

Compare and Contrast the Western Rebellion and Kett's Rebellion in terms of Causes and Threat.

The year 1549 in which both rebellions took place was a troublesome year for the Lord Protector, at the time, Somerset. It was plagued with bad harvests, inflation, poverty and war. These factors made 1549 a watershed year for rioting and rebellion. Though these are the only two rebellions that posed a serious threat, they were definitely not unique. There were outbreaks throughout the country ranging from Leicestershire to Gloucestershire for most of the year. Somerset's style of leadership was not suited to this atmosphere and had it not been Warwick; he would have been ousted by someone else it was only a matter of time.

Though the rebellions had different motivations and causes, some parallels can be drawn. For instance, they both had local grievances that they wished to voice and neither could have been handled at a local level. In fact, what distinguished the two rebellions from the rest during the grave year was its ability to grow beyond a local level and in effect become a more serious threat to the government. In addition, the Western rebellion may have been considered more serious since firstly, the government realised its existence too late and was slow to act against it, and secondly, it eventually led to the coup by Warwick. However, had it not been for Kett's rebellion the Western rebellion would not have been so pivotal. Furthermore, the engagement of the troops with Kett's rebellion put Somerset in such a weak position.

A key problem and grievance of both rebellions was inflation. Somerset's continued policy of debasement of the coinage sent prices rocketing, as well as the underlying problem of population increase that created a situation in which demand outstretched supply. This was also contributed to by the bad harvests during the previous and current year. Inflation manifested itself in different ways for each of the rebellions. For Kett's rebellion, rack-renting became an important problem especially for the commoners who were affected the most by it. In the Western rebellion however, sheep tax was of great worry since the collapse of the Antwerp market had already made business hard. Enclosure was another common grievance that linked the two rebellions. Here Somerset's position compromised his leadership and encouraged further unrest. Being sympathetic towards the rebels cause he set up the Enclosure Commission in 1547. It was only to confirm commoners' fears as enclosure to be an 'evil'. Though it only occurred in limited areas it was seen as a pivotal problem.

In terms of religion the rebellions do differ since they take completely opposite views on the subject. The Western rebellion was an anti-reformation protest where as Kett's was in favour of a more evangelical England. Most of the demands made by the Western rebels were religiously influenced however this may only be since clerics were the writers of the list of demands. Kett's rebellion consists of more socio-economic demands with a few in relation to religion. Those that do refer to religion embody a slightly anti-clerical aspect, showing their desire for further reforms to the church. The former also display a more disrespectful attitude towards the Lord Protector than the latter as is apparent by the language used in the demands. This was regardless of Somerset's sympathy towards them and their grievances. In fact, some

such as William Paget feel he is too lenient towards the rebels and to a greater degree this is true. Somerset's leadership style simply empowered the rebels making them a more serious threat. His indecisive nature led if the 'orderliness' of Kett's followers to mass a fight against the King's troops.

Somerset made the crucial decision to continue the inherited war with Scotland and France, which weakened his position further when dealing with these events. He garrisoned troops near the Scottish border which was not only costly but paralysed a large part of his forces. The JP's could not control the riots which soon grow beyond their powers. The intense poverty during a time of recession lead to policies against vagabonds being legislated. This created further unrest since unemployment was not their fault. This lack of resources and misdirection on Somerset's part furthered the rebels support making them a more prominent threat. There was also an essence of anti-gentry feeling in the Western rebels' demands that enforces this point. The usual way, in which Tudor government dealt with problems, pardoning those who disarmed failed to work. Somerset was in a compromising situation but did not have the ability or support to suppress both rebellions.

Kett's rebellion was successfully dispersed by Somerset's troops but required an all the forces he was capable of mustering. Hence the Western rebels may have overthrown him had Warwick not stolen the opportunity and crushed the rebellion only for him to soon take power. Furthermore, the Privy Council did not think much of Somerset since he consulted them rarely, only adding to the opposition he faced at the time. The causes of the two rebellions and the threats they pose are a response to the failure of the Lord Protector to rule as an effective leader. However, it is not to be said that is it entirely his fault since many of the problems he or Edward VI had inherited. Though some were simply out of his control like bad harvest other were worsened by his judgements such as the continuation of the war and debasing of the coinage.