

THE “*LIGHT*” ASCENDS IN GREAT BRITAIN

During King William III and Queen Mary (II’s) reign, the English Bill of Rights was signed in 1689. Note since the spelling is the original, for ease of understanding, I have amended it and some grammar to suit American English:

An Act Declaring the Rights and Liberties of the Subject and Settling the Succession of the Crown:

Whereas the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons assembled at Westminster, lawfully, fully and freely representing all the estates of the people of this realm, did upon the thirteenth day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred eighty-eight [old style date] present unto their Majesties, then called and known by the names and style of William and Mary, prince and princess of Orange, being present in their proper persons, a certain declaration in writing made by the said Lords and Commons in the words following, viz.: Whereas the late King James the Second, by the assistance of divers evil counsellors, judges and ministers employed by him, did endeavor to subvert and extirpate the Protestant religion and the laws and liberties of this kingdom...

And thereupon the said Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons, pursuant to their respective letters and elections, being now assembled in a full and free representative of this nation, taking into their most serious consideration the best means for attaining the ends aforesaid, do in the first place (as their ancestors in like case have usually done) for the vindicating and asserting their ancient rights and liberties declare:

- *That the pretended power of suspending the laws or the execution of laws by regal authority without consent of Parliament is illegal.*
- *That the pretended power of dispensing with laws or the execution of laws by regal authority, as it hath been assumed and exercised of late, is illegal.*
- *That the commission for erecting the late Court of Commissioners for Ecclesiastical Causes, and all other commissions and courts of like nature, are illegal and pernicious.*
- *That levying money for or to the use of the Crown by pretense of prerogative, without grant of Parliament, for longer time, or in other manner than the same is or shall be granted, is illegal.*
- *That it is the right of the subjects to petition the king, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal.*

- *That the raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with consent of Parliament, is against law.*
- *That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defense suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law.*
- *That election of members of Parliament ought to be free.*
- *That the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament.*
- *That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.*
- *That jurors ought to be duly impaneled and returned, and jurors which pass upon men in trials for high treason ought to be freeholders.*
- *That all grants and promises of fines and forfeitures of particular persons before conviction are illegal and void.*
- *And that for redress of all grievances, and for the amending, strengthening and preserving of the laws, Parliaments ought to be held frequently.*

And they do claim, demand and insist upon all and singular the premises as their undoubted rights and liberties, and that no declarations, judgments, doings or proceedings to the prejudice of the people in any of the said premises ought in any wise to be drawn hereafter into consequence or example; to which demand of their rights they are particularly encouraged by the declaration of his Highness the prince of Orange as being the only means for obtaining a full redress and remedy therein.

Having therefore an entire confidence that his said Highness the prince of Orange will perfect the deliverance so far advanced by him, and will still preserve them from the violation of their rights which they have here asserted, and from all other attempts upon their religion, rights and liberties, the said Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons assembled at Westminster do resolve that William and Mary, prince and princess of Orange, be and be declared king and queen of England, France and Ireland and the dominions thereunto belonging, to hold the crown and royal dignity of the said kingdoms and dominions to them, the said prince and princess, during their lives and the life of the survivor to them, and that the sole and full exercise of the regal power be only in and executed by the said prince of Orange in the names of the said prince and princess during their joint lives, and after their deceases the said crown and royal dignity of the same kingdoms and dominions to be to the heirs of the body of the said princess, and for default of such issue to the Princess Anne of Denmark and the heirs of her body, and for default of such issue to the heirs of the body of the said prince of Orange. And the Lords Spiritual and

Temporal and Commons do pray the said prince and princess to accept the same accordingly.

And that the oaths hereafter mentioned be taken by all persons of whom the oaths have allegiance and supremacy might be required by law, instead of them; and that the said oaths of allegiance and supremacy be abrogated...

Wikipedia's entry for the English Bill of Rights encapsulates the bill's importance. Interestingly, the author relates the Bill "reflected" the ideas of John Locke. Essentially, the Bill of Rights "restates—certain constitutional requirements of the Crown to seek the consent of the people, as represented in Parliament." Its greatest triumph was giving the power to the people through their parliament, and eventually a "constitutional monarchy", it also resolved "the political and religious turmoil that had convulsed Scotland, England and Ireland in the 17th century." As stated, the author encapsulates the Bill of Rights enactment, when he or she writes:

The Bill of Rights (1689) reinforced the Petition of Right (1628) and the Habeas Corpus Act (1679) by codifying certain rights and liberties. The rights expressed in these Acts became associated with the idea of the rights of Englishmen and described as Fundamental Laws of England. The Bill of Rights directly influenced the 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights, which in turn influenced the Declaration of Independence. Although not a comprehensive statement of civil and political liberties, the Bill of Rights stands as one of the landmark documents in the development of civil liberties in the United Kingdom and a model for later, more general, statements of rights; these include the United States Bill of Rights, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. For example, as with the Bill of Rights 1689, the US Constitution prohibits excessive bail and "cruel and unusual punishment". Similarly, "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" is banned under Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.