

simple bill, giving Mary's husband Philip the protection of the treason laws, into a measure making him protector of the realm if she predeceased him and left minor heirs. A number of peers were alarmed by this attempt to enlarge the authority of the king-consort. When the bill passed the Commons 106 members either walked out or were simply absent—and later the Court of King's Bench took legal action against more than sixty of them. At least thirty-six were clients of Pembroke, Bedford, other nobles, and Sir Thomas Cheyne, Pembroke's friend and Bedford's relative, all of whom (with the possible exception of Cheyne) quietly departed parliament too. It is probable that these men seceded in silent protest and took their clients with them.³⁰

Another example of the courtier-cum-parliamentary politician, Thomas, Lord Seymour, is one of unalloyed ambition, devoid of principle of any kind. He was the worthiest candidate for the title of 'aristocratic lunatic of the century', excelling even Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex in his blind impetuosity and political naiveté. He was inordinately jealous of his brother Edward, who proclaimed himself Lord Protector and guardian of King Edward VI a few days after Henry VIII's death. Thomas 'misliked that he was not placed in the Parliament House, as one of the King his uncles'. So he turned to parliament to remedy his grievances and challenge his brother's authority. When he was arrested in January 1549 he was charged with 'having in both the same houses laboured, stirred, and moved a number of persons to take part and join with him in such things as he would set forth and enterprise, whereby he thought to breed such a tumult, uproar and sedition'. He was accused of intending to appear in the Commons with his 'fautours and adherents [i.e. clients] before prepared' and there to cause a 'broil' and tumult. Nor did he ignore the upper house where 'he had the names of all the Lords, and totted them whom he thought he might have to his purpose to labour them'. Seymour even threatened that, if his designs were thwarted, 'I will make the blackest Parliament that ever was in England'.³¹ His indiscretions, tactlessness and the crudeness of his actions brought about his fall, but at least he had the perception to turn to parliament as an appropriate instrument with which to effect a revolution at Court.

The final example belongs to the Elizabethan political twilight, the 1590s. The heirs of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and the Earl of Leicester were Robert Cecil and Robert, Earl of Essex. Theirs too was a power struggle pure and simple. They competed for everything including borough stewardships or recorderships, which gave them extensive influence in parliamentary elections. The steward might be the nominal, decorative head officer of a