

# Sources of British Revolutionary Politics



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Edited by

R. G. Williams

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History has remembered the kings and warriors because they destroyed, art has remembered the people because they created.

—William Morris



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## PREFACE

This book is a selection of documents, covering the revolutionary and working-class politics of Great Britain. Specifically, it covers the revolutionary events and movements in British history from ancient Britain to the rise of the modern labour movement — from 60 CE to 1920. More specifically, it is a collection of radical documents and sources from the Middle Ages, the English Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Rise of Labour in the 19th century and the 20th century.

This book is a source book. This book is an attempt to illustrate British politics through the history of its radical, revolutionary, labour, working-class, and Socialist movements. The documents and sources in this book are designed to show that British history has often been the history of ordinary people struggling for social progress and social freedom. The selection of documents and sources in this book is designed to show a Marxist perspective on Britain and British history. This book is for Socialists who are interested in studying British history — in order to struggle for Socialism in Britain today.

This book is about the radical movements of British history. British history is the history of the working class struggling for its freedom and its emancipation, within the context of Britain. This history is demonstrated by the social struggle in British history, from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era. The selection of documents and sources in this book is about showing the history of ordinary people in Britain — not the history of Kings, Lords, and Capitalists. This book is a history of the working-class struggle in Britain.

This book is a Socialist collection of the documents of British revolutionary politics. This book is a Socialist study. It is a Socialist Humanist study, in the tradition of Democratic Socialism. The struggle for Socialism, in Britain, has emerged from the history of Britain. The documents in this book show that the working class, since its emergence from the Industrial Revolution, has been crucial to social progress and social struggle in Britain. Any possible future for Britain rests on the struggle of the working class. Hopefully, its future struggle will be victorious —



towards a future of democracy, solidarity, peace, emancipation, freedom, and Socialism.

This book begins in 60 CE – with the revolt of Boudica. This book ends in 1920 — with the formation and rise of the British Communist Party (CPGB). A selection of documents of British working-class and Socialist history after 1920 would require another, longer, book. By ending this book in 1920, with the rise of the CPGB, the book ends at a highpoint in the history of the British labour and Socialist movement. The struggle for Socialism in Britain, since 1920, has gone through a series of difficult periods, but the struggle for Socialism in Britain continues — and it will continue until the victory of Socialism.

R.G. Williams

(2023)

# INTRODUCTORY ESSAY - SOURCES OF BRITISH REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS

This short essay is a study of British politics and British history, specifically the role of revolutionary politics, radical politics, and social struggle in shaping Britain. Britain, today, is a society which clearly needs social change. Britain, today, is a society which clearly needs radical and revolutionary politics – in the form of Socialism. British history has a history of such politics – the revolutionary and radical tradition in British politics.

Britain is an island in North-Western Europe. For most of its modern history, since 1707/1801, Britain has been a union of countries and nations — specifically, England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland/Northern Ireland. From the time of the first human settlement in the islands of Britain by homo sapiens to the time of the modern age, Britain has been a land of social change, social development, social struggle, and social revolution. This history means that Britain has often been a major site of social conflict and social revolution, especially in the form of the English Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, the rise of the British Empire, and the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism, the modern social struggle in Britain has been a struggle between Capitalism and Socialism. The social struggle in Britain, today, is the struggle for Socialism. It is the social struggle for a society based on the free development of each and the free development of all.

British history is a long history. British history, so far, can be divided into five major periods since the beginning of written history in Britain — beginning with the Roman invasions of 55-54 BCE and 43 CE. The major periods of British history are: the Classical period (55 BCE - 410 CE), the Medieval period (410 CE - 1485 CE), the Early Modern period (1485 - 1750), the Industrial period (1750 - 1914), and the Modern period (1914 - present). In Marxist terms British history can be divided into four major periods: Ancient society (1st century BCE – 5th century CE), Feudal society (5th century – 17th century), Capitalist society (17th century - present), and the modern struggle for Socialism (19th century – present). British society,

like all modern societies, has gone through a series of societies: Neolithic society, Ancient society, Feudal society, Capitalist society, and hopefully a future Socialist society. Britain has gone through these societies due to social revolution: the Neolithic Revolution, the Urban Revolution, the Feudal Revolution, the Capitalist Revolution, and the future Socialist Revolution. This book covers the more recent and modern periods of British history, from the Feudal period through to modern Capitalist society to the possibility of Socialism in Britain.<sup>1</sup>

British history is the history of class struggle in Britain. British history has often been shaped by the class struggles between the various classes which have made and remade British society — such as the feudal lords, the peasantry, the capitalist class, and the working class. For much of British history, between the Middle Ages and the Industrial Revolution, the class struggle in British history was between the feudal lords, the peasantry, and the capitalist class. In modern British history, since the English Revolution of 1640-1660 and the Industrial Revolution, the class struggle has been the struggle between the capitalist class and the working class. British history is still the history of class struggle. The most important events in British history remain the class struggles of British history — specifically the English Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of the modern labour, working-class, and Socialist movement.<sup>2</sup>

The history of Britain is the history of social struggle. Written history, in Britain, began with the Roman invasions of 55–54 BCE and 43 CE. In the period between 43 CE and 76 CE the Romans conquered most of southern Britain. Their conquest, effectively, begins the process of social struggle and revolutionary struggle in British history – in terms of what has been recorded by written history. The peoples of Britain at the time of the Roman conquest, the Ancient Britons, fought a series of wars and struggles to maintain their independence – particularly during the Roman conquest (43 CE – 75 CE), the struggle of Caractacus (43CE - 50 CE), the revolt of Boudica (60 CE - 61 CE), and the battle of Mons Graupius (83 CE or 84 CE). These struggles, ultimately, failed and the Romans conquered Britain – resulting in the creation of Roman Britain – 43 CE – 410 CE. Figures like Caratacus and Boudica were crucial to the early military resistance of the Britons to Roman rule – and their struggles are recorded by the Roman historian Tacitus, in his *Annals* and his biography of the Roman general Agricola. Tacitus, as a Roman historian who was critical of the Empire, wrote a serious criticism of Imperialism – the Speech of Calgacus – an alleged speech by a legendary British chieftain. In this great speech, Tacitus sums up the reality of Imperialism: ‘To ravage, to slaughter, to usurp under

false titles, they call empire; and where they make a desert, they call it peace'. Following the victory of the Romans, over the Britons, the Romans would dominate Britain for centuries. Eventually, during the gradual collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century CE, the Romans would abandon Britain but not before completely transforming British society. The social struggle, in Ancient Britain, following the Roman conquest was mainly the struggle for the independence of the Britons from Roman rule. This struggle ultimately failed but it underlines a key fact of British history – that British history is based on social struggle.

The Middle Ages was the period in British history between 410 CE and 1485 CE — from the withdrawal of Roman forces from Britain (410 CE) and the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476 CE) to the battle of Bosworth Field and the rise of the Tudor dynasty (1485 CE). After the collapse of Roman Britain (5th century CE, 410 CE), the Anglo-Saxon invasions (5th century CE - 7th century CE), the Viking invasions (8th century CE - 11th century CE), and the Norman invasion (11th century CE, 1066 CE), most of the societies in Britain became feudal societies — specifically the Kingdom of England (10th century CE, 927 CE - 1707 CE). The early class struggle in British history during this period was primarily between the monarchy, the feudal lords, and the peasantry. Magna Carta (June 1215) and the Great Revolt of 1381 demonstrates the class struggle in British history during the medieval period, particularly between the feudal lords and the peasantry. Magna Carta, as a charter of medieval rights, demonstrates the social struggles between the monarchy and the feudal lords. The Great Revolt demonstrates the class struggle between the feudal lords and the peasantry. Feudalism in England began to break down following the crisis of the 14th century and the Wars of the Roses (1455-1487). Feudal Britain, from the 1300s and 1400s, also went through a series of economic and social changes which resulted in the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism (1450 to 1840). This produced radical ideas, such as the Communist ideas of Sir Thomas More and his vision of Utopia (1516). By the end of the 1500s and the beginning of the 1600s, Feudal society was beginning to completely break down in England. This led to the English Revolution of 1640.

The English Revolution was the revolutionary period in British history between 1640 and 1660. The English Revolution, and the English Civil War, saw the overthrow of Feudalism in England, the rise of Capitalism, and the rise of the modern capitalist class as the ruling class in Britain. The English Revolution was a bourgeois revolution and a class war, which saw the monarchy of Charles I overthrown by the forces of the Long Parliament —

specifically by Oliver Cromwell and the New Model Army. In 1649, Charles I was executed for treason and an English Republic was established (1649-1660). The English Revolution produced a number of radical movements, some of which struggled for democracy and for early types of radicalism and Socialism. The most important radical movements during the English Revolution were the Levellers and the True Levellers. The Levellers fought for parliamentary democracy, while the True Levellers argued for a form of early Socialism. The Levellers were led by John Lilburne, Richard Overton, and William Walwyn. The True Levellers were led by Gerrard Winstanley and William Everard. In 1647, at the height of the Revolution, a series of debates took place in the New Model Army at St Mary's Church in Putney. These debates, led by the Levellers Thomas Rainsborough and Edward Sexby, discussed the nature of parliamentary democracy, and argued for manhood suffrage in England. Another radical figure, in this period, was John Milton, a poet and radical thinker, who argued for freedom of the press and for an English Republic. The monarchy was restored in England (1660), but England remained a Capitalist society. The English Revolution, in the long term, also led to the creation of the British Empire and the unification of Britain in 1707 and 1801 — with the unification of England, Scotland, and Ireland into the Kingdom of Great Britain (1707) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1801).

The Industrial Revolution was the period in British history between 1750 and 1840. This period saw the rise of industrial society in Britain and the creation of the modern working class. It also saw the rise of British Imperialism — in the form of the British Empire. The rise of industrial society, in Britain, created the modern working class — a class based on wage labour and labour power. This period also saw the rise of the first working-class movements in British history, specifically in the form of radicalism, trade unions, Chartism, and early Socialism. Chartism (1838-1857) was the first working-class movement in modern history — and the first working-class movement to struggle actively for democracy and universal suffrage. Chartism was the beginning of the labour and Socialist movement in modern Britain. The impact of the American Revolution of 1776, the French Revolution of 1789, and the Industrial Revolution of 1750-1840, produced new and modern ideas in Britain, leading to the modern struggle for democracy and Socialism. The first working-class movements in Britain, such as the London Corresponding Society (1792), the Peterloo demonstrators (1819), the Luddites, the Tolpuddle Martyrs (1834), and the Chartists, suffered defeat and repression by the British state, but they laid the foundations of the modern working-class struggle in Great Britain. The Luddites of 1811-1816 were an early working-class movement — who

protested against the wage reductions which emerged due to the Industrial Revolution. The Peterloo Massacre of 1819 resulted in eighteen protesters being killed by the British state, and 700 wounded, in the struggle for parliamentary suffrage and representation. The Tolpuddle Martyrs of 1834 were exiled to Australia for attempting to form a trade union. The Chartists, as a major working-class movement, struggled in the 1830s and 1840s, for parliamentary democracy. The period from 1750 to 1840 saw the rise and development of many radical ideas in British society, such as the ideas of the Enlightenment, Reason, Democracy, Socialism, and Feminism. Another key social struggle in Britain, during the Industrial Revolution, was the struggle to abolish slavery and the slave trade – which resulted in the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and slavery itself in 1834 in the British Empire. British Imperialism, in the period of the Industrial Revolution, also conquered large sections of the world, in Ireland, India, America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, creating the need for anti-colonial and anti-Imperialist movements, both in Britain and in the British Empire. Some of the greatest radical thinkers in Britain, in the period between 1750 and 1880, were: Tom Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Blake, Robert Owen, Percy Shelley, and Marx and Engels.

The Rise of Labour was the period in British history when the modern working-class, labour, and Socialist movement firmly emerged in Britain between 1889 and 1920 — between the rise of modern trade unionism, the formation of the Labour Party (1900-1906), and the rise of the Communist Party of Great Britain (1920). This period created the modern conditions for British politics — specifically in the form of the rise of the labour movement, the development of democracy, and the struggle for Socialism. The rise and fall of the British Empire (1497-1997), the struggle for Irish Independence (1798-1922), the struggle for Indian independence (1857-1947), the rise of the British working class and the Labour Party (1900 to today), the struggle for democracy (1832-1928), the struggle for male and female suffrage (1832-1928), the struggle of the suffragette movement (1903-1928), the struggle for Socialism, and the impact of the First World War (1914-1918), also shaped the development of the British working-class movement. The Independence of Ireland (1922, 1949) and emerging anti-colonial movements in the British Empire led to the reshaping of Britain — into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (1922). These politics and struggles finally culminated with the formation of the Labour Party (1900-1906) and the Communist Party of Great Britain (1920). This period, between 1889 and 1920, saw the life and work of many great radical thinkers and activists in British labour history, such as: Henry Hyndman, E. Belfort Bax, William Morris, James Connolly, Eleanor Marx,

Friedrich Engels, Tom Mann, Keir Hardie, Sylvia Pankhurst, Noah Ablett, John Maclean, R. Palme Dutt, Will Gallacher, and Albert Inkpin. Britain, today, is still a Capitalist society. The British Empire no longer exists but British Capitalism and British Imperialism still exist. British society, today, is still the historical result of this period of British history – resulting in the current struggle for Socialism in Britain. Modern British society and British politics is still shaped by the struggle between Capitalism and Socialism. British history, and British politics, shows that Britain has been changed by social struggle. It shows that Britain can change – and that ordinary people have been vital to achieving social progress. Hopefully the struggle in Britain, today, will eventually result in a better society - a society based on the free development of each and the free development of all. The struggle in Britain, today, is to achieve Socialism – in the form of Democratic and Revolutionary Socialism.

British history can be understood and studied by the Marxist approach to history – through the sources of British history. Marxism is the theory and practice of working-class emancipation. A Marxist and Socialist approach to British history is possible. This approach, developed by Marx, Engels, and by the British Marxist tradition, has shown that British history has developed because of material conditions, productive forces, social relations, social struggle, class struggle, human agency, and social revolution. British history has a revolutionary tradition – which can inspire revolution and social change today. This tradition shows that Socialism is possible in Britain. The Marxist approach to history, the theory of Historical Materialism, shows that British history has developed due to the reality of social development – because of the social struggle of various classes. British history is a great example of the fact that the ‘history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle’. British history has been shaped by the interaction between social development and class struggle – resulting in social revolution. British history has often been limited by social reaction – but it has also resulted in the development of the revolutionary struggle for human progress through social revolution in Britain. British history, as an example of history, shows that ‘people make history, but they do not do so in conditions of their own choosing’. British history also shows that history is ‘the process of human emancipation and rehabilitation’. British history is the history of social struggle -- leading to social revolution.

Students of British history should also consult the large number of secondary sources about the history of Britain, written by Marxist and Socialist historians.<sup>3</sup> A general Socialist history of Britain, from ancient times to the First World War, can be found in A.L. Morton, ‘A People’s

History of England' (1938). The medieval period in Britain is covered in the work of Rodney Hilton. A Socialist history of the English Revolution can be found in Christopher Hill, 'The English Revolution: 1640' (1940), and in Christopher Hill, 'The Century of Revolution' (1961). A Socialist history of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and the early working class, can be found in E.P. Thompson, 'The Making of the English Working Class', (1963). The history of Chartism and the early struggle for working-class suffrage is covered by the work of Dorothy Thompson. A detailed Socialist history of the British labour movement in the early twentieth century can be found in the work of Brian Pearce, Raphael Samuel, and E.J. Hobsbawm. For the economic and social history of modern Britain refer to E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Industry and Empire' (1968). The history of women in Britain is covered by Sheila Rowbotham. The history of the British Empire is covered by the work of V.G. Kiernan. For British history in a global context, consult the work of Eric Hobsbawm.

British history is important. The study of British history, today, is mostly dominated by the theories of Whig, Tory, Liberal, and Conservative historians. British history, today, needs a Socialist theory.<sup>4</sup> It is time for a Socialist theory and approach to British history to be redeveloped – based on the example of the British Marxist historians of the 20th century. A stronger Left theory of British history could result in a stronger form of British Left politics – and a stronger struggle for human emancipation in Britain and in the world. There is a strong tradition of British Left history. There is a strong British Left tradition in British politics.<sup>5</sup> This strong tradition can still struggle for Socialism. British history, today, needs to be revolutionised by the ideas and approach of Socialist theory – for a Socialist history of Britain.

## Notes

1. A.L. Morton, *A People's History of England*, (1938)
2. A.L. Morton, *A People's History of England*, (1938)
3. H.J. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians*, (1984)
4. G. Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, (1941)
5. E.P. Thompson, *Socialist Humanism*, (1957)

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## NOTE ON ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editor wishes to thank the Marxist Internet Archive (MIA) for permission to publish extracts from its material relating to British history, and the history of the British labour and socialist movements. The work of the MIA is of vital importance to the struggle for Socialism in the world today.

## NOTE ON DOCUMENTS

The original spelling, grammar, and punctuation of medieval and early modern English has been largely retained in this book, placing these sources and documents in their original historical context. The full editorial information provided for each document is 'document', 'author', 'date', and 'source'.

The idea of this book is to present these documents with as little editing as possible so that students and readers can fully engage with them on their own historical and political terms.

# DOCUMENT LIST

## PART I – ANCIENT BRITAIN

Document I – The Revolt of Boudica

Document II – Tacitus' Account of the Speech of Caratacus

Document III – Tacitus' Account of the Speech of Calgacus

## PART II – THE MIDDLE AGES

Document I - Magna Carta (1215)

Document II - Froissart Chronicle of the Great Revolt of 1381

Document III - Sermon of John Ball (John Ball)

Document IV - Utopia (1516) - Extract (Sir Thomas More)

## PART III – THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

Document I - The Grand Remonstrance of 1641 (Long Parliament)

Document II - Leveller Petition of 1648 (Levellers)

Document III - An Agreement of The Free People of England – 1647

Document IV - Putney Debates of 1647 - Extract (Levellers)

Document V - The True Levellers Standard Advanced (True Levellers)

Document VI - Areopagitica - Extract (John Milton)

Document VII - The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth -  
Extract (John Milton)

## PART IV – THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Document I - Common Sense - Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession (Thomas Paine)

Document II - The Rights of Man – Extract (Thomas Paine)

Document III - Property in Land: Everyone's Right (Thomas Spence)

Document IV - A Vindication of the Rights of Woman – Introduction (Mary Wollstonecraft)

Document V - Minutes from the Abolitionist Committee (Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade)

Document VI - On the Horrors of the Slave Trade (William Wilberforce)

Document VII - The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African – Extracts (Olaudah Equiano)

- Document VIII - Regulations of the London Corresponding Society (Maurice Margarot and Thomas Hardy)
- Document IX - The Chimney Sweeper (William Blake)
- Document X - London (William Blake)
- Document XI - Preface to Milton, (William Blake)
- Document XII - A Luddite Manifesto in Nottinghamshire, 1812 (Luddites)
- Document XIII - A New View of Society – Essay One (Robert Owen)
- Document XIV – Account of the Peterloo Massacre – Monday 16th of August, 1819 (Manchester Observer)
- Document XV - Masque of Anarchy, 1819 (Percy Shelley)
- Document XVI - The Tolpuddle Martyrs, 1834 (George Loveless)
- Document XVII - Grand National Holiday (William Benbow)
- Document XVIII - The People's Charter (London Working Men's Association)
- Document XIX - The Six Points of the People's Charter (LWMA)
- Document XX - Introduction to Condition of the Working Class in England – 1845 (Friedrich Engels)
- Document XXI - To the Working-Classes of Great Britain (Friedrich Engels)
- Document XXII - Free Trade and the Chartists (Karl Marx)
- Document XXIII - Letter to the Labour Parliament (Karl Marx)

## PART V – THE RISE OF LABOUR

- Document I - England for All – Introduction (Henry Hyndman)
- Document II - Socialism: The Ends and the Means (William Morris)
- Document III - Socialism and Irish Nationalism (James Connolly)
- Document IV - The Working-Class Movement in England (Eleanor Marx)
- Document V - What a Compulsory Eight-Hour Day means to the Workers (Tom Mann)
- Document VI - Foundation of the Labour Party (Labour Representation Committee)
- Document VII - Social-Democrats and the Suffrage (Keir Hardie)
- Document VIII - Force Feeding of a Suffragette (E. Sylvia Pankhurst)
- Document IX - The Miners' Next Step (Noah Ablett)
- Document X - Open Letter to British Soldiers / Don't Shoot! (Tom Mann)
- Document XI - Clause IV of the Labour Party – 1918 Version (Labour Party)
- Document XII - The Clyde Unrest (John Maclean)
- Document XIII - The British Empire (R. Palme Dutt)
- Document XIV - Revolution (Willie Gallacher)
- Document XV- Communist Party of Great Britain – Communist Unity Convention Report (Communist Party of Great Britain)

## **PART I – ANCIENT BRITAIN**

## Document I

Document: 'The Revolt of Boudica'

Author: Tacitus – Roman historian

Date: 60 CE / 61 CE – written, 100 CE –110 CE

Source: Complete Works of Tacitus (1942)

In the consulship of Cæsonius Pætus and Petronius Turpilianus, a serious disaster was sustained in Britain, where Aulus Didius, the emperor's legate, had merely retained our existing possessions, and his successor Veranius, after having ravaged the Silures in some trifling raids, was prevented by death from extending the war. While he lived, he had a great name for manly independence, though, in his will's final words, he betrayed a flatterer's weakness; for, after heaping adulation on Nero, he added that he should have conquered the province for him, had he lived for the next two years. Now, however, Britain was in the hands of Suetonius Paulinus, who in military knowledge and in popular favour, which allows no one to be without a rival, vied with Corbulo, and aspired to equal the glory of the recovery of Armenia by the subjugation of Rome's enemies. He therefore prepared to attack the island of Mona which had a powerful population and was a refuge for fugitives. He built flat-bottomed vessels to cope with the shallows, and uncertain depths of the sea. Thus the infantry crossed, while the cavalry followed by fording, or, where the water was deep, swam by the side of their horses.

On the shore stood the opposing army with its dense array of armed warriors, while between the ranks dashed women, in black attire like the Furies, with hair dishevelled, waving brands. All around, the Druids, lifting up their hands to heaven, and pouring forth dreadful imprecations, scared our soldiers by the unfamiliar sight, so that, as if their limbs were paralysed, they stood motionless, and exposed to wounds. Then urged by their general's appeals and mutual encouragements not to quail before a troop of frenzied women, they bore the standards onwards, smote down all resistance, and wrapped the foe in the flames of his own brands. A force was next set over the conquered, and their groves, devoted to inhuman superstitions, were destroyed. They deemed it indeed a duty to cover their altars with the blood of captives and to consult their deities through human entrails.

Suetonius while thus occupied received tidings of the sudden revolt of the province. Prasutagus, king of the Iceni, famed for his long prosperity, had made the emperor his heir along with his two daughters, under the impression that this token of submission would put his kingdom and his

house out of the reach of wrong. But the reverse was the result, so much so that his kingdom was plundered by centurions, his house by slaves, as if they were the spoils of war. First, his wife Boudicea was scourged, and his daughters outraged. All the chief men of the Iceni, as if Rome had received the whole country as a gift, were stript of their ancestral possessions, and the king's relatives were made slaves. Roused by these insults and the dread of worse, reduced as they now were into the condition of a province, they flew to arms and stirred to revolt the Trinobantes and others who, not yet cowed by slavery, had agreed in secret conspiracy to reclaim their freedom. It was against the veterans that their hatred was most intense. For these new settlers in the colony of Camulodunum drove people out of their houses, ejected them from their farms, called them captives and slaves, and the lawlessness of the veterans was encouraged by the soldiers, who lived a similar life and hoped for similar licence. A temple also erected to the Divine Claudius was ever before their eyes, a citadel, as it seemed, of perpetual tyranny. Men chosen as priests had to squander their whole fortunes under the pretence of a religious ceremonial. It appeared too no difficult matter to destroy the colony, undefended as it was by fortifications, a precaution neglected by our generals, while they thought more of what was agreeable than of what was expedient.

Meanwhile, without any evident cause, the statue of Victory at Camulodunum fell prostrate and turned its back to the enemy, as though it fled before them. Women excited to frenzy prophesied impending destruction; ravings in a strange tongue, it was said, were heard in their Senate-house; their theatre resounded with wailings, and in the estuary of the Tamesa had been seen the appearance of an overthrown town; even the ocean had worn the aspect of blood, and, when the tide ebbed, there had been left the likenesses of human forms, marvels interpreted by the Britons, as hopeful, by the veterans, as alarming. But as Suetonius was far away, they implored aid from the procurator, Catus Decianus. All he did was to send two hundred men, and no more, without regular arms, and there was in the place but a small military force. Trusting to the protection of the temple, hindered too by secret accomplices in the revolt, who embarrassed their plans, they had constructed neither fosse nor rampart; nor had they removed their old men and women, leaving their youth alone to face the foe. Surprised, as it were, in the midst of peace, they were surrounded by an immense host of the barbarians. All else was plundered or fired in the onslaught; the temple where the soldiers had assembled, was stormed after a two days' siege. The victorious enemy met Petilius Cerialis, commander of the ninth legion, as he was coming to the rescue, routed his troops, and destroyed all his infantry. Cerialis escaped with some cavalry into the camp, and was saved

by its fortifications. Alarmed by this disaster and by the fury of the province which he had goaded into war by his rapacity, the procurator Catus crossed over into Gaul.

Suetonius, however, with wonderful resolution, marched amidst a hostile population to Londinium, which, though undistinguished by the name of a colony, was much frequented by a number of merchants and trading vessels. Uncertain whether he should choose it as a seat of war, as he looked round on his scanty force of soldiers, and remembered with what a serious warning the rashness of Petilius had been punished, he resolved to save the province at the cost of a single town. Nor did the tears and weeping of the people, as they implored his aid, deter him from giving the signal of departure and receiving into his army all who would go with him. Those who were chained to the spot by the weakness of their sex, or the infirmity of age, or the attractions of the place, were cut off by the enemy. Like ruin fell on the town of Verulamium, for the barbarians, who delighted in plunder and were indifferent to all else, passed by the fortresses with military garrisons, and attacked whatever offered most wealth to the spoiler, and was unsafe for defence. About seventy thousand citizens and allies, it appeared, fell in the places which I have mentioned. For it was not on making prisoners and selling them, or on any of the barter of war, that the enemy was bent, but on slaughter, on the gibbet, the fire and the cross, like men soon about to pay the penalty, and meanwhile snatching at instant vengeance.

Suetonius had the fourteenth legion with the veterans of the twentieth, and auxiliaries from the neighbourhood, to the number of about ten thousand armed men, when he prepared to break off delay and fight a battle. He chose a position approached by a narrow defile, closed in at the rear by a forest, having first ascertained that there was not a soldier of the enemy except in his front, where an open plain extended without any danger from ambuscades. His legions were in close array; round them, the light-armed troops, and the cavalry in dense array on the wings. On the other side, the army of the Britons, with its masses of infantry and cavalry, was confidently exulting, a vaster host than ever had assembled, and so fierce in spirit that they actually brought with them, to witness the victory, their wives riding in waggons, which they had placed on the extreme border of the plain.

Boudicea, with her daughters before her in a chariot, went up to tribe after tribe, protesting that it was indeed usual for Britons to fight under the leadership of women. "But now," she said, "it is not as a woman descended from noble ancestry, but as one of the people that I am avenging lost freedom, my scourged body, the outraged chastity of my daughters. Roman



lust has gone so far that not our very persons, nor even age or virginity, are left unpolluted. But heaven is on the side of a righteous vengeance; a legion which dared to fight has perished; the rest are hiding themselves in their camp, or are thinking anxiously of flight. They will not sustain even the din and the shout of so many thousands, much less our charge and our blows. If you weigh well the strength of the armies, and the causes of the war, you will see that in this battle you must conquer or die. This is a woman's resolve; as for men, they may live and be slaves."

Nor was Suetonius silent at such a crisis. Though he confided in the valour of his men, he yet mingled encouragements and entreaties to disdain the clamours and empty threats of the barbarians. "There," he said, "you see more women than warriors. Unwarlike, unarmed, they will give way the moment they have recognised that sword and that courage of their conquerors, which have so often routed them. Even among many legions, it is a few who really decide the battle, and it will enhance their glory that a small force should earn the renown of an entire army. Only close up the ranks, and having discharged your javelins, then with shields and swords continue the work of bloodshed and destruction, without a thought of plunder. When once the victory has been won, everything will be in your power."

Such was the enthusiasm which followed the general's address, and so promptly did the veteran soldiery, with their long experience of battles, prepare for the hurling of the javelins, that it was with confidence in the result that Suetonius gave the signal of battle.

At first, the legion kept its position, clinging to the narrow defile as a defence; when they had exhausted their missiles, which they discharged with unerring aim on the closely approaching foe, they rushed out in a wedge-like column. Similar was the onset of the auxiliaries, while the cavalry with extended lances broke through all who offered a strong resistance. The rest turned their back in flight, and flight proved difficult, because the surrounding waggons had blocked retreat. Our soldiers spared not to slay even the women, while the very beasts of burden, transfixed by the missiles, swelled the piles of bodies. Great glory, equal to that of our old victories, was won on that day. Some indeed say that there fell little less than eighty thousand of the Britons, with a loss to our soldiers of about four hundred, and only as many wounded. Boudicea put an end to her life by poison. Poenius Postumus too, camp-prefect of the second legion, when he knew of the success of the men of the fourteenth and twentieth, feeling that he had cheated his legion out of like glory, and had contrary to all military

usage disregarded the general's orders, threw himself on his sword.

The whole army was then brought together and kept under canvas to finish the remainder of the war. The emperor strengthened the forces by sending from Germany two thousand legionaries, eight cohorts of auxiliaries, and a thousand cavalry. On their arrival the men of the ninth had their number made up with legionary soldiers. The allied infantry and cavalry were placed in new winter quarters, and whatever tribes still wavered or were hostile were ravaged with fire and sword. Nothing however distressed the enemy so much as famine, for they had been careless about sowing corn, people of every age having gone to the war, while they reckoned on our supplies as their own. Nations, too, so high-spirited inclined the more slowly to peace, because Julius Classicanus, who had been sent as successor to Catus and was at variance with Suetonius, let private animosities interfere with the public interest, and had spread an idea that they ought to wait for a new governor who, having neither the anger of an enemy nor the pride of a conqueror, would deal mercifully with those who had surrendered. At the same time he stated in a despatch to Rome that no cessation of fighting must be expected, unless Suetonius were superseded, attributing that general's disasters to perverseness and his successes to good luck.

Accordingly one of the imperial freedmen, Polyclitus, was sent to survey the state of Britain, Nero having great hopes that his influence would be able not only to establish a good understanding between the governor and the procurator, but also to pacify the rebellious spirit of the barbarians. And Polyclitus, who with his enormous suite had been a burden to Italy and Gaul, failed not, as soon as he had crossed the ocean, to make his progresses a terror even to our soldiers. But to the enemy he was a laughing-stock, for they still retained some of the fire of liberty, knowing nothing yet of the power of freedmen, and so they marvelled to see a general and an army who had finished such a war cringing to slaves. Everything, however, was softened down for the emperor's ears, and Suetonius was retained in the government; but as he subsequently lost a few vessels on the shore with the crews, he was ordered, as though the war continued, to hand over his army to Petronius Turpilianus, who had just resigned his consulship. Petronius neither challenged the enemy nor was himself molested, and veiled this tame inaction under the honourable name of peace.

## Document II

Document: 'Account of the Speech of Caratacus'

Author: Tacitus – Roman historian

Date: 50 CE - written, 100 CE –110 CE

Source: Complete Works of Tacitus (1942).

There is seldom safety for the unfortunate, and Caractacus, seeking the protection of Cartismandua, queen of the Brigantes, was put in chains and delivered up to the conquerors, nine years after the beginning of the war in Britain. His fame had spread thence, and travelled to the neighbouring islands and provinces, and was actually celebrated in Italy. All were eager to see the great man, who for so many years had defied our power. Even at Rome the name of Caractacus was no obscure one; and the emperor, while he exalted his own glory, enhanced the renown of the vanquished. The people were summoned as to a grand spectacle; the prætorian cohorts were drawn up under arms in the plain in front of their camp; then came a procession of the royal vassals, and the ornaments and neck-chains and the spoils which the king had won in wars with other tribes, were displayed. Next were to be seen his brothers, his wife and daughter; last of all, Caractacus himself. All the rest stooped in their fear to abject supplication; not so the king, who neither by humble look nor speech sought compassion.

When he was set before the emperor's tribunal, he spoke as follows: "Had my moderation in prosperity been equal to my noble birth and fortune, I should have entered this city as your friend rather than as your captive; and you would not have disdained to receive, under a treaty of peace, a king descended from illustrious ancestors and ruling many nations. My present lot is as glorious to you as it is degrading to myself. I had men and horses, arms and wealth. What wonder if I parted with them reluctantly? If you Romans choose to lord it over the world, does it follow that the world is to accept slavery? Were I to have been at once delivered up as a prisoner, neither my fall nor your triumph would have become famous. My punishment would be followed by oblivion, whereas, if you save my life, I shall be an everlasting memorial of your clemency."

Upon this the emperor granted pardon to Caractacus, to his wife, and to his brothers. Released from their bonds, they did homage also to Agrippina who sat near, conspicuous on another throne, in the same language of praise and gratitude.

### Document III

Document: 'Account of the Speech of Calgacus'

Author: Tacitus – Roman historian - 56 CE – c. 120 CE

Date: 85 CE – written in 98 CE

Source: Complete Works of Tacitus (1942).

He [Agricola] sent his fleet ahead to plunder at various points and thus spread uncertainty and terror, and, with an army marching light, which he had reinforced with the bravest of the Britons and those whose loyalty had been proved during a long peace, reached the Graupian Mountain, which he found occupied by the enemy. The Britons were, in fact, undaunted by the loss of the previous battle, and welcomed the choice between revenge and enslavement. They had realized at last that common action was needed to meet the common danger, and had sent round embassies and drawn up treaties to rally the full force of all their states. Already more than 30,000 men made a gallant show, and still they came flocking to the colours—all the young men and those whose 'old age was fresh and green', famous warriors with their battle honours thick upon them. At that point one of the many leaders, named Calgacus, a man of outstanding valour and nobility, summoned the masses who were already thirsting for battle and addressed them, we are told, in words like these:

"Whenever I consider the origin of this war and the necessities of our position, I have a sure confidence that this day, and this union of yours, will be the beginning of freedom to the whole of Britain. To all of us slavery is a thing unknown; there are no lands beyond us, and even the sea is not safe, menaced as we are by a Roman fleet. And thus, in war and battle, in which the brave find glory, even the coward will find safety. Former contests, in which, with varying fortune, the Romans were resisted, still left in us a last hope of succour, inasmuch as being the most renowned nation of Britain, dwelling in the very heart of the country, and out of sight of the shores of the conquered, we could keep even our eyes unpolluted by the contagion of slavery. To us who dwell on the uttermost confines of the earth and of freedom, this remote sanctuary of Britain's glory has up to this time been a defence. Now, however, the furthest limits of Britain are thrown open, and the unknown always passes for the marvellous. But there are no tribes beyond us, nothing indeed but waves and rocks, and the yet more terrible Romans, from whose oppression escape is vainly sought by obedience and submission. Robbers of the world, having by their universal plunder exhausted the land, they rifle the deep. If the enemy be rich, they are rapacious; if he be poor, they lust for dominion; neither the east nor the west

has been able to satisfy them. Alone among men they covet with equal eagerness poverty and riches. To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude and call it peace (*ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*).

"Nature has willed that every man's children and kindred should be his dearest objects. Yet these are torn from us by conscriptions to be slaves elsewhere. Our wives and our sisters, even though they may escape violation from the enemy, are dishonoured under the names of friendship and hospitality. Our goods and fortunes they collect for their tribute, our harvests for their granaries. Our very hands and bodies, under the lash and in the midst of insult, are worn down by the toil of clearing forests and morasses. Creatures born to slavery are sold once and for all, and are, moreover, fed by their masters; but Britain is daily purchasing, is daily feeding, her own enslaved people. And as in a household the last comer among the slaves is always the butt of his companions, so we in a world long used to slavery, as the newest and most contemptible, are marked out for destruction. We have neither fruitful plains, nor mines, nor harbours, for the working of which we may be spared. Valour, too, and high spirit in subjects, are offensive to rulers; besides, remoteness and seclusion, while they give safety, provoke suspicion. Since then you cannot hope for quarter, take courage, I beseech you, whether it be safety or renown that you hold most precious. Under a woman's leadership the Brigantes were able to burn a colony, to storm a camp, and had not success ended in supineness, might have thrown off the yoke. Let us, then, a fresh and unconquered people, never likely to abuse our freedom, show forthwith at the very first onset what heroes Caledonia has in reserve.

"Do you suppose that the Romans will be as brave in war as they are licentious in peace? To our strifes and discords they owe their fame, and they turn the errors of an enemy to the renown of their own army, an army which, composed as it is of every variety of nations, is held together by success and will be broken up by disaster. These Gauls and Germans, and, I blush to say, these Britons, who, though they lend their lives to support a stranger's rule, have been its enemies longer than its subjects, you cannot imagine to be bound by fidelity and affection. Fear and terror there certainly are, feeble bonds of attachment; remove them, and those who have ceased to fear will begin to hate. All the incentives to victory are on our side. The Romans have no wives to kindle their courage; no parents to taunt them with flight, man have either no country or one far away. Few in number, dismayed by their ignorance, looking around upon a sky, a sea, and forests which are all unfamiliar to them; hemmed in, as it were, and enmeshed, the

Gods have delivered them into our hands. Be not frightened by the idle display, by the glitter of gold and of silver, which can neither protect nor wound. In the very ranks of the enemy we shall find our own forces. Britons will acknowledge their own cause; Gauls will remember past freedom; the other Germans will abandon them, as but lately did the Usipii. Behind them there is nothing to dread. The forts are ungarrisoned; the colonies in the hands of aged men; what with disloyal subjects and oppressive rulers, the towns are ill-affected and rife with discord. On the one side you have a general and an army; on the other, tribute, the mines, and all the other penalties of an enslaved people. Whether you endure these for ever, or instantly avenge them, this field is to decide. Think, therefore, as you advance to battle, at once of your ancestors and of your posterity."

Note 1 – The speech of Calgacus is probably a literary invention by Tacitus – designed to show the brutality and reality of Roman Imperialism during its conquest of Britain.

Note 2 – The line, 'To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude and call it peace', can also be translated as: 'To ravage, to slaughter, to usurp under false titles, they call empire; and where they make a desert, they call it peace'.