surviving records prove that women not only attended coffeehouses, but were even owners of them in London and elsewhere. The reason why Habermas and a number of historians have come to believe that women were unwelcome in Restoration coffeehouses was probably the fact that three pamphlets exist, which

criticised and attacked these institutions in the name of women.<sup>5</sup> As Steven Pincus (1995b) points out, however, “there is no evidence that they were written by women” (p. 815). It is much more probable that they were published by Anglican Royalists in the eyes of whom coffeehouses were centres of sedition, places where nonconformist, religious and political radicals came together to conspire against the restored monarchy. Anglican Royalists associated coffeehouses with England’s radical past for, when coffee first appeared in England, the Puritans were in power. Oliver Cromwell himself was a great coffee drinker. It is not surprising, therefore, that the government of Charles II was concerned about these new establishments, and had agents in them to collect political information (Pincus, 1995b).

Coffeehouses enjoyed a number of advantages over alehouses. They were cheap places of sobriety, where newspapers and pamphlets could be read and business could be conducted in a more appropriate way. The main function of these institutions, however, was the circulation of news. They were places to discuss politics, religion and culture. People “flocked to the coffeehouses in droves because it was there that they could gather news or political gossip and criticize or celebrate the actions of the government” (Pincus, 1995b, p. 822).

Discussions in the new institutions of the public sphere were not confined to domestic affairs. European affairs were frequent topics of conversation as well. Developments in the three Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652-54; 1665-67; 1672-74), for example, were hotly debated. What follows is an explanation of what English coffeehouse-goers were able to discuss at the beginning of the 1670s, and why public sentiment changed from anti-Dutch to anti-French in 1673.

## 5. The Shift in English National Sentiment

From the spring of 1668, there was a marked contrast between the foreign policy aims of Charles II and those of his chief minister, the Earl of Arlington. Arlington wanted a Protestant foreign policy and wished to strengthen the Triple Alliance of England, Sweden and the Dutch Republic, while the king hoped that his diplomatic successes would enable him to make a deal with Louis XIV. Eventually, Charles – who was a great double-dealer and personally responsible for policy-making – started secret negotiations for an alliance with France through the agency of his sister, Henrietta, the wife of the Duke of Orleans, Louis XIV’s brother.

By the end of 1669 the main terms of the agreement had been agreed on, and at Dover in late May 1670 (under the cover of the English king’s meeting with Henrietta) the Treaty of Dover was signed. The treaty consisted of two parts. According to the open treaty, which was known to all the ministers, France and England were to attack the

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<sup>5</sup> *The Women’s Petition Against Coffee* (London, 1663); *The Maiden’s Complaint Against Coffee* (London, 1663); *The Ale-Wives Complaint Against the Coffee-House* (London, 1675).

United Provinces in the near future. England was to conduct the naval war against the Dutch and Charles was to receive £225.000 a year from the French king during the ensuing war. By the secret part of the treaty, which was known only to Thomas Clifford and Arlington, Charles II was to declare himself a Roman Catholic and to restore Catholicism in England. Louis was to give Charles a further payment of £150.000 a year, and to supply an army of 6000 French soldiers to put down possible rebellions in England.<sup>6</sup>

As regards Charles' motives, it is clear that he had financial and political ones. French financial help was necessary to save him from the control of Parliament in his difficult fiscal position after the second Anglo-Dutch War. Why the English king insisted on including the Catholic clause in the secret treaty is more difficult to explain. Charles II was a clever ruler, the wisest of the Stuarts who knew that openly Catholic policies might have disastrous consequences. Eventually it was only on his deathbed that he converted to Catholicism in 1685. With the Catholic clause he probably had a double purpose. This is how he could get really close to his cousin, Louis, and force him to raise the French subsidy by £150.000 (Coward, 1994).

The war against the Dutch (the third Anglo-Dutch War), which Louis XIV and Charles II had agreed on in the Treaty of Dover, was launched in the spring of 1672. Up to this time it was possible for the English political nation to accept both interpretations of international affairs. People could easily believe that the Dutch were attempting to archive universal domination by gaining a monopoly in maritime trade, while the Sun King wished to establish a universal monarchy with his aggressive foreign policy and by using his large standing army. Now, that England in alliance with France attacked the small Dutch Republic, the English had to decide which the greater threat was. Due to three developments in the early stages of the war, there remained no doubt in the large majority of the English that France represented the more serious danger (Pincus, 1995a).

First, the French offensive of June 1672 was so successful that the United Provinces almost vanished from the map of Europe. Turenne and Condé crossed the Rhine, occupied Utrecht and advanced nearly to Amsterdam. The Dutch republic, which consisted of seven different provinces, was now virtually reduced to the province of Holland. The citizens of The Hague and Amsterdam managed to survive only by cutting their dykes and flooding their suburbs with water to stop the advance of the French troops. Under these new circumstances it was very hard to imagine that it was the Dutch who were seeking universal domination. Instead, English public opinion started to turn against the war and the French alliance. As Barry Coward (1994) has put it, the "potential threat to English national security from French expansion in the Low Countries, which only a few had seen in 1670-1, now became apparent to all" (p. 309).

Second, the French invasion also resulted in a political revolution in the United Provinces in 1672. In this state of national crisis, the people of The Hague overthrew Johan De Witt and his republican party, and made the young William of Orange Captain-

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<sup>6</sup> For details see Hutton, 1986.

General and Admiral-General of the country, as well as Stadholder of the various provinces. Many Englishmen had supported the war against the Dutch because Johan De Witt's party had been an enemy of the English monarchy. Now they wanted alliance with the half-Stuart William and the Orangists (Pincus, 1995a).

Third, since the French failed to support the English properly at sea, it became clear to almost everyone that the French had dark designs. They believed that the French in reality wanted "the English and Dutch fleets to destroy each other" (Pincus, 1995a, p. 357). At the beginning of the war, in May 1672, De Ruyter's attack against the Anglo-French fleets at Sole Bay caused considerable damage to the English force and revealed the inability of the two Allied fleets to cooperate. At the end of the war, De Ruyter repeated his attack upon the Royal Navy and once more the English received little help from the French. The failure of the French fleet to engage was considered perfidy by the English. As Paul Kennedy (2001) has remarked, "indeed, the apparent inaction of the French in this battle off the Texel and on other occasions, caused even James's enthusiasm for the alliance with Louis XIV to wane, while the greater part of the country displayed its open animosity towards the war and the government's leanings to a more Catholic and authoritarian policy" (p. 62).

Thus, as a result of these three developments English popular opinion came to be transformed. Claims that the Dutch were trying to achieve universal domination were discredited and, at the same time, fears of French aspirations strengthened. Fear of France went hand in hand with fear of Catholicism and absolutism. Some domestic developments in 1672 and 1673 also contributed to these fears and the transformation of public opinion.

In March 1672, shortly before declaring war on the Dutch, Charles II issued a Declaration of Indulgence by which he suspended all the penal laws, allowed Roman Catholics to worship in their homes and gave licences to protestant nonconformists (dissenters) to hold communal worship.<sup>7</sup> The Declaration united most of the political nation (which saw the document as a papist measure and a major threat to Parliament) against the king and his ministers. When Parliament met in February 1673, its debates were characterised by anti-Catholic hysteria. The House of Commons declared the suspending power on which the Declaration was founded illegal. Unlike his brother, James, Duke of York, Charles II was a man of compromise. Realising the strength of the parliamentary resistance, the king announced the withdrawal of the Declaration of Indulgence and ratified the Test Act, which excluded both Catholics and Protestant Nonconformists from holding public offices.

The most important immediate consequence of the Test Act of 1673 was that James, Duke of York, brother and heir apparent of Charles II – who had converted to Catholicism at the end of the 1660s – had to resign as Lord Admiral. Suddenly it became clear to everyone that the heir to the throne was a devout Catholic. He was to be the first Catholic ruler on the throne since Bloody Mary (1553-1558).

Fears of Catholicism had deep roots in England. As William Speck (1989) has explained:

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<sup>7</sup> For the whole document see Browning (ed.), 1955, pp. 387-388.

“Fears of popery generated irrational delusions about the intentions of the Stuarts from the 1630 to the 1680s. They were fed on a mythology sustained by Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* that Catholic monarchs would follow Mary Tudor’s example and extirpate heresy by wholesale executions. In addition to this Protestant martyrology there was also the myth which equated Catholicism with arbitrary power, a belief which received strong support from contemporary events in France...” (pp. 10-11)<sup>8</sup>

James’ marriage in the same year also heightened these fears. After the death of Anne Hyde – the Protestant mother of the future Mary II (wife of William of Orange) and Queen Anne – the government started to search for a new wife for the Duke of York. The first choice was a Catholic member of the Habsburg dynasty, and it is significant that nobody had anything against this match. It was only when these negotiations came to nothing and James decided to marry the Italian Mary of Modena instead that protests started, since this was considered to be a marriage of the French interest. It was not Roman Catholicism itself, therefore, that the English feared, but French domination. There was fear of French-style Catholic absolutism (Pincus, 1995a; Macleod, 1999).

Dutch propaganda also contributed to the transformation of English popular sentiment in 1673. The Dutch “smuggled large numbers of pamphlets into England during the war” (Pincus, 1995a, p. 353) in order to undermine the English support for the French alliance. The most important instrument of this propaganda was Peter du Moulin’s *England’s Appeal from the Private Cabal at Whitehall to the Great Council of the Nation*. The essence of its argument was that France, Catholicism and absolutism were inseparable, and the continuation of the military conflict between the English and the Dutch would only enable the Sun King to achieve universal monarchy and to spread Catholicism in England (Coward, 1994; Pincus, 1995a).<sup>9</sup>

## 6. The Consequences and Significance of the Change in English National Sentiment

In the face of hardening opposition, Charles II decided to make peace with the Dutch in February 1674. The Franco-Dutch war continued until 1679. William of Orange managed to save his country from French conquest by making a Grand Alliance with the

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<sup>8</sup> The proper title of John Foxe’s book, which appeared in 1563, was *Acts and Monuments*.

<sup>9</sup> Peter du Moulin was a French Huguenot who settled in England at the time of the Restoration. As a protégé of the Earl of Arlington, he entered the English diplomatic service. At the outbreak of the third Anglo-Dutch War he escaped to the United Provinces and became a close associate of William of Orange. He cooperated with the English Parliamentary opposition and developed a whole network of agents in London. He was responsible for smuggling thousands of pamphlets into England. For details see Haley, 1953.

Austrian Monarchy, Spain, Brandenburg and Lorraine. The possibility of checking France by a European coalition was demonstrated in this war. William of Orange knew, however, that without English help the French could not be defeated. He realised that if his uncles (Charles II and James II) refused to change England's foreign policy, he would have to force them to do so. This is what eventually happened in 1688.

In conclusion, we need to emphasise the significance of the change in English popular sentiment in 1673 from anti-Dutch to anti-French. From 1673 onwards, fear of France, absolutism and Catholicism was so strong in England that it would have made the Glorious Revolution possible much earlier than 1688. William of Orange managed to stabilise his position in the United Provinces. More and more politicians realised in Europe the necessity of uniting against the French. Thus, the most important preconditions of the Glorious Revolution were provided.

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