

## **'Queen Elizabeth regarded Parliament as a waste of time' Discuss. (45)**

Historians have debated for many years whether Queen Elizabeth regarded parliament as a waste of time. Key historians, such as Michael Graves claim that parliament was a waste of time under Elizabeth as he says they were 'standard bearers without an army.' This is also a view shared by Haigh as he states that 'Elizabeth's objective as Queen was to be Queen', suggesting it was her role to rule England, not parliaments. However, I believe parliament wasn't a waste of time during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Elizabeth used parliament effectively in the early stages of her reign to implement religious reform. This can be seen by the passing of numerous acts in 1559 such as the Act of Supremacy, the Act of Uniformity and the Royal Injunctions. All of these acts were designed to transform England back into a protestant nation, but prevent the more radical puritans from promoting further, more revolutionary change.

Moreover, under Elizabeth the House of Commons got bigger and more powerful. As shown by the traditionalist view that is shared by Neal who said that there was increased 'desire amongst the gentry to become a member of the House of Commons.' Why would they have this desire if they believed they would be disregarded by Elizabeth?

Furthermore, Elizabeth's parliament passed numerous pieces of legislation such as the Poor Laws that we still see resemblances of today. The Poor Laws were a way to support those who were unable to work and stated that each parish had to look after its own poor. These laws were the first equivalence of the modern welfare state and according to MacCaffrey, the poor laws of 1598 which gave aid to the 'deserving poor' were the most effective piece of legislation passed.

It can be argued that although Elizabeth didn't regard parliament as a waste of time, she did however use it for her own gain. She utilised it to improve her financial situation that was deteriorating due to an expensive foreign policy regarding the war with Spain. Elizabeth abused the monopolies system to increase the crown's revenue, however this almost sent the country into disrepute as Essex rebelled when his monopoly on sweet wines was repealed. Almost every time Elizabeth called parliament she asked for a subsidy, which although placed huge strain on the country economically, she was never refused. Thus showing her ability to control her parliament effectively.

However, 1563 saw a year when parliament was seen to be a 'waste of time' as this was at the height of the parliamentary plea for Elizabeth to get married. Elizabeth responded and told parliament that she would remain unmarried and would settle it at an appropriate time, which as we now know she never did. This shows her ignoring parliament's wishes which were described by Haigh. Additionally in 1563 the 39 Articles of Religion were passed, not by parliament, but by convocation instead. Again showing that Elizabeth did not need parliament to pass laws which was its main job.

Elizabeth seemed to use the Privy Council more than the parliament which is a view supported by Simon Adams. This may have been the case as she trusted Burleigh and Walsingham due to their shrewd political skill set and utilised them to oversee decisions made in parliament. However, this was certainly not the case in 1601, as the parliament reached a level of unrest and rejected the influence of the Privy Council and adjusted the laws within the country to be more efficient. Such as the Poor Law of 1601 which benefited the rising number of vagrants.

Lastly, in Queen Elizabeth's final speech of her reign called 'The Golden Speech', delivered in the House of Commons in 1601, she praised parliament for what they had done for her and told them she had respect and admiration towards them. She says to the Speaker 'and I charge you to thank them of the lower house from me.' This famous speech undoubtedly shows that Queen Elizabeth did not regard parliament as a waste of time.

It is undeniable that there were stages in Elizabeth's reign when she opposed the views of parliament. There is no better example of this than the issue surrounding marriage where Elizabeth chose, as Haigh says, 'to ignore them'. However, to state that she regarded parliament as a waste of time is incorrect and unsubstantiated based on the factors that I outlined during this essay. The most important of these being the three acts passed in 1559; The Act of Supremacy, The Act of Uniformity and The Royal Injunctions which all brought about protestant religious reform. Therefore, I am of the traditionalist view shared by Neal and Pollard that there was a 'rise in the political importance of parliament throughout Elizabeth's reign' and consequently she did not regard parliament as a waste of time.