**An interview with Angela Anderson**

This interview with Dr Angela Anderson (AA) was carried out by Wall to Wall Television (WW) for the Channel 4 programme [*Cromwell: New Model Englishman*](http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/H/history/war/index.html).

**Charles I**

**WW**: What kind of person was Charles I?

**AA**: Shy and sensitive. He was the second son of James I. He was not intended to be king. Henry, the first son, was big, strong, good at games, physically impressive and everything that a king should be. Charles was much smaller and weaker and had a stammer. He was overshadowed by his elder brother until 1612 when Henry died. Then, suddenly, Charles is catapulted into the position of heir to the throne.

He also had a very strong sense of duty. I think this explains quite a bit about his attitude and behaviour later on.

He tended to be very formal and reserved. It's almost as if he takes refuge in formality because it gives him a cloak, a strength that he might not feel that he actually had. He had a very strong belief in his powers as king and, again, it's something that he can rely on, which will give him the strength to do the job that he feels he must do.

He has been described as emphasising authority in a way that only a very insecure person would. I think that probably explains a lot of what Charles later did. It would also fit with, for example, his preference for 'high church' forms, because they're ritual and a set pattern. It's the emphasis on uniformity and authority that would give him strength and comfort.

He was also a very devoted family man. After a very difficult beginning, his marriage was very happy, and he was very fond of his children.

He seems to have had good taste in art. He was quite aesthetically aware and not unintelligent. You might say he was a 'nice man', but not, I think, a very good king.

**WW**: It struck me as quite ironic that, at this stage in their lives, both Cromwell and Charles feel they're chosen by God.

**AA**: Oh yes, definitely. Charles obviously was chosen by God – he was anointed at the coronation – and Cromwell saw himself as chosen by God. In Cromwell's case, 'chosen' meant one of a significant number of people, whereas Charles was chosen as 'the one' – God's deputy on earth.

**WW**: Can you tell me about the divine right of kings? What exactly did Charles understand by it?

**AA**: Kings had always had some claim to a divine status. If you go right back to Anglo-Saxon England, once the king was crowned that meant he was approved by the Church as the representative of God. He was anointed literally with oil and therefore he had a divine status.

That status was enhanced considerably at the time of the Reformation. When Henry VIII claims to be the head of the Church, what he's saying is that he is God's deputy on earth over spiritual matters as well as secular government. So the divine right of kings begins to be further developed from that point on to justify the king's place at the head of both the Church and the State.

What it meant is that the king had certain powers, what we would call his 'prerogative powers', which he had the right to exercise according to his judgement. Ultimately, the king was responsible to God, and if you take that literally, he not only has the right to follow his own judgement, he has the duty to follow his own judgement, because sooner or later, he's going to have to account to God for what he does.

The divine right of kings is also part of a wider belief in what was called 'the great chain of being' – that God had actually created a world that was based on a hierarchy, with kings at the top and then, moving down through the social structure, ordinary people, animals and stones. Everything had its rightful place within this hierarchy, and the responsibility of the monarch at the top was to maintain and uphold it and then to account to God for his way of managing it.

**WW**: How important was that belief to Charles?

**AA**: Oh, it was absolutely essential to Charles. I don't think his beliefs differed that much from those of his father. It was James I who had actually written on the divine right of kings. He'd published a book in 1598 called The True Law of Monarchies, in which he'd enunciated very high-flown theories about the divine right of kings. To him, kings are 'gods' because they have the power of life and death over their subjects. I don't think that Charles believed anything more extreme than James. The difference was that Charles seems to have taken it more literally. The MPs were rather worried about this.

James applied the theory but also said, 'A king leads to be a king and becomes a tyrant if he ceases to rule according to the laws that he has made.' So kings are above the law because they make the laws, but once the laws are made, they should abide by them. In practice, James always accepted the limitations on his power.

Charles, perhaps because he was less confident, tended not to see the need for those limitations, and so he is not only autocratic in belief, he's autocratic in temperament, and that's what causes difficulties for him.

**WW**: You've talked a lot about the Puritan vision. What was Charles's vision?

**AA**: It's a vision of a harmonious community with everything in its place. It's based on the idea of the hierarchy. The kind of Church that Charles wanted to create was a Church that was beautiful, that honoured God through its beauty, that was orderly, that brought the community together, that placed people in relation to one another where they should be. That was also part of his political vision because that was the kind of society that he believed he should rule over.

The problem for Charles was that he could never understand why other people didn't share this vision. If you think about it, in his terms it was a very attractive vision, and because he knew that he intended 'well' by it, for his people, he couldn't accept that anyone could challenge this vision with good motives. Therefore opposition must be maliciously motivated, and because it was maliciously motivated, it had to be cracked down on and dealt with in whatever way was necessary.

**WW**: Why did this upset the Puritans so much?

**AA**: Because it was too close to Catholicism. That's the crucial point. It was partly that they didn't share this communal vision of religion in quite the same way. It didn't allow for the individual to follow their own spirit.

One of the things that Cromwell wanted and fought for, and actually tried to put into practice when he was Lord Protector, was to create a Church that was flexible enough to allow people to find God their own way. He wanted a Church that emphasised certain basic beliefs and maintained a standard of education and was an instrument for good behaviour – the Godly Reformation – but, in spiritual terms, allowed people the freedom to find their own way. Now Charles's vision didn't allow that.

The other problem was that the kinds of rituals that Charles was adopting, the methods he was using, were very closely associated with the Catholic Church. For most Puritans and for many Protestants, Roman Catholicism was a force of evil and the pope was identified as the Antichrist. Their version of the development of the Church was that this force of evil had come into the early Church, corrupted it and turned it into the Roman Catholic Church. If you allowed that to creep back in, its corrupting influence could begin to work again.

That was why you had to get rid of all traces of Catholic practice. What Charles was doing, even if he himself wasn't a secret Catholic, was allowing secret Catholics to operate within the Church and they would begin to corrupt it again.

So, not just those whom you could call Puritans but quite a wide spectrum of English Protestants were horrified by the changes that Charles and Laud introduced because they feared that they were moving back to Catholicism.

And, of course, there was also a link to political tyranny. If you looked across at the continent of Europe at this time, you had Catholic monarchies that were absolute monarchies and becoming more absolute. They were whittling away at local and provincial privileges and centralising and extending their control. They were Catholics. They were in association with the pope. The Roman Catholic Church was based on the authority of one man at the top. It was an authoritarian institution. It fitted with the idea of absolute monarchy.

The Puritans had long memories. They remembered their persecution during Mary Tudor's reign – Fox's Book of Martyrs had, of course, played this up – and the Spanish plots against Elizabeth I and the threat of Spanish invasion. Now there was the Thirty Years' War going on in Europe, which was militant Catholicism trying to retake areas that had become Protestant. If you look at it from that viewpoint, you can see why Charles's vision was very frightening to the Puritans.

**WW**: What about Charles's wife? Was he under her thumb?

**AA**: I think so, yes. It's difficult to say because she obviously didn't see him as being under her thumb.

One of the concerns that Henrietta Maria shows in the months of the Long Parliament is the fear that Charles will abandon her. She knew how unpopular she was and there was this fear that he would try to save the political situation by getting rid of her. Now that doesn't suggest someone who believes her husband is at her beck and call.

However, they were close. She had a very strong personality, and there's no doubt that she did have some influence. The problem was that her influence was politically quite, quite disastrous.

She and Buckingham were the two great liabilities to Charles. He was very much under Buckingham's influence and he gave Buckingham political power in a way that James hadn't. He was very willing to listen to his wife, who was a Catholic, who practised her religion, who actively sought to convert and did convert a number of courtiers, who sometimes took her children to hear Mass and those children included the heir to the throne, and who was always telling Charles that he must stand up for himself and not let people walk all over him.

**The coming of civil war**

**WW**: What do we know about Cromwell when he arrived on the scene in 1640? What kind of figure did he cut at this time?

**AA**: I suppose 'comic' is not the right word, but I don't think he would have been an impressive figure. He seems to have been a bit of a country bumpkin.

He was capable of being rash and outspoken and sometimes quite, quite naïve. At the same time, he could be quite forceful, quite noticeable – not, you know, hiding his light under a bushel – but not, compared to men like [John] Pym and [John] Hampden, a particularly impressive political figure.

**WW**: You then have this extraordinary news coming from Ireland – rebellion. What effect did this have on people in England?

**AA**: It had a massive effect. Even in Parliament. There's a story that somebody dropped something that rattled on the wooden floor and gentlemen grabbed their swords because they thought they were being attacked. A kind of tension creeps in, because of the English prejudice about the Irish, plus the fact that they were Catholics. The Irish were always seen as the worst type of Catholics, the most dangerous type of Catholics.

The news of the rebellion began to come in October 1641. There were rumours that thousands of Protestants had been massacred. There were massacres – there's no doubt about that – but they were wildly exaggerated.

According to the diary of a fairly obscure Yorkshire minister, all his congregation were in church on a Sunday night when someone rushed in and announced, 'The Irish have landed on the coast of Lancashire and they'll be in Bradford within the hour!' The whole congregation rush home, get their stores of food in, put wood in front of their windows and sit there shivering and waiting for the hordes of Irish to descend. That was the kind of impact that the stories from Ireland had. People panicked, and this presented the opposition MPs with a real problem.

At that stage, their relationship with the king was at something of a stalemate. They'd achieved quite a lot of their political objectives, but they'd lost support in the process. There were signs of a division within Parliament and some sympathy for the king.

The MPs didn't trust the king. The king was in Scotland and they'd been very unhappy about him going there because they thought he was trying to build support there – which, of course, he was (but he failed). The MPs are already wary, they're already tense and then there's this news of these dreadful massacres in Ireland. They must make sure that fellow Protestants are helped, so they've got to do something.

The king is slow to react. The Irish rebels claim to be acting in his name, and the fact that he didn't rush back from Scotland tended to lend some credibility to that.

So what are the MPs going to do? They've got to create an army; they've got to send help to Ireland. They're going to have to give the king an army when they're not at all sure what the king is going to do with it. There is fear that, if they give him the army, he may choose to use it against Parliament rather than in Ireland.

So what they did was develop a strategy. They introduced a Militia Bill to give the king the wherewithal to raise an army. Then they attached a clause saying that Parliament should have the right to approve his choice of commander-in-chief. Obviously they were trying to make sure they maintained some control. Now that was a clear encroachment of the king's power.

There was no debate about that, and a lot of the more moderate MPs were horrified. It was also a considerable insult to the king because it must have been perfectly obvious that they were doing this because they didn't trust him.

**WW**: The situation then escalates, doesn't it?

**AA**: Yes. The Militia Bill was a tactical error. It offended a number of Royalist MPs. Pym introduced the Grand Remonstrance, which was an attempt to reunite Parliament by looking back at all that they'd achieved and laying out what they still had to do. This passed the House of Commons by only 11 votes, so, far from uniting the House of Commons, it actually showed how deep the division was by this time.

**WW**: What was the atmosphere like in the Commons as Christmas 1641 approached?

**AA**: I think 'tense'. You have to bear in mind that the opposition leaders were playing a very dangerous game. They were putting themselves at risk by the things they did. From their point of view, if Charles should ever regain freedom of manoeuvre, they were likely to suffer personally. They could quite possibly find themselves in the Tower, and if they were convicted of treason, it wasn't only themselves, it was their families who were also at risk, as well as their property.

The atmosphere must have been tense, and that tension probably increased because of what was going on outside. The citizens of London were aware of what was happening, and from time to time, they appear in the political picture – the mobs who demonstrated outside Whitehall to get Charles to sign Strafford's death warrant, that kind of thing.

The knowledge that Parliament was divided must have been a great cause of concern for the opposition because their great security was the unity of Parliament and they were losing it. At this point, they made a decision that caused further division, which was to publish the Grand Remonstrance. As one of the later Royalist MPs said, they were appealing to the people and talking of the king as a person, which was something unheard of. For the more conservative MPs, it was dangerous to bring the people into politics.

In late December, there were elections in London and a common council was elected that was favourable to the opposition cause, so it was likely that there would be more demonstrations. Charles sent Colonel Thomas Lunsford to become warden of the Tower and tried to overawe the citizens. There were further demonstrations over the Christmas period and rumours that Pym was going to impeach the queen. It was at that point that Charles, having seen support flowing his way, felt that he had to take action. He tried to arrest the five members. If he had arrested them, there's every reason to believe that they would have been tried and convicted of treason.

**Cromwell at war**

**WW**: This amazing quote: 'I'd rather have ... the plain russet-coated captain that knows what he fights for and loves what he knows.' What does that tell us about Cromwell?

**AA**: It tells us that he relied a great deal on common sense, that he was a very practical man. One of the features of his character is that he tries to do what is going to work. It sometimes gets him in trouble with more doctrinaire allies.

Remember that Cromwell became actively engaged before the war started. He left London and went down to Cambridge and secured Cambridge Castle and also intercepted a considerable amount of plate that was being sent from the colleges to the king. Now, had the war not started, he could easily have been charged with robbery, maybe even treason, for those actions. So he's involved, he's prepared to put himself at risk, he believes he's fighting for a cause and he is determined to do it as effectively as possible.

However, I don't think for one moment that it meant that he didn't have a respect for the social hierarchy. He was a member of the gentry class. It's also important to realise that many of the officers of the New Model Army and of the Eastern Association Army were members of the gentry, so there's no anti-gentry spirit.

But Cromwell is not prepared to allow concepts of social hierarchy to stand in the way of getting the most effective fighting unit. And I also think that the quote may imply a respect for a certain kind of equality, not social or economic equality, but a spiritual one. Some Protestants believed strongly that truths could come from all sorts of unexpected quarters.

We don't know a lot about Cromwell's religious views. He was probably closest to some kind of independency. He does seem to have shared the view, which was common to a number of people at the time, that religion consists in many ways of a search for truth. Truth is to be found in the Bible, but it relies on interpretation of the Bible, and the ability to see truth and find truth could come from anyone. So there is this sense that ordinary men had a contribution to make and were capable of good things. That sense of equality also shows in the way he organised his regiment and then later trained his troopers.

**WW**: And what kind of man was he in battle?

**AA**: At the end of battles, he was nearly always elated. He writes again and again from the battlefield that he's elated by victory because God would not allow them to win the battle if they were not fighting for God's cause.

It is interesting that, in some ways, Cromwell appears capable of rash action, and yet he doesn't seem to be like that on the battlefield. The whole quality of his troopers was their discipline – the way that they were able to reorder themselves after a charge and take further part in the battle, which is often contrasted with the quality of Prince Rupert's cavalry.

So I think, on the battlefield, Cromwell was active, determined, disciplined, organised and, at the end, elated by what he sees as the verdict of success.

Cromwell was a man who found relief in action. He was at his best when he was doing something demanding. And I think the success he built up throughout the war had an enormous effect on his confidence as well as on his importance in political circles.

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**The power of the press**

**WW**: During this time in the war, how important was the printing press and the way publications were telling different sides of the story?

**AA**: There was a good deal of propaganda on both sides. There was political news, news sheets or newspapers. Information was disseminated around the country. Both sides had people writing on their behalf – for example, Henry Parker's tract justifying Parliament's rebellion against the king. There was that kind of philosophical justification, as well as more overtly propagandistic publications.

There was also a whole host of pamphlets pouring from the presses, which were not within the control of either side. The attack on the bishops in 1641 brought about the collapse of censorship, and although some attempts were made to reimpose it, it was impossible to do so effectively during the war.

A printing press at this time was small, quite cheap and quite easy to move around, and so you got a very great variety of illegal, or semi-legal pamphlets being published. That's why there was the explosion of new ideas, both important and eccentric, which was such a characteristic of this period. It certainly played a part in maintaining the morale of sections on each side, particularly some of those who were more committed to Parliament's side.

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**Cromwell and Parliament**

**WW**: What kind of figure does Cromwell now cut in Parliament as opposed to how he used to be?

**AA**: Well, he was obviously a very much more impressive and important figure. He'd played a significant role in the passing of the Self-Denying Ordinance and the creation of the New Model Army and he had already challenged [Edward Montagu, 2nd Earl of] Manchester. So he's becoming more significant as an individual, but still working with others.

I think it's very easy to make Cromwell too significant too early on in the Civil War. He didn't actually become the commander-in-chief of the army until 1650. [Thomas, 3rd Baron] Fairfax resigned because he was not prepared to lead the army to Scotland, and because he had grave reservations about what had happened to the king. It's not until the 1650s that Cromwell begins to be the really dominant figure who becomes Lord Protector.

The interesting thing is how many debates there were about what to do for a settlement – should they offer the crown to someone? Would it be better with a king? These debates take place between 1649 and 1657, but it's not until 1657 that Cromwell is considered a realistic candidate for the monarchy. In 1651, when they were discussing it, I don't think anyone would have thought of offering it to him.

**WW**: Despite bringing quite significant victories Parliament's way, Cromwell seems to have made a lot of enemies on his own side. Why?

**AA**: He was determined to pursue certain goals and I don't think he greatly worried about making enemies on his own side. He worried about keeping people together. You see this, for example, when he was dealing with the Levellers in 1647 – he was very keen to keep the army together. But when he felt an action was necessary, he took it.

The making of enemies has to do with pursuing the war effectively. He simply couldn't accept the defensive-mindedness of people like Manchester and [Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of] Essex. To Cromwell, if you're going to fight a war, you fight it to victory; only then could you bring the king to realistic negotiations. In fact, you couldn't even then, but Cromwell believed you could.

After that, he made more enemies because of political differences. Cromwell was searching for different sorts of settlement. He said at one stage, 'I'm not wedded and glued to forms of government,' and in terms of secular politics, I think that was true.

And he was prepared to try and get a compromise that would draw in as many supporters as possible. So at one stage he's working quite closely with the Levellers, and then, when it becomes apparent that what the Levellers are seeking is something he's not prepared to go along with, he crushes them. You also see him working quite closely with republican MPs and members of the Rump, and then, when he feels that the Rump have outstayed their welcome, when they become a liability to the cause, he dissolves the Rump. Now the Rumpers were extremely bitter about this – it comes through in the memoirs of people like [Edmund] Ludlow. Cromwell then turns to the idea of a nominated assembly – whether the best people of the country can come together and create an assembly where they can bring out a reformed constitution. This, of course, enthuses the millenarian element, and when Cromwell makes it quite clear that he's not going to pursue that path, they too become very bitter.

So he gradually made enemies, often because they expected more of him than he was prepared to give, and because what he saw as a sensible change of direction, they saw as a betrayal. It's one reason why he's had such bad press.

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**Religious toleration**

**WW**: One of the most remarkable things that Cromwell shows is this great desire to allow people freedom of conscience. However, even members of his own side were afraid of him because of this. Why?

**AA**: What the majority of MPs were so afraid of was that religious freedom would bring about social and political collapse. They thought that they'd go back to a world that they would have difficulty controlling. Order, hierarchy, these things were absolutely vital.

You have to remember that the common people were a great deal more 'common' than they tend to be now. They lived closer to animals – in many ways, some of their habits and manners were much more like those of animals. The gentry were a thin veneer at the top of this society and they undoubtedly did feel threatened at times.

There was no police force. You cannot rule a people simply through fear and an army, so one of the main ways of maintaining social control and social cohesion was through respect for the social hierarchy and the idea of deference. The Church was essential in teaching and maintaining that; hence, you had to have everybody going to church. This was why separatism itself was a threat, although some of the separatists developed quite frightening and radical and eccentric ideas – the Diggers and the Ranters, who went into sexual freedom.

Many of the separatists' ideas were, in religious terms, relatively orthodox, apart from wanting to be separate from the national church. But that was, in itself, a threat.

**WW**: Just how remarkable was Cromwell in this idea of toleration?

**AA**: He is remarkable, but so were a number of other people. William Walwyn, for example, the Leveller leader – his grandfather was a bishop, and he was a very wealthy merchant himself. Yet he is recommending schemes of social reform, work provided for the poor, their children given free education and so on.

So there were others, also of the gentry class, who were more radical than Cromwell. Having said that, he was one of a small minority who were prepared to allow that kind of freedom. The reasons lay, I think, in a belief that true religion was a search for God and that each person had to find God in their own way, within certain limits.

Now Cromwell had little or no time for the kind of radicals who actually threatened the existence of a national church. He had no sympathy, for example, for the Quakers in their demand to abolish tithes, although he perhaps would have liked to find a better way of raising money for the Church. He sought to maintain the institutions of control and to ensure decency, the Godly Reformation, the reformation of manners. For Cromwell, the Church was very important because it was a major means of education and moral reform.

So the caricature Puritan element is there – the control of behaviour – but Cromwell also seems to have had a streak of humanity: persecution for its own sake was something he seems to dislike. Take the case of James Nayler. While Cromwell didn't approve of Quaker beliefs, he was appalled by the way MPs set about trying to create the most horrific punishments for Nayler and actually talked about the death penalty for what was, at worst, an act of blasphemy. Cromwell regarded Nayler as misguided, eccentric, foolish if you like, rather than deliberately wicked. To him, this was not a man who was seeking to mislead the world; this was a man who was carried away by his own importance in riding [in the guise of Jesus] into Bristol.

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**The search for settlement**

**WW**: What was Cromwell's state of mind at the end of the First Civil War, after the elation of battle wore off?

**AA**: He sought settlement. He'd seen war at first hand, he'd seen the blood, he'd seen the suffering. I don't think anyone who'd been in the Civil War could have had any illusion as to what the war had done to the country and to the people who had been involved. Cromwell wanted and expected a settlement, and at first, he was prepared to leave that settlement to Parliament.

I think it's important to remember that, when Cromwell had fought, his personal cause had been mainly religious, but he had also fought for Parliament and the rights of Parliament. I don't think there was any question in his mind of the army playing an active role in politics. So he wanted to see a settlement between king and Parliament.

Now that didn't take place initially because of the intransigence of Charles, but gradually it also became clear that some MPs were out to get rid of the army as quickly as possible, and that the things for which many in the army, including Cromwell, had fought for – for example, religious freedom – were not going to be part of the deal.

You get an impression of a man who's concerned and perhaps quite depressed and disillusioned. However, I don't think his letters convey any intention to do anything about it until the unrest in the army becomes apparent. His role in what happens next is quite unclear.

It has been suggested that Cromwell in some way orchestrated the army mutinies and was pulling the strings. Of course, he spoke in Parliament several times, assuring MPs that the army would disband, and it's been said that that was deliberately misleading so that the conservative MPs maintained their very harsh attitude towards the army. However, I don't think there's any evidence to support that.

When the army seized control of the king, they visited Cromwell before he departed for Northampton. Cromwell then very quickly left London and joined the army, so we cannot be sure whether he had a hand in that or not. My view is that he probably did not, but that, as so often happened, he took it as a sign that it was God's will that this should take place. Therefore, he threw in his lot with the army. It is typical of Cromwell that, having decided to become involved, he wants to be in charge, he wants influence what goes on.

So he and [Henry] Ireton place themselves at the head of the army's movement. Fairfax, of course, is very important, he's the general, but he seems to have been content to take political advice from his leading officers, maybe because he doesn't want to divide the army either. So they go down that route of offering a political settlement of their own to the king. It was a fairly moderate settlement that, in many ways, addressed some of the king's concerns. And I think there's no reason to doubt that Cromwell was still genuinely seeking a settlement with the king.

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**Cromwell and the Levellers**

**WW**: The Levellers seemed to raise quite a degree of unrest within the army What was the agenda on the table at the Putney Debates? What can we learn about Cromwell from his behaviour at them?

**AA**: The agenda on the table was the Leveller Agreement, the agreement of the people, which was the Leveller proposal for a settlement.

It's difficult to know how much influence the Levellers had in the army at any particular time. I think there's no reason to believe that they actually fomented the army unrest. That was almost certainly caused by the failure of MPs to provide for arrears of pay or an indemnity for the soldiers before they were disbanded.

The Levellers certainly saw their opportunity when faced with unrest within the army. You have to bear in mind that there would be many personal contacts. [John] Lilburne had himself served in the army. Members of the army were members of gathered churches. I don't think there's any suggestion any longer that the army is dominated by religious radicals. But they certainly existed within the army and they were influential because of their commitment and the fact that they were often articulate. Those men would have personal links with Levellers in London and their supporters, so it wasn't difficult for the Levellers to begin to take an interest in what was happening in the army and to help organise, to encourage the appointment of agitators and the formulation of army demands.

Then, of course, Cromwell and Ireton join the army and their agenda is different. Neither of them was a republican; neither wanted to see the social hierarchy destroyed. They had some sympathy with some of the Leveller demands – things like the abolition of imprisonment for debt and obviously a measure of religious freedom – so there was a certain area of common ground. If you look at the heads of the proposals that Cromwell had put to Charles in August [1647], it does include some proposals that are obviously influenced by the Levellers: biennial elections for Parliament, some limited legal and social reforms.

But the Levellers were increasingly suspicious because they, of course, wanted a neo-democratic republic and therefore they regarded Cromwell and Ireton's dealings with the king as potentially a betrayal. As the summer wore on, what they wanted was for the army to go to London, dissolve Parliament by force and in some way introduce a republican form of government with the backing of the English people. That, of course, wasn't going to take place, and by the end of August, they were becoming increasingly fearful of a stitch-up, a deal between the king and the 'grandees'. So they published a tract called The Case of the Army Truly Stated and wanted to have it debated at the army general council.

Now the general council was something very unusual. It was set up at the time of the army mutinies and consisted of the officers and the agitators as representatives of the rank and file.

So what the Levellers were saying was: 'This is our proposal for an agreement, a settlement for the kingdom. We want the army general council to debate it and adopt it as the army's plan.'

At the debates, the arguments against the Levellers were led by Ireton. In particular, he challenged the idea of extending the vote to the majority of adult males. He argued – quite effectively, I think – that men of property with a stake in the kingdom should have the vote and not those who were, if you like, able to come and go, who were not tied to England in the same way as those who owned land.

But he also challenged the possibility of having such a wide franchise because there's no suggestion of a secret ballot, In fact, it was logistically impossible to have anything like a secret ballot at the time. Therefore, if voting is going to be public, men who depend on somebody else for their employment or their land or if they're parish poor who are dependent on poor relief, clearly they can be influenced to vote one way or another. So the theoretical arguments come from Ireton and they're quite effective. The evidence that we've got suggests that the Levellers did have a significant amount of support among some of the officers as well as the agitators. Cromwell's role seemed to be to keep things together. He's always trying to keep things calm, to say, 'We mustn't split apart. Surely we can come to some kind of agreement?'

Again it's a role that has led to accusations of hypocrisy, that he's trying to say what the Levellers want to hear until he can do something else.

The king's escape, which brought the debates to an end, was heaven-sent from Cromwell's point of view because it enabled him to bring the debates to an end and send the agitators back to their regiments. From that point on, the Levellers had very little chance of taking control of the army. And for that reason, it was suggested that Cromwell had in some way orchestrated the escape. I don't think the evidence is there to say that, but certainly he must have been very relieved when he had that chance.

**WW**: Do you see Cromwell as a hypocrite?

**AA**: I think he is being political. I don't think that's the same as being a hypocrite. The point was that, if Cromwell was to achieve any of his goals, the army was the essential instrument and the army had to be united. If the army were allowed to fall apart in the kind of internal wrangling that could happen if Ireton and the Levellers became too opposed to one another, they would all suffer.

So he's aware of the dangers; he's aware of the need to keep the army united. I don't think there's any doubt that he would not have agreed to the Leveller proposals in the end, but he was seeking a way in which they could come to some kind of agreement.

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**The army mutinies**

**WW**: The king escapes and Cromwell is confronted with insurrection within his own army. How does he react then? How does that compare with his behaviour at Putney?

**AA**: Of course, it's a different situation because now martial discipline is restored. Therefore, those who are doing what Cromwell doesn't want them to do are not simply arguing – they are actually committing an act of mutiny.

The Levellers had wanted a rendezvous of the whole army in the hope of getting the agreement adopted by acclamation from the men. Cromwell had insisted on three separate rendezvous, which were more controllable. Certain regiments were drawn up at Ware [Hertfordshire] when the one led by Colonel Robert Lilburne arrived bearing copies of the agreement attached in their hats.

They were not meant to be there, and the story was that Cromwell rode into the middle of them, snatched the copies very decisively, quickly quelled them and got them in line. Four troopers were cashiered for mutiny, of whom one was shot.

The story of Cromwell's action was challenged, certainly by at least one historian, who argued that he wasn't there. But work that's been done by others suggests that he was. So we don't know whether he actually acted as the story goes, but he seems to have acted decisively. Again, it's a case of, in one situation, he's trying to get political agreement, but if people are going to outface him, challenge his authority, put at risk the cause he's fighting for, then he's going to act.

It's a similar case to when the Levellers were finally dealt with. [John] Lilburne told the story of overhearing Cromwell thumping the table and saying, 'You are going to have to break these men because, if not, they will break you!' I don't think there's any reason to doubt the story, nor to doubt that Cromwell meant it.

**WW**: How did they chose the one out of the four to be shot?

**AA**: The normal process would be to draw lots. It's not an unduly harsh punishment when you consider that the men have committed mutiny.

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**The king's fate**

**WW**: During this time, Cromwell seems to be in favour of some sort of settlement with the king. He doesn't give any signs of being against the monarchy in principle. But within a two-year period, he goes from being someone who believes in the monarchy to someone who signs the king's death warrant. What is it that changes him?

**AA**: I think the major event is the Second Civil War. I don't think there was any time in his life when Cromwell was against the monarchy on principle, although he became convinced that God had set it aside. But he always believed in some sort of mixed monarchy, or something close to that, a government where there was more than one institution exercising power and where, therefore, one institution was able to check and maintain a balance with the other. That was always his preference.

So there was no reason for him not to look for a settlement with Charles as long as he believed a settlement with Charles was (a) possible and (b) approved of by God.

Then Charles escaped and got to the Isle of Wight – which was uncomfortably close to the coast of France – and began to negotiate with the Scots, which he had every right to do because he was king of Scotland as well. He signed an Engagement with the Scots in December 1647, whereby he invited a Scottish army into England to restore him to his throne. Now that was a very different kind of act from the actions taken by Charles at the beginning of the first war, and he was doing it at a time when peace had been restored. He deliberately started a second war.

Cromwell wanted a settlement, but the Second Civil War transformed his – and the army's – view of Charles. Charles became the man of blood, the man who was responsible for all the blood that was shed in that Second Civil War. Militarily it wasn't on anything like the same scale as the first war, but there were a large number of deaths, and Charles was to be held responsible for them by the army.

In addition, Cromwell increasingly believed that Charles had rejected God's verdict. This is where the perception of God's providence and the active will of God in the affairs of men becomes very important. Not only Cromwell but many radical Protestants saw the First Civil War as a trial of strength, a bit like the old- fashioned trial by battle, where the two causes were being tried out and God gave the verdict to the successful cause, the cause of Parliament.

So, in Cromwell's eyes, by restarting the war Charles was ignoring the verdict of God and going against God, so he was both responsible for the bloodshed and rejecting the will of God. And that was certainly important for many members of the army and for Cromwell.

**WW**: So was it quite a difficult journey for him internally ...

**AA**: It was a very difficult journey for him. He was not instinctively a political radical. He shared the outlook of his generation and class that the monarchy was a vital part of the social hierarchy and so he was never a theoretical republican.

And this, I think, is one reason why we get one of those periods of waiting, of uncertainty. The lead in formulating the army's demands that the king be brought to trial is taken by Ireton, not Cromwell. Ireton is the one who produces the Remonstrance of the Army in November [1648]. Cromwell was in Yorkshire, carrying out mopping-up operations after the second war. He could have returned to London and left that to somebody else. I think it was convenient for him to stay there, because he wasn't sure what he wanted to do, and as soon as he was back in London, he would have to go one way or the other.

There are letters that he writes at this time that suggest that he's inching his way to the decision. There's one very interesting letter to his cousin, Robert Hammond, who was Charles I's gaoler on the Isle of Wight. Cromwell talks about the chain of providences that brought Charles to the Isle of Wight – 'Can't you see that there is a pattern in this?'

It's almost like he's rehearsing arguments in favour of punishing Charles. You wonder whether the arguments are really to convince Hammond or to convince himself. He eventually did return to London the day after Pride's Purge [7 December 1648]. Once again, he seems to have seen in that the kind of sign from God that he saw with the seizure of the king by the army. He then commits himself. He says that he approves of Pride's Purge, and he commits himself to the process of setting up a high court and bringing the king to trial.

**WW**: So once he's made up his mind, what was Cromwell's behaviour during the trial?

**AA**: It was difficult for him to make his mind up. It was a big shift, but it was necessary. He actually says at one stage: 'It would be a terrible thing to kill the king, but necessity and providence put it upon us.' But once he's decided, as usual he's very active, he's very determined, he drives it through.

There are hints of evidence that he might have attempted to have one last go at persuading Charles to come to an agreement. But I think Charles had also made up his mind that he was not going to.

So the trial goes ahead and Cromwell is very much a driving spirit within it. There are comments about his behaviour during the trial – flicking ink at other judges, behaving in a very schoolboy fashion at times. I think it's a sign of tension. Nobody could ever doubt what a momentous act this was, and it's a sign of inner tension.

**WW**: Did they have a plan of what to do with the king?

**AA**: No, they didn't. The clearest evidence of how reluctantly they proceeded with the trial and execution is the fact that they were really badly prepared in terms of what to put in Charles's place.

The army officers tended to favour the idea of a republic. The Rump MPs, particularly the common lawyers, tended to argue for some kind of monarch because, as they pointed out, the laws were interwoven with the name of the king.

But, of course, they didn't have a monarch. There was no one that they could put in Charles's place.

There had never been any question, if the king was brought to trial, that he was going to be found guilty, and if found guilty, he was going to be executed. You couldn't afford to leave Charles alive, because he would always have been a centre of plotting. If you put him in prison, he would plot; if you sent him into exile, he would return with an army. So Charles had to go.

But once you execute Charles, you can't expect either of his adult sons – both of whom had actually fought against Parliament – to take his place.

There was a third son – Henry, Duke of Gloucester – and they did seriously consider putting him on the throne and appointing some kind of regency to govern in his name. But I think it would have been difficult. Certainly Cromwell was present at discussions where this kind of thing was raised, and he said, 'That would be a thing of more than ordinary difficulty.'

And so, in the end, they had to declare a commonwealth and create a republic. But it's not for two months after the king is executed that they actually get around to declaring it and abolishing the House of Lords as well. They were reluctant and they weren't sure where they were going.

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**Dissolving the Rump**

**WW**: Do we see Cromwell's ambitions appear at this stage?

**AA**: I think there was always an ambitious Cromwell. I don't mean it in the sense that his accusers were using it. I think Cromwell was always ambitious in the sense that he wanted to influence, he wanted to control, he wanted to help shape things, he wanted to have the power to do things. I don't think for one moment he envisaged finding himself as the general, or the Lord Protector. But if ambition can be defined as a desire to be active in influencing affairs, I think that was always there in him.

Right back in 1630, when he objects to the Huntingdon Charter, he's a man who's prepared to speak out, who's prepared to try to influence events around him. So that quality is always there. The higher he rises, the more ability he has to influence and shape the events around him.

There are several stories where Cromwell is supposed to have raised the question 'What if a man took it upon himself to be king?' They may well be true, because I think Cromwell believed that a king was a necessary part of a stable government. At the same time, he had a conviction that God had laid aside the king they'd had and maybe God was laying aside monarchy. Anyway they had no king, so you had to find something else.

I don't think there's any personality change at this stage. But he finds himself in a very important, very influential position, not entirely by chance. He's worked to get there, because he wants to influence events. And he's therefore looking at the possibilities: How can we find a settlement? How can we sort things out?

**WW**: So why do you think he dissolved the Rump?

**AA**: There are two questions about why Cromwell dissolved the Rump.

There's 'why in general', and 'why in general' was because the Rump consistently failed to introduce the kind of reforms that the army wanted to see. And they consistently failed to make progress, not only in constitutional reform, but in the pursuit of the Godly Reformation.

The Rump MPs were more restrictive of religious radicals than Cromwell would have been. Instead of establishing a broad, flexible, tolerant Church, capable of helping people find their way to God, they were actually restricting people's religious freedom. They passed some laws that, in the long run, were very useful. The Navigation Acts probably laid the basis of the development of the British Empire, but they were not the kinds of issues that Cromwell wanted to see them focus on. They set up a commission to investigate law reform and then did nothing about its findings.

So for four years there's this constant friction. The army is pressing for religious, social and legal reforms; the Rump is doing little or nothing about it. And Cromwell, for a long time, was placing himself in the middle, trying to prod the Rump into action, trying to placate the army and prevent them from complaining too much and so on.

So the general reason is because, in the end, he was fed up with the fact that the Rump were not doing what they should be doing.

The specific reason is not quite as clear. For a long time, it was thought that the Rump were about to pass a law that would 'recruit' to the House. This meant that they would stay as MP s and elections would be held in other constituencies to add to their number. They would actually be perpetuating their own power.

That was certainly discussed and a proposal was put forward. The argument was that they were going to pass this and Cromwell rushed down to get rid of them before they could. But more recently, research has suggested that, in fact, the Rump were going to dissolve themselves, which is what the army had been wanting them to do. But they were going to dissolve themselves without making any arrangements for any kind of transitional government, or for reforming the system of election, so that, if the army tried to call another Parliament, it would be on the old voting system. This would have produced an even more conservative Parliament than the Rump had turned out to be.

Now that makes sense because it would explain why Cromwell acted so hastily, because he seems to have come to a very sudden decision, and why he was so very angry when he got to the Parliament, because he felt that they were perhaps duping the army, tricking them in some way.

**WW**: How does he behave when he's angry?

**AA**: He marched in and he harangued them. He told them that they'd let the country down, that they'd done nothing, that basically they were a waste of space. He picked up the mace, which was on the table, and waved it round and said, 'Take this bauble away.' There's quite an interesting cartoon, a Dutch print, that shows the members of the Rump filing out and Cromwell standing with armed men. Down in the corner there's a little owl wearing glasses, which was intended to signify the stupidity of the Rump, because it's wisdom that can't see. Cromwell later said that, when he carried out this act, 'Not a dog barked.' And, certainly, the public in general seems to have been quite pleased to see the back of them.

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**Lord Protector**

**WW**: Cromwell becomes Lord Protector. We have extraordinary image of this time – dour, no pubs, no dancing, just Cromwell's jack-booted men stopping fun. Is this true?

**AA**: There is an element of truth. There's no doubt, particularly under the rule of the major-generals, that a concerted effort was made to improve the moral standards of the general population.

In fairness, it has to be said that the moral standards of many sections of the population would not be acceptable to most people today. When we talk about maypole dancing and various country pursuits and ceremonies, we're not talking about innocent maidens dancing round the village green in 'Merrie England'. Life for a lot of people was very basic, and there was drunkenness, adultery, wife beating. These were all things that went on and there was an attempt to improve these standards.

There was also a dislike of some of the more unnecessary religious festivals. You know, this thing about the Puritans abolishing Christmas – what they were against was some of the pagan and semi-pagan rituals that accompanied Christmas because, to them, it was a religious festival.

Some pursuits were banned because they were a cover for political activity. They banned race meetings and cock fights and things like that because they were often places where members of the gentry could meet and trouble could be discussed and planned. So, in some instances, there was a political motivation.

But I think the point is that the caricature is just that – it's a caricature, it's an exaggeration. They were not against all pleasure. Cromwell himself liked music, he enjoyed dancing at his daughter's wedding, he drank wine. A lot of the exaggeration was Royalist propaganda. But there's no doubt that he was concerned with a reformation of manners, with greater decency in society.

**WW**: What about his private life?

**AA**: He was happily married. He had eight children across 21 years. He seems to have been very fond of his children. He was very upset by the death of his daughter in 1658. He seems to have had reasonably close relationships with his children and both his adult sons. And he had close relationships with his sons-in-law – John Desborough, Charles Fleetwood and, of course, Henry Ireton. He seems to have had a fairly balanced and quite happy family life.

**WW**: How do you think he felt at the end of his life? Do you think he felt he'd succeeded?

**AA**: There's an atmosphere of gloom when you read about Cromwell's last year [1657/8]. After his second parliament, when the new constitution – the Humble Petition and Advice – was put in place, he was undoubtedly very disappointed by the failure of that parliament. And there's a sense of a long struggle. He certainly suffered from ill health, and he had one or two personal tragedies to deal with – his daughter's death and so on.

But I think the gloom can be exaggerated. There's no sense that he had totally failed.

In 1659, the last year of the Interregnum, there is a real sense of the army not knowing where to go. Each experiment they try gets closer and closer to naked military dictatorship, which was not what they wanted to do. The providential beliefs have turned against them. They feel that God has turned away from them because they've gone wrong somewhere. This is very clearly expressed in John Milton's pamphlet, The Ready and the Easy Way, where he was arguing that they can keep going.

Now, in the previous year, before Cromwell's death, there isn't the same sense of being at a loss, of not knowing what to do, of feeling that God had turned away. Not, it's not that clear in Cromwell's last year. He was becoming an old man and I think his health was a problem, but I don't think he felt that it had all been a waste.

**WW**: How did he react when he was offered the crown?

**AA**: Very, very uncertain.

I think he was very tempted to take it. Partly because he believed monarchy would be a better, more stable form of government. Partly, of course, because it would have given safety to himself and his family, which I think was important to him. He could see all the arguments in its favour and he very much wanted to do it, but he wasn't sure.

The opposition of the army upset him. There was the story of Colonel Pride saying that he would shoot Cromwell if he accepted the crown. Certainly there was a petition from 100 officers not to take it. There was even opposition from those closest to him, like Desborough and Fleetwood.

I think he felt that, if those whom he knew he could trust were opposed to it, it must be wrong. Again there is a suggestion that it may be the sign from God that he shouldn't take it because he had previously believed that God had laid it aside.

Ultimately his ties with the army and his respect for their feelings and views, particularly of those close to him, tipped the balance against him.

**WW**: You seem to admire Cromwell Why is that?

**AA**: I find him a very complex person. It's very difficult to get a sense that you actually know him in any way. His personality is very elusive.

But he comes across – through his letters and through his actions – as a man who did his best. He was active, he was involved, he needed to be part of something. Given that that was his temperament, he does seem to have genuinely had certain humane qualities and to have done his best to serve a good cause in whatever way he could.