

English Petition of Right

Arbitrary and unlawful actions of the English kings of the 1600s led the English Parliament in 1628 to draft the following statement of grievances. The document, which was presented by Parliament to King Charles I and which he accepted, forced the king to make concessions of reform. The ideas contained within the document, particularly the protection of individual freedoms and the principle of taxation only with the consent of the legislature, influenced the political thinking of many American colonists. The right to petition, guaranteed in the First Amendment of the U.S. Bill of Rights, can in part be traced to the English Petition of Right.

I.

... Whereas, It is declared and enacted . . . that no tallage [tax] or aid should be laid or levied by the king or his heirs in this realm without the goodwill and assent of the archbishops, bishops, earls, barons, knights, burgesses, and . . . the freemen of the commonalty [the common people] of this realm; and by authority of the Parliament . . . it is declared and enacted that from thenceforth no person . . . [shall] be compelled to make any loans to the king against his will,

II.

Yet, nevertheless . . . your people have been . . . required to lend certain sums of money to your Majesty; . . .

III.

And whereas also, By the statute called the Great Charter of the Liberties of England, it is declared and enacted that no freeman may be taken or imprisoned, . . . or be outlawed or exiled or in any manner destroyed, but by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.

IV.

And . . . it was declared and enacted by authority of Parliament that no man . . . should be put out of his land . . . nor imprisoned, nor disinherited, nor put to death, without being brought to answer by due process of law.

V.

Nevertheless . . . divers [several] of your subjects have of late been imprisoned without any cause showed; . . .

VI.

And whereas . . . great companies of soldiers and mariners [sailors] have been dispersed into divers counties of the realm, and the inhabitants against their wills have been compelled to receive them into their houses. . . .

VII.

And whereas also . . . it is declared and enacted that no man should be forejudged of life or limb against the form of the Great Charter and the law of the land; . . . nevertheless of late divers commissions . . . have issued forth, by which certain persons have been assigned and appointed commissioners, with power and authority to proceed within the land according to the justice of martial law [law carried out by military authority]. . . .

VIII.

By pretext whereof some of your Majesty's subjects have been by some of the said commissioners put to death. . . .

IX.

Upon pretense that the said offenders were punishable only by martial law . . . which commissions . . . are wholly and directly contrary to the said laws and statutes of this your realm:

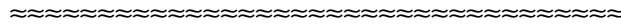
X.

They [your subjects] do therefore humbly pray your most excellent Majesty that no man hereafter be compelled to make or yield any gift, loan, benevolence [special tax levied by English kings for their own benefit], tax, or such like charge without common consent by act of Parliament; and

that none be called to make answer, or take such oath, or give attendance, or be confined, or otherwise molested . . . concerning the same, or for refusal thereof; and that no freeman . . . be imprisoned or detained; and that your Majesty would be pleased to remove the said soldiers and mariners; and that your people may not be burdened in time to come; and that the aforesaid commissions for proceeding by martial law may be revoked and annulled; and that hereafter no commissions of like nature may issue forth. . . .

XI.

. . . and that your Majesty would be also graciously pleased, for the further comfort and safety of your people, to declare your royal will and pleasure that in the things aforesaid all your officers and ministers shall serve you according to the laws and statutes of this realm, as they tender [work for] the honor of your Majesty and the prosperity of this kingdom.



Thinking Critically

1. What complaint does the English Parliament make to the king in regard to taxation?
2. What type of law is Parliament protesting?
3. What does the right of petition allow citizens to do? Why is the right of petition important?