

The Formation of the Two Parties

After the English Civil War had established a protectorate in place of a monarchy under New Model Army leader Oliver Cromwell, a period known as the Restoration began. During this time King Charles II (the son of the previously executed Charles I) was restored to the throne but was under specific limits placed upon by parliament. The Bill of Rights was enacted in 1689, and certain privileges were protected from intrusion by any power including the monarchy. When the heir to the throne, James Duke of York was discovered to be a Catholic a rift among parliamentarians arose on the issue of support for the Catholic king.

The people who wished to exclude James from the throne came to be known as Whigs, and the people who gave support were known as Tories, or the Tory party. Both names inherently have negative connotations: 'Whig' means a horse driver in Scottish Gaelic, and 'Tory' means outlaw in the Irish Gaelic language. This schism during the Exclusion Bill Crisis served as the starting point of the formation of political parties in England. Although the bill was ultimately defeated in the House of Lords in 1681, the division of the two political tendencies remained. It should be noted, however, that real party distinctions did not clarify until a later time. The terms of 'Whig' and 'Tory' were used more as tendencies to support an opinion in policy: rigid blocks of political coordination were yet to be constructed.

The Tories came to represent and support the Anglican Church, the gentry, and the maintenance of a relatively strong monarchy. On the other hand, the Whigs supported non-Anglicans (notably Presbyterians), wealthy middle class people, and later industrial, mercantile interests. People following the tendencies of Whigs were also generally supportive of the supremacy in parliament's power to govern, while the authority of the monarchy was to be largely decreased. Although the main issue regarding the Exclusion Bill Crisis was the religious affiliation of James II, it is possible that the Whigs desired a notable decrease in the monarchy's authority by discontinuing the hereditary custom of passing the throne. The Tories wished the opposite of the Whigs' plans.

During the Glorious Revolution (1688-89) the two Whig and Tory parties cooperated in discontinuing the Stuart dynasty and seating William III of Orange on the throne of England, Scotland, and Ireland. It was during this period that the two parties, although their differences were ameliorated to an extent, moved forward another step in fomenting their respective party identities. The idea of a limited constitutional monarchy was generally accepted by people of both parties, in contrast to the absolutism of a king held by divine right. 'Toryism' became identified with Anglicanism and the regional squires, while 'Whiggism' came to represent the wealthy middle class and aristocracy. Until around 1714, political power was contested by both Whigs and Tories, when monarchs favored one political tendency over another such as the case of Queen Anne's initial preference to the Tory party. A group of Whigs known as the Junto Whigs increasingly dominated politics until Queen Anne dismissed the Whig Ministry and replaced them with Tories in 1710.

Dominance of 'Whig' tendencies in Politics (1714-1760)

The death of Queen Anne in 1714 led her successor, George I Duke of Hannover to the throne. George the first was a nominee by the Whig members of parliament, and this substantially increased the influence of the Whig party. In 1715 and 1745, Jacobite uprisings with the motive of restoring the Stuart dynasty by the son of James II (Bonnie Prince Charlie, also known as the Young Pretender) gave reason for the Whig party to discredit the majority of the Tories as traitors, although only a few had initially taken part in the uprising. The leader of the Tory Party, Henry St. John, first Count of Bolingbroke fled England for France, further threatening the maintenance of the party. The loosely coalesced Whigs, unchallenged, became the dominant force of government for the next several decades while the Tories practically lost their ground to function as a cohesive political force. Individual Tories during this time, however, continued to serve in the House of Commons. The 'Whigs' in control during this period were generally aristocratic groups and their connections, who preferred to name themselves as Whigs. Tories were generally country gentlemen, following the party's background.

As time progressed, the definite borders of 'Whig' and 'Tory' lost more of their ground as politicians faced no clear distinction by the use of such terms. By the time of King George III, a definitive 'Whig' party did not exist: groups of aristocratic people connected with each other were the major forces in parliament. Many groups in power claimed the status of Whigs, sometimes claiming lineage from the traditional wealthy Whig families. For example, the Rockingham Whigs under the leadership of intellectuals such as Edmund Burke called themselves 'Old Whigs', following the tradition of the old families such as the Pelhams. The opposition was not deemed to be a Tory party, but was composed of Whigs who were Tory-leaning. Not until under the leadership of William Pitt the Younger would party distinctions be made clear and the term 'Tory' be made usable again.