

CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHIES IN THE WORLD

Annotation: In this article analyzes the constitutional monarchy and its basic features.

Key words: constitutional monarchy, monarch, concept of divine right, separation of powers, unwritten constitutions.

The oldest constitutional monarchy dating back to ancient times was that of the Hittites. They were an ancient Anatolian people that lived during the Bronze Age whose king or queen had to share their authority with an assembly, called the *Panku*, which was the equivalent to a modern-day deliberative assembly or a legislature. Members of the *Panku* came from scattered noble families who worked as representatives of their subjects in an adjutant or subaltern federal-type landscape. In theoretical absolutism, a monarch rules with total power. Towards the end of the Middle Ages and following the Reformation, religious wars, the decline of the church, and a growing middle class resulted in the emergence of absolute leaders to provide guarantees of order. The concept of "divine right" often, as in the case of King James I/VI (King James I of England, James VI, King of Scots) covered as a justification for abuses of absolute power. There are several constitutional monarchies in the world today. Of the member states of the European Union, seven are constitutional monarchies: Great Britain, Belgium, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, and Liechtenstein. Japan remains a constitutional monarchy, albeit with a politically weak and largely ceremonial king, and several states in the British Commonwealth of Nations, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica, and many of the Pacific Island states, still retain

political, social, and legal links with the British monarchy. Smaller states such as Nepal and Cambodia also retain limited monarchies.

A constitutional monarchy is a form of monarchical government established under a constitutional system which acknowledges an elected or hereditary monarch as head of state. Modern constitutional monarchies usually implement the concept of *trias politica* or "separation of powers", where the monarch either is the head of the executive branch or simply has a ceremonial role. Where a monarch holds absolute power, it is known as an absolute monarchy. The process of government and law within an absolute monarchy can be very different from that in a constitutional monarchy. Constitutional monarchy may refer to a system in which the monarch acts as a non-party political head of state under the constitution, whether written or unwritten. While most monarchs may hold formal authority and the government may legally operate in the monarch's name, in the form typical in Europe the monarch no longer personally sets public policy or chooses political leaders. Political scientist Vernon Bogdanor, paraphrasing Thomas Macaulay, has defined a constitutional monarch as "A sovereign who reigns but does not rule". The concept of semi-constitutional monarch identifies constitutional monarchies with fewer parliamentary powers. As a result, constitutional monarchies may also be referred to as 'parliamentary monarchies' to differentiate them from semi-constitutional monarchies.

In addition to acting as a visible symbol of national unity, a constitutional monarch may hold formal powers such as dissolving parliament or giving royal assent to legislation. However, the exercise of such powers may largely be exercised strictly in accordance with either written constitutional principles or unwritten constitutional conventions, rather than any personal political preference imposed by the sovereign. In *The English Constitution*, British political theorist Walter Bagehot identified three main political rights which a constitutional monarch may freely exercise: the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn. Many constitutional monarchies still retain significant authorities

or political influence, however, such as through certain reserve powers and who may also play an important political role.

In a situation where one individual who is not necessarily knowledgeable about economics makes all economic decisions, the economy can be seriously damaged by imprudent allocation of funds. For example, Louis XIV of France abused his control of money by spending it on his Palace of Versailles and on wars that did not benefit France. According to *Early Modern France*, (Robin Briggs, 1998, ISBN), at the end of Louis XIV's reign, the French Royal Family was in debt 2 billion livres or about \$21 billion. This debt, combined with the awkward tax structure of the country, was a contributing factor in the French Revolution. However, other historians argue that the tax-exempt status of the nobility and the Church was a more important cause of France's budget deficit.

If the absolute monarch favors one group over another, a reduction of personal freedoms may result. King Louis XIV demonstrated this when he overrode the Edict of Nantes and forcibly exiled the Huguenots from France.

Constitutional monarchies are often very difficult to evolve because of the complexity of its structure. Unwritten constitutions even create difficulties because the rules, though unwritten, have a tradition of being followed. Changing the rules creates objections within the various layers of government that must be resolved before any internal change would become possible. Constitutional monarchy first occurred in modern continental Europe after the French Revolution. General Napoleon Bonaparte is considered the first monarch proclaiming *himself* as embodiment of the nation, rather than as a divinely-appointed ruler; this interpretation of monarchy is basic to continental constitutional monarchies. A constitutional monarchy is less prone to a coup compared to other systems because it offers a dual structure of support. You will have the side that includes all of the elected or appointed officials that govern over legislation and the daily tasks of governing, and then you have the sovereign who serves as the head of state in some capacity. If the people feel that their government is no longer providing them

with what they need, then there is the option to elect new officials or petition for a change in appointments.

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