Controversy 2
The role and power of parliament 1566 – 1588

Managing Parliament
What was the role and power of parliament?

What was the role of Parliament?

Legislation: Elizabeth recognised that the Monarch in parliament had almost unlimited power and her religious settlement was passed with the aid of Parliament through the Act of Uniformity and the Act of Supremacy. There were 483 laws passed in Elizabeth’s reign.

Advisory function: Elizabeth was a very traditional and conservative monarch, therefore would respect parliament as a forum for her to consult her subjects. In 1572 there was no subsidy demanded or granted as it was called to offer advice and this was the reason for calling Parliaments in 1581 and again in 1584-85. The Queen did believe this should only be at her request hence her disapproval of discussion of her marriage and the succession in 1566 with the assertion that it was “monstrous that the feet should direct the head.” The Queen recognised that advice was an important function but it was not the one uppermost in her mind.

Economic: The central role of Parliament as a source of taxation. Of thirteen sessions of Parliament, Elizabeth asked all but one for money. Parliament did vote taxation to cover war - against Spain and in Ireland - but the proceeds were inadequate. Elizabeth was forced to sell crown land, thereby decreasing ordinary revenue. Elizabeth turned to various means to increase revenue e.g. leaving bishoprics vacant so she could pocket episcopal income and licensing privateers to rob the Spaniards in exchange for a cut of the profits. Another royal money-making scheme was issuing monopolies - one person would be given the sole right to sell or manufacture a particular commodity provided he paid for the privilege.

How much influence did Parliament have?

Not influential:

- The short time that parliaments sat and their relative infrequency and their subordination to the will of the Queen in terms of their dismissal and her willingness to veto bills
- The Queen often silenced Parliament or ignored its advice, like on secession and marriage
- The money granted by Parliament was insufficient and Elizabeth had to resort
- Use the Revisionists argument that Parliament did not grow in power in this time and conflict was mainly Privy Council driven

Influential:

- Elizabeth did see parliament as useful, otherwise she would not have called it on the 13 occasions that she did
- Parliament served an important function in voting of money and making of legislation
- Parliament had the potential to disrupt the Queen e.g. through the impact of the houses on religious reformation
- Use the traditionalist argument that Parliament grew in power in this time and conflict was driven by this
- Parliament put a large amount of influence on Elizabeth to execute MQS and this probably swayed her