

# The Differences in Contribution of Radical Puritanism to the English (1642-1688) and American (1775-1783) Revolutions

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## Abstract

The bourgeois revolutions, which occurred in Britain and America, took place in different historical periods. However, in both of them Puritanism stood as the main ideological banner, supporting these revolutions. Puritanism was not homogeneous, and split into two main groups: moderate Puritans (Presbyterians) and radical Puritans (Independents). The aim of the present paper is to show that radical Puritanism made greater contribution to American Revolution, and explain the reasons for this difference.

**Keywords:** Bourgeois revolution, Independents, Presbyterians, radical Puritanism

## Introduction

In historical terms, the English and American Revolutions are both similar and different. Both of them had underlying reasons, such as class struggle, changing economic relationships, striving for political changes, and striving for more liberty. The processes preceding both of these revolutions were developing led by similar ideology: religious doctrines which came into the conflict with the established ecclesiastic powers. In both cases, this religious doctrine is known as Puritanism, consisting of two main branches – moderate (Presbyterians) and radical (Independents), which, having originated from the same theological teaching, were quite different from each other in terms of institutional organization. We shall try to show the roles of these ideologies for the revolutionary processes in two countries, and illustrate how radical Puritans proved to be more successful in American continent, than on the British soil. At the same time, it was the very tradition of English opposition radicalism, which emerged in the 17th century, being developed by the thinkers of the following century, which found omnipresent echo in the colonies and laid the foundations for the activities of local opposition (Bailyn, 1967).

## The Nature of English Revolution and Puritanism

Up to now there are two basic views on the nature of English revolution. One of the camps reckons that the English revolution was the struggle not of different classes for their material interests and certain social order, but of different religious currents, which adhered to certain religious principles.

One of the first notable analysts of the issue was Thomas May (1595-1660). David Hume's *The History of England* reviews the English Revolution of 1649, Restoration of 1660, and, finally, the political turnover of 1688-1689 known as Glorious Revolution. He evaluates the Revolution of 1649 as the deviation from the normal development of English history, as some mass madness, which brought England to total political, economic, and moral catastrophe. He is more positive with regard to the Restoration, and he praises and worships the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689, which provided for improvement and stability of English social life.

Another camp thinks that the English Revolution had class struggle as its foundation. The emerging bourgeoisie was getting stronger, and it came into the clash with already getting obsolete feudal system. The interests of bourgeoisie were economic, but for that purpose they had to get hold of political power. The same were those of upper classes, as they needed to hold the power. And, such analysts (James Harrington (1611-1677) the most famous among them), conclude that if the royal power consisted of Anglicans, bourgeoisie created its own religious ideology called Puritanism.

Henry Hallam (1777-1859) shares Hume's and John Lock's view on revolutionary processes in England. In his opinion, the Stuarts usurped their rights and established tyranny in the kingdom. Therefore, the English had the right to protest. However, this protest turned into anarchy and fanaticism, which could be avoided in 1641, when the Parliament significantly strengthened constitutional guarantees. In 1642 anarchy started, which was as alien for England as royal despotism. However, Hallam states that the "ge-

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nial miracle" occurred in the form of 1688 Revolution, and the Englishmen in fact came back to the point, which they should have stopped at in 1641. The 1688-89 Glorious Revolution returned to the constitution of 1641, and denied the experience of 1649.

Along with the others, Hallam agrees that lower classes were the key drivers of revolutionary processes in England. Hallam calls them Whigs as the parliamentary opposition, who, of course, consisted mostly of emerging bourgeoisie, confessing at same time Puritan religious doctrine as an ideological banner of the revolution. However, from the very beginning of the Revolution, Puritans split into two groups – Presbyterians and Independents, and they created two political parties correspondingly – Presbyterian (which was Constitutional-Monarchist) and Independent (Republicans), which reflected the interests of different classes and social layers. Presbyterians, "the party of nabobs", supported upper layers of bourgeoisie and new nobility, and had hierarchical structure different from the Anglican one, but still aiming at creating new, now anti-feudal aristocracy.

The Independents represented more radical, leftish branch of Puritans. They expressed the interests of more democratic layers of the commons: petty and middle bourgeoisie, lower aristocracy, rural gentlemen (gentry), artisans, part of peasantry, lawyers, different layers of intelligentsia etc. The urban plebeian masses were creating the extremely leftish wing of the Independent movement in the form of different sects. Compared to the Presbyterians, this movement was characterized by higher radicalism, and, as it will be shown on the American example, more democracy, its irreconcilability with the old order (Kiguradze, 1979).

To sum up, the "Independent" Revolution of 1649 was eventually condemned by the English intellectuals and more compromising approach in the form of 1688-89 Revolution was appraised.

The situation in the New World, New England developed in a bit different way. The austere Presbyterian theocracy of New England was hindering the democratic processes. The beautiful words "republic" and "common good" pronounced in the later period of Puritan revolution, reflected the best the political ideal of Independents. English liberals came to the conclusion that the order based on aristocratic rule and ecclesiastical hierarchy (which was very topical for New England) should yield to social order, built on voluntary basis, in which the state was thought as a corporation called to care for the good of each and every and not to give special rights and privileges to anybody. However, in order to fulfill these ideas, the Liberals both in the old and New England had to pass severe struggle. First of all, the principle of liberty should be firmly introduced in social consciousness – the Independents dedicated all their energy to that cause. The Independent movement both in theory and practice stood for two basic rights: the right of a person to decide independently from authorities, which religious convictions to confess; and the right to unite freely with co-religionists for the execution of religious rites and preaching their doctrines.

Obviously, nobody was going to grant the Independents these rights without struggle. The inevitable conflict was ma-

turing on Massachusetts. The decisive battle between the Presbyterians and Independents was on the way. It would decide, which order would win in New England – aristocratic or democratic. It should not be forgotten that democratic teachings and institutions, which would spread subsequently and create the unique image of New England, cherished in the memories of following generations, originated not in Massachusetts, but in Connecticut and Rhode-Island (Parrington, 1958).

### **Divergence between Thomas Hooker and Theocrats**

Thomas Hooker (1586-1647) came to North America in 1633 and settled down in Massachusetts. Soon the sharp divergence between Hooker and theocrats of Massachusetts were revealed on the issue which form of governance should be established in the church and state – aristocratic or democratic. Under the influence of Hooker, the parishioners of Massachusetts church expressed open discontent with oligarchic governance of the magistrates. Hostile attitude of the authorities made Hooker move to the neighboring colony of Connecticut, the city of Hartford. Here Hooker fought for democratization of the religious and political life of the community.

In numerous sermons, Hooker started vigorous struggle with the supporters of theocracy, the Governor of Massachusetts Winthrop, defending the principle of people's sovereignty. Thus, in the sermon from 31 May, 1638, Hooker argued that "the foundations of power is laid first of all by the free consent of people" and, as people "are authorized to appoint the officers and magistrates, they are also empowered to establish the limits and borders of their power and activities" (Samoxvalov, 1971).

In 1620, the agreement composed on the board of the Mayflower gave birth to the first Covenant on American soil. Hooker caught up the Pilgrim's idea of the Covenant and developed it further. Having settled down in Connecticut, he made the church and political order of the colony more democratic. For example, Hooker managed to abolish the property and religious qualification (Karimsky, 1976).

Hooker was able to place the issues of people's sovereignty, discussing the problems of church governance. For example, he declared that "the supreme and monarchic power belongs only to our Savior, it cannot be ascribed to anybody except for Him, as it cannot be passed to anybody else". Hooker pointed at the injustice of the fact that "the presbyters assumed the whole church power", he insisted on "letting people come to power". John Cotton considered the God as the highest level, after whom come the magistrates, followed by people. Thomas Hooker also considers the God as the highest level, but in his system the God makes the covenants on civilian and church power directly with people. In Hooker's system, God speaks not through the ministers or magistrates, but through the majority (Karimsky, 1976).

One should pay attention to the energy and simplicity of Hooker's style. His works, he was saying, "are dressed in the home suit". Justifying simplicity and severity of his style, Hooker wrote: "All settlers only try to get warmed by their coats, letting fashionable style and laces to those, who cares for elegancy". It should be noted, however, that simplicity and energy of Hooker's language goes quite in harmony with his clear, deep thoughts, with magnificence of their content. Hooker's main work is *A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline* (1648) (Samoxvalov, 1971).

### Roger Williams on Theocracy

Roger Williams (1603-1683) dealt even a more crushing blow on theocracy. Parrington calls him the teacher of Cromwell and Milton, predecessor of Locke, "one of the eminent democrat thinkers, whom English people gave to the world". Seventeen years before the English bourgeois revolution, in 1631, Williams emigrated to America, having settled down in Massachusetts.

Williams criticized not only Massachusetts theocracy, but he had no mercy even on English king, having rejected the claims of the crown on American lands. He declared the charter gifted to the colony by Jacob I as well as the related land rights of the colonists invalid, since the English monarch does not have the right to be in charge of foreign lands. Williams considered Indians the legal masters of the lands on which the colonists settled. Consequently, to legalize the existence of the colonies on the territory of New England, one should appeal not to the English king, but to the Indians.

Having entered the struggle with the theocrats, Williams in his famous treatise *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution* (1644) stepped out with ardent defense of religious tolerance and freedom of conscience, which New England lacked. In his treatise, Williams protests against the imposition of uniformity of religion, especially by violent actions, since "inforced uniformity (sooner or later) is the civill Warre, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Jesus Christ and his servants". He convincingly argues that "it is the will and command of God that . . . a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or Antichristian consciences and worships, bee granted to all men in all Nations and Countries" (Parrington, 1958, Vol. I, p. 119) and still the state will not perish, it will flourish if being founded upon the fair laws.

Being declared even in the 1630s by Massachusetts authorities as "a dangerous trouble-maker and rebel", Williams was tried in the court, excommunicated and sentenced to forced deportation to England. In the winter of 1635, Williams ran away to the then under-populated neighborly colony of Rhode-Island. Here he made an attempt to realize his great experiment – to build a democratic state, free from theocracy. Of course, the initiative of establishment of people's democracy in the 17 century was Utopian, but Williams' activities in Rhode-Island had the great significance as the attempt to implement the theory of social covenant in practice; it enriched the democratic traditions of Ameri-

can people, it meant the great contribution to development of American theoretical thought. The agreement, signed by the residents of Rhode-Island, envisaged frequent holding of elections, creation of a single-chamber legislative body, compulsory holding of referenda, and, what is especially important, the right of abolition of all laws, including the Constitution, if they in reality cease serving the rights of people (Samoxvalov, 1971).

Roger Williams converted to Baptism, and later became a Quaker. He took these decisions striving to accept the theological system, which proclaimed (a) the opportunity of salvation to all people; (b) religious tolerance. Religious freedom was not only an important democratic achievement, but it also matched the development of capitalism and consolidation of the colonies. Owing to Roger Williams, Rhode Island community became one of the most democratic ones in North America. Eventually, all its democratic achievements were reduced to zero, and Rhode Island became a "respectable" colony again (Karimsky, 1976).

The activities of Williams gained even greater significance with regard to the Indian question. He persistently called the compatriots for friendship with Indian tribes, based on respect towards the aboriginal masters of America. Among many works of Williams, *The Key into the Language of America* (1643) is of special interest. In this work he described customs, morals and manners and beliefs of American Indians of the Atlantic coast. At the same time, *The Key* represents a real guidebook for studying the language of the natives of America (Samoxvalov, 1971).

### John Wise: a democrat philosopher

The further we go away from the initial period of colonization of North America, the more notable becomes the deviation of political literature from theological polemic and its address towards the ideas of Enlightenment, which spread in Europe in the 18th century.

In the beginning of the 18th c., when political power of the clergy of New England weakened and theocracy experienced crisis, the Mather Dynasty strived to strengthen the positions of theocracy. In 1705, Cotton Mather attempted to subjugate the Independent (Congregational) churches of New England to the single Supreme Synod. John Wise (1652-1725), the first plebeian philosopher born on American soil, was the first who opposed the adepts of theocracy. In his books *The Discussion of the Churches* (1710), and *The Defense of the Church Administration in New England* (1717), he was upholding democratic principle of management of the church.

To ground this principle, Wise refers to "natural law". If the theocrats got used to reckon that it was exactly the church to serve as the model for statehood building, then Wise, on the contrary, argues that most reasonable and fair state system should become the model for reasonable form of church governance. Having considered three forms of statehood – monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic, -

Wise argues about the advantage of the latter as the most beneficial for realization of fair and natural rights of man (Karimsky, 1976). Wise's reasoning on fair state anticipates Rousseau's theory of social contract:

*"It seems most agreeable with the light of nature, that if there be any of the regular forms of government settled in the church of God, it must needs be . . . a democracy. This is the form of government which the light of nature does highly value, and often directs to as most agreeable to the just and natural prerogatives of human beings . . . . It is certainly a great truth, namely, that man's original liberty after it is resigned . . . ought to be cherished in all wise governments; or otherwise a man in making himself a subject, he alters himself from a freeman into a slave, which to do is repugnant to the law of nature. Also the natural equality of men amongst men must be duly favoured; in that government was never established by God or nature, to give one man a prerogative to insult over another . . . . Honor all men. The end of all good government is to cultivate humanity, and promote the happiness of all, and the good of every man in his rights, his life, liberty, estate, honor, etc., without injury or abuse to any"* (Quoted from Parrington, 1958, Vol. I, pp.177-78).

The thinking about fair state used by Wise for settling of theological issues was preconditioned by his age, since, as V. L. Parrington justly mentions, "The struggle for ecclesiastical democracy was a forerunner of the struggle for political democracy which was to be the business of the next century". This explains great popularity of the books of Wise in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and their second edition in 1772 on the eve of American Revolution (Samoxvalov, 1971).

## Conclusion

The English and American Revolutions had both similarities and differences. Both of them were the protest against the suffocating practices of feudal order. In both of them the new emerging economic class – bourgeoisie – led the revolutionary process, as it was driven by the incentive of getting hold of political and economic power. Last but not least, in both of them, the protests were taking place under the banner of Puritanism, as a spiritual, and, as it appeared, political ideology, whose function was to shake the foundations of the episcopal church, which was the key stronghold of feudalism.

However, the mission of Puritanism took different hues in the developments preceding the two revolutions. In England, Puritans split into Presbyterians, who, although against monarchy and feudalism, were still for creating their own aristocratic-type order, and Independents, who were characterized by extreme radicalism and reliance on people's masses of lowest level. The Independents temporarily won, having established a republican order, but, in the end, failed politically, and their line was condemned both by the historical development (the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89) and the leading intellectuals of those and following times.

In American colonies, the tendency was rather opposite.

The Presbyterians had theocracy, which, although in formal opposition with the royal episcopal ecclesiastical power, represented a type of aristocratic rule, and actually hindered the development of capitalist relationships and democratic institutions necessary for such relationships. Therefore, on American soil, the Independents have played the significantly progressive part, opposing the Presbyterians by demanding religious freedom, which was an important precondition for establishing more democratic institutions (religious congregations), which would eventually contribute to the ardor for liberty resulted in America's independence.

Thus, taking into account both the differences in historical stages of development of two societies as well as the differences in aspirations of these societies, it can be said that radical Puritanism (Independents) proved more successful in terms of bringing positive changes in American colonies, than it did in England.

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