

HOW DID WILLIAM PITT 'THE YOUNGER' GAIN POWER?

The story of William Pitt's rise to power is the story of a kingdom put in the care of a schoolboy. At least, that was the general consensus in 1783. At 24 years of age, William Pitt ruled as Prime Minister in King George III's name for 20 years at the head of a revived Tory faction in Parliament. His aim was to grow and protect a strong, united and independent England. But how did a man, with much fortune against him, achieve so much at so young an age? For William Pitt, power was the actualisation of his aims caused directly or indirectly by his actions. The history of William Pitt's rise to power is an important one in learning about individual achievement, and one many politicians today should learn from: should success in politics be their aim. Chiefly relying on his nobility, William Pitt gained power by various constitutional means: initially and throughout his administration. Beginning with his character and education, William Pitt's successes in the constitution, political economy, keeping the peace and defending the realm contributed to William Pitt's gaining power, and to solving the epic problems of his age.

The foundation for William Pitt's rise to power was his character. From a young age, much like the erudite King Edward VI, William Pitt was austere, reserved and industrious. Raised in a Protestant household, much of his character was determined by his childhood. A childhood often spent in bed from ill health. The combination of these factors fixed education at the centre of his life. This austerity and reserved nature greatly helped to grow his will power; relying more on the company and wisdom of Greek and Roman philosophers than his counterparts. In trusting books more than men, William Pitt avoided the rife temptation of corruption when he entered the House of Commons and avoided scandalous intrigues like the Fox North Coalition of 1783. William Pitt's characteristics therefore informed his intuition: growing and keeping the virtues necessary to find and keep the King's, Parliament's and the people's favour. And so, England depending on his character, William Pitt gained power to uphold a strong, united and independent England.

In addition to his character, William Pitt's education aided his rise to power. Schooled at Pembroke College, Cambridge, from 14 years of age, William Pitt spent the next three years reading political philosophy, history and mathematics (predominantly). These sciences gave him a firm grounding in natural law, and with it the flexibility to respond to new information on how things were, rather than how he wished them to be. This put him in a better position to gain power in the long term as William Pitt was equipped to deal with political problems from facts rather than assumed ideologies which so often characterised his Whig rivals, and which so many politicians suffer from today. In this way, William Pitt was schooled in potentialities so that, when problems arose, he was able to actualise his options where others were more reliant on their ideological dispositions. Whilst this style of education was common for many of his noble peers, without it, it is hard to see William Pitt entering the arena of politics, and subsequently surviving to gain future power as Prime Minister as well as his achievements in that office. His education was very much his ticket into the world of political power. It is also at Cambridge William Pitt met his chief political allies: Henry Addington (who would briefly succeed him as Prime Minister) and the Duke of Rutland. The Duke, along with Lord Lonsdale, were instrumental in gaining William Pitt's seat in Parliament; with whose patronage William Pitt acquired the rotten borough of Appleby. And so, in schooling per se and in his friendships, education played a significant part in William Pitt's rise to power.

With character and education considered, William Pitt's place in the English constitution helped him to gain power as well. By virtue of his father, William Pitt was of noble birth. This alone, with House Pitt's ownership of land, qualified William Pitt to stand for Parliament; a necessity that would remain so until the passing of various reform bills between 1832 and 1917. William Pitt's father, Lord Chatham, was also a Prime Minister and was given the name 'the Great Commoner' by the people of England. Such was their faith and trust in Lord Chatham's advocacy for their interests: against a corrupt King and his Whig cronies. In turn, Lord Chatham's reputation was impressed into the minds of the people: not only onto Lord Chatham, but onto his children too. An impression all the more fervent on a son who shared his father's name. The people's love of William Pitt 'the Elder' helped William Pitt 'the Younger' gain power out of reverence from the people and, like his father, from fear of the effects if his Parliamentary enemies avoided granting him power. As for the King, King George III grew increasingly suspicious of his Whigs. The turning point was the Fox North Coalition led by Charles Fox, an advocate of republic leaning reform, and Lord North, who had formerly been Prime Minister and angered many for his ineptitude and proximity to the King. The Coalition was the scapegoat needed for William Pitt to shoot into the office of Prime Minister. From his nobility and family reverence, he secured firstly his seat in Parliament and second the office of Prime Minister. Without these facts of nature, it would have been difficult for William Pitt to gain, let alone maintain, power.

After looking at his character, education and the English constitution, the next means by which William Pitt gained power was political economy. In 1776, Adam Smith published 'An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations'. Often described by modern audiences as the birth of capitalism, Smith's book rejected mercantilist trade policy in favour of laissez faire free market political economy, specialised and guided by the 'invisible hand'. At Pembroke, William Pitt kept on top of Smith's books, arguing in favour of a free market in Parliament and supporting merchants in the City to expand their trade. It is partially for this reason that his white statute sits opposite his father's in the Guildhall. William Pitt's support for Adam Smith's political economy secured the support of the City — then and now still a chief part of the constitution — and with it much of the mercantilist class and their wealth. Initially, William Pitt's sinking fund helped him to gain power too; as someone who could eliminate the long term debts of the realm. A debt chiefly gained by the Seven Years' War and the American War of Independence. However, the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic Wars failed to keep the sinking fund effective. The cost of war was greater than the money set aside to deal with England's debt. Nevertheless, the fund proved valuable in peace time and Smith's political economy, arguably, was one of the central factors that kept English war supplies better than the French's, and so prevented Napoleon's invasion of England; achieving William Pitt's aim to defend the realm and raise his honour in office.

Having explored character, education, the constitution and political economy, William Pitt's next province for gaining power was keeping the peace. Before the French Revolution, William Pitt kept up the precedent of traditional English peace keeping. When laws were violated, watchmen had criminals arrested, judges would try them and sentence them, with the aid of a 12 man jury, according to the severity of the crime. This was expected of a Prime Minister. And so, in achieving this purpose of government, William Pitt succeeded in gaining power. In the background, however, revolution was rife. With the American Revolution, republican ideals flocked over to England. As unsettling as they were at the time, these radical ideologies — with Thomas Paine as the figurehead — were exasperated by the French Revolution. The Reign of Terror in France under Maximilian Robespierre moved William Pitt; as it moved all of Christendom. By preventing public gatherings of more than six persons, William Pitt was able to gain power from the Whigs and Radicals in

England. In so doing, he prevented revolutionary ideas from spreading by extinguishing the flicker before it became a flame. Whilst this prevented trade union representation, England at that time was a land still predominantly rural in its outlook. Faith and loyalty to King and country were more important than pusillanimous economic considerations. The sacking of Joseph Priestley's house in Birmingham by a mob stands testament to this intuition. The suspension of *habeas corpus* was necessary for keeping the peace too. With revolutionary fervour swelling over Christendom, the need to contain it was vital to maintain the English constitution. And so, minimising contact was a safe way to prevent ideals from spreading: especially in the court room. For the revolution was not a question of justice, it was a question of survival. Constitutionally, this was England's Stalingrad. To this end, William Pitt gained power by keeping the peace against a new and extraordinary problem to appear across the civilised world.

The final province William Pitt gained power in was in defending the realm. As it so common in England's history, her chief belligerent in William Pitt's time was France. In 1792, after the execution of King Louis XVI, England declared war on France. War with France presented William Pitt with an opportunity to gain honour as a general as well as a peace keeper. Whilst the Duke of Wellington, with Prussia's hand, would be the knight to slay Napoleon's dragon, William Pitt's contribution to the war was paramount in defending England. His unification between England and Ireland, after a failed French invasion through Irish support, secured the political loyalty of Ireland in the short term by having Irish Members of Parliament sit at Westminster. In so doing, England's west coast was secured against invasion, and with it the British Isles could direct their attention against French invasion from one source instead of two. Furthermore, William Pitt shared in the victories of Lord Nelson: trailing the French across the Atlantic and Mediterranean, drowning Napoleon's fleet in Egypt and again at Trafalgar. This prevented the French from controlling the sea; enabling the French to cross the English Channel to invade the island fortress. With his strategy, William Pitt was able to prevent France invading from both sides of Great Britain and, in so doing, gained power which the French otherwise would have taken to their advantage.

William Pitt's rise to power, before and in office, stemmed from several sources. His education, place in the constitution, political economy, peace keeping and realm defending all had a part to play in gaining power. Whilst nobility was the *modus operandi*, the chief factor was his character. Through all the challenges and troubles of his 20 year administration, his character remained resolute; providing the continuity for a stable government. Critics say much of his gains fell on his nobility, and to deny this fully would be false. However, it is the quality of action, rather than the property of birth, that truly defines nobility. In the end, the kingdom was in the care of a schoolmaster; albeit with the energy of a schoolboy. And it is William Pitt's many praiseworthy, valuable and admirable deeds which brought power to the individual and to the realm of England. Imitating William Pitt will bring success to the modern politician and to modern England.