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The "Petition of Right" is a legal petition that led to the Civil War and the deposing of Charles I in 1649. It is written in very difficult, technical, legal language, with many clauses, commas, additions, and so forth.

The way in which it is written is that first a rule is pointed out and then the manner in which the king has broken that rule is set forth. In order to make it easier to follow, the two types of passage are labeled as either "The Rule" or "The King's Offences" below.

In addition, the key part of each passage has been underlined. If you struggle with the reading, focus on the underlined parts to ensure comprehension. When there is more than one rule or offence in a set, they are numbered so you can tell them apart.

The Petition of Right (1628)

The Petition exhibited to his Majesty by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, concerning divers Rights and Liberties of the Subjects, with the King's Majesty's royal answer thereunto in full Parliament.

To the King's Most Excellent Majesty,

- I. [THE RULE] Humbly show unto our Sovereign Lord the King, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons in Parliament assembles, that whereas it is declared and enacted by a statute made in the time of the reign of King Edward I, that [1] no tallage or aid shall be laid or levied by the king or his heirs in this realm, without the good will and assent of the archbishops, bishops, earls, barons, knights, burgesses, and other the freemen of the commonalty of this realm; and by authority of parliament holden in the five-and-twentieth year of the reign of King Edward III, it is declared and enacted, that from thenceforth [2] no person should be compelled to make any loans to the king against his will, because such loans were against reason and the franchise of the land; and by other laws of this realm it is provided, that [3] none should be charged by any charge or imposition called a benevolence, nor by such like charge; by which statutes before mentioned, and other the good laws and statutes of this realm, your subjects have inherited this freedom, that they should not be compelled to contribute to any tax, tallage, aid, or other like charge not set by common consent, in parliament.

- II. [THE KING'S OFFENCES] Nevertheless of late divers commissions directed to sundry commissioners in several counties, with instructions, have issued; by means whereof [1] your people have been in divers places assembled, and required to lend certain sums of money unto your Majesty, and [2] many of them, upon their refusal so to do, have had an oath administered unto them not warrantable by the laws or statutes of this realm, and have been constrained to become bound and make appearance and give utterance before your



Privy Council and in other places, and [3] others of them have been therefore imprisoned, confined, and sundry other ways molested and disquieted; and divers [4] other charges have been laid and levied upon your people in several counties by lord lieutenants, deputy lieutenants, commissioners for musters, justices of peace and others, by command or direction from your Majesty, or your Privy Council, against the laws and free custom of the realm.

- III. [THE RULE] 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 disseized of his freehold or liberties, or his free customs, 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. [THE RULE] And in the eight-and-twentieth year of the reign of King Edward III, it was declared and enacted by authority of parliament, that no man, of what estate or condition that he be, should be put out of his land or tenements, nor taken, nor imprisoned, nor disinherited nor put to death without being brought to answer by due process of law.
- V. [THE KING'S OFFENCES] Nevertheless, against the tenor of the said statutes, and other the good laws and statutes of your realm to that end provided, divers of your subjects have of late been imprisoned without any cause showed; and when for their deliverance they were brought before your justices by your Majesty's writs of habeas corpus, there to undergo and receive as the court should order, and their keepers commanded to certify the causes of their detainer, no cause was certified, but that they were detained by your Majesty's special command, signified by the lords of your Privy Council, and yet were returned back to several prisons, without being charged with anything to which they might make answer according to the law.
- VI. [THE KING'S OFFENCES] And whereas of late great companies of soldiers and mariners have been dispersed into divers counties of the realm, and the inhabitants against their wills have been compelled to receive them into their houses, and there to suffer them to sojourn against the laws and customs of this realm, and to the great grievance and vexation of the people.
- VII. [THE RULE] And whereas also by authority of parliament, in the five-and-twentieth year of the reign of King Edward III, it is declared and enacted, that no man shall be forejudged of life or limb against the form of the Great Charter and the law of the land; and by the said Great Charter and other the laws and statutes of this your realm, no man ought to be adjudged to death but by the laws established in this your realm, either by the customs of the same realm, or by acts of parliament: and whereas no offender of what kind soever is



exempted from the proceedings to be used, and punishments to be inflicted by the laws and statutes of this your realm;

- VIII. [THE KING'S OFFENCES] nevertheless of late time divers commissions under your Majesty's great seal 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, against such soldiers or mariners, or other dissolute persons joining with them, as should commit any murder, robbery, felony, mutiny, or other outrage or misdemeanor whatsoever, and by such summary course and order as is agreeable to martial law, and is used in armies in time of war, to proceed to the trial and condemnation of such offenders, and them to cause to be executed and put to death according to the law martial.
- IX. [THE KING'S OFFENCES] By pretext whereof some of your Majesty's subjects have been by some of the said commissioners put to death, when and where, if by the laws and statutes of the land they had deserved death, by the same laws and statutes also they might, and by no other ought to have been judged and executed.
- X. [THE KING'S OFFENCES] And also sundry grievous offenders, by color thereof claiming an exemption, have escaped the punishments due to them by the laws and statutes of this your realm, by reason that divers of your officers and ministers of justice have unjustly refused or forborne to proceed against such offenders according to the same laws and statutes, upon pretense that the said offenders were punishable only by martial law, and by authority of such commissions as aforesaid; which commissions, and all other of like nature, are wholly and directly contrary to the said laws and statutes of this your realm.

Having gone through this list of rules and offences the authors are now prepared to make their requests; let us label these "Petitions." Underlining and numbering are used, as above.

- XI. [PETITIONS] They do therefore humbly pray your most excellent Majesty, that [1] no man hereafter be compelled to make or yield any gift, loan, benevolence, tax, or such like charge, without common consent by act of parliament; and that [2] none be called to make answer, or take such oath, or to give attendance, or be confined, or otherwise molested or disquieted concerning the same or for refusal thereof; and that [3] no freeman, in any such manner as is before mentioned, be imprisoned or detained; and that [4] your Majesty would be pleased to remove the said soldiers and mariners, and that your people may not be so burdened in time to come; and that [5] the aforesaid commissions, for proceeding by martial law, may be revoked and annulled; and that [6] hereafter no commissions of like nature may issue forth to any person or persons whatsoever to be executed as aforesaid, lest by color of them any



of your Majesty's subjects be destroyed or put to death contrary to the laws and franchise of the land.

- XII. [PETITIONS] All which they most humbly pray of your most excellent Majesty as their rights and liberties, according to the laws and statutes of this realm; and that [7] your Majesty would also vouchsafe to declare, that the awards, doings, and proceedings, to the prejudice of your people in any of the premises, shall not be drawn hereafter into consequence or example; and that [8] 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 the honor of your Majesty, and the prosperity of this kingdom.

The "Bill of Rights" is the statement of parliament drawn up to officially oust James II and enthrone William and Mary, simultaneously establishing certain claims of parliament and rights of the English citizenry. The format is similar to the first document we read in that it includes a list of the offences of a king; however, it is not interested in merely petitioning for corrections. Instead, they go much further.

The Bill begins with the listing of the king's faults.

Bill of Rights (1698)

- I. 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:
1. By assuming and exercising a power of dispensing with and suspending of laws, and the execution of laws, without consent of parliament.
 2. By committing and prosecuting divers worthy prelates, for humbly petitioning to be excused from concurring to the said assumed power.
 3. By issuing and causing to be executed a commission under the great seal for erecting a court called, The court of commissioners for ecclesiastical causes.
 4. By levying money for and to the use of the crown, by pretence of prerogative, for other time, and in other manner, than the same was granted by parliament.
 5. By raising and keeping a standing army within this kingdom in time of peace, without consent of parliament, and quartering soldiers contrary to law.
 6. By causing several good subjects, being protestants, to be disarmed, at the same time when papists were both armed and employed, contrary to law.
 7. By violating the freedom of election of members to serve in parliament.
 8. By prosecutions in the court of King's bench, for matters and causes cognizable only in parliament; and by divers other arbitrary and illegal courses.



9. And whereas of late years, partial, corrupt, and unqualified persons have been returned and served on juries in trials, and particularly divers jurors in trials for high treason, which were not freeholders.
10. And excessive bail hath been required of persons committed in criminal cases, to elude the benefit of the laws made for the liberty of the subjects.
11. And excessive fines have been imposed; and illegal and cruel punishments have been inflicted.
12. And several grants and promises made of fines and forfeitures, before any conviction or judgment against the persons, upon whom the same were to be levied.

All which are utterly and directly contrary to the known laws and statutes, and freedom of this realm.

Having listed the king's illegal behavior, the authors propose that the king has actually left the throne as a result of his bad behavior. They then see fit to make legal declarations themselves, since there is no king.

- II. And whereas the said late king James the Second having abdicated the government, and the throne being thereby vacant, the said lords spiritual and temporal, and commons 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;
1. That the pretended power of suspending of laws, or the execution of laws, by regal authority, without consent of parliament, is illegal.
 2. 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.
 3. 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.
 4. That levying money for or to the use of the crown, by pretence of prerogative, without grant of parliament, for longer time, or in other manner than the same is or shall be granted, is illegal.
 5. That it is the right of the subjects to petition the King, and all committments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal.
 6. 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.
 7. That the subjects which are protestants, may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions, and as allowed by law.
 8. That election of members of parliament ought to be free.
 9. 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.
 10. That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed; nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.



11. That jurors ought to be duly impanelled and returned, and jurors which pass upon men in trials for high treason ought to be freeholders.
12. That all grants and promises of fines and forfeitures of particular persons before conviction, are illegal and void.
13. And that for redress of all grievances, and for the amending, strengthening, and preserving of the laws, parliaments ought to be held frequently.

Since they have the legal authority to act (again, there is no king) the parliament here takes the further step of declaring William and Mary, the prince and princess of Orange, to be king and queen.

III. 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 [1] that William and Mary, prince and princess of Orange, be declared king and queen of England, France and Ireland and the dominions thereunto belonging, [2] 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 [3] 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 [4] 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.

In order to ensure acceptance of their actions, the authors next establish oaths of allegiance. Notice that these include a theological aspect in regards to Catholicity.



IV. 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.

I, _____, do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to their Majesties King William and Queen Mary. So help me God.

I, _____, do swear that I do from my heart abhor, detest and abjure as impious and heretical this damnable doctrine and position, that princes excommunicated or deprived by the Pope or any authority of the see of Rome may be deposed or murdered by their subjects or any other whatsoever. And I do declare that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state or potentate hath or ought to have any jurisdiction, power, superiority, pre-eminence or authority, ecclesiastical or spiritual, within this realm. So help me God.