

History: Unit 2

Lesson 4 of 30

# How bad were Elizabeth's financial problems?



# What was the role of Parliament in Elizabethan England?

During the sixteenth century, Parliament had very little power when compared with today. However, during the reign of Henry VIII (Elizabeth's father), the importance of Parliament had increased because he had relied upon them to pass laws that secured the break with Rome. Parliament was the only body that could pass laws called 'Acts of Parliament', which could only be changed if another Act of Parliament was passed. For an Act of Parliament to be passed, a 'bill' (proposed law) had to be read three times and voted upon in the House of Commons and House of Lords. Therefore, to be able to pass laws, Elizabeth needed Parliament. Parliament met only 13 times during Elizabeth's reign.



# What was the role of Parliament in Elizabethan England?

Parliament also had the power to grant **parliamentary subsidies** (taxes) to Elizabeth. She relied on these twice during her reign, due to the financial problems that she faced.



# Why did Elizabeth's relationship with Parliament change?

During Elizabeth's reign, **Members of Parliament** (MPs) became more confident in what they discussed. They began to complain about issues such as religion and Elizabeth's **marital status** (she remained unmarried without an heir). These were matters that Elizabeth did not want them to discuss. In particular, **Puritan** MPs began to become more vocal in Parliament because they wanted Elizabeth to bring in more Protestant changes (we will examine this further in future lessons). The opposition she faced meant that she had to sometimes attend Parliament herself and limit their freedom of speech and even imprison MPs for arguing against her. If Parliament was difficult, Elizabeth could **dissolve** it (close it down).



# How did Elizabeth make money?

Elizabeth needed money in order to rule successfully, and it was not just readily available at all times. It was possible for the Crown to be in **debt**.

There were different sources of money which included:

- Income from renting out **Crown land** (land owned in England by the monarch)
- **Customs duties** (taxes from trade)
- **Subsidies** (taxes raised by Parliament)
- **Profits of justice** (money from people who were fined for not following the law)
- **Loans** (borrowing money)
- **Extraordinary taxation** (additional taxation to pay for unexpected wars)



# What financial problems did Elizabeth face?

Elizabeth was heavily in debt when she came to the throne in 1558. This is because Mary I had fought many expensive wars between 1553-1558 and lots of Crown land had been sold to be able to pay for them. The **Marian Debt** was £300,000.

Elizabeth had to be very careful with her spending. She did not want to tax people in the country too heavily because this was unpopular. In addition, Parliament had to 'raise' and collect the taxes and then grant them to Elizabeth. Elizabeth did not want to have to rely on Parliament too much because she felt this would give them more power.



# Glossary

**Parliamentary subsidies** - taxes that were raised and collected by the Parliament that could be granted to the monarch for extra finance

**Members of Parliament** - Wealthy men who debated matters in Parliament and who voted to pass bills (proposed laws)

**Puritans** - Strict Protestants who wanted to remove all Catholic elements remaining in the church during Elizabeth's reign

**Debt** - the state of money being owed

**Marian debt** - the £300,000 debt that Mary I left the Crown in by 1558



# Questions - let's test your understanding!

1. What did Elizabeth need Parliament for?
2. Why was there conflict between Elizabeth and Parliament?
3. What financial problems did Elizabeth face in 1558?
4. What were different sources of money that Elizabeth could use?

Challenge yourself: Why was the financial position of the Crown an important concern for Elizabeth?

