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4 Class Warfare and Anarchy: The Reign of Edward VI

POINTS TO CONSIDER

This chapter deals with the two major rebellions of Edward's reign. However, it places them in the wider context of the long- and short-term changes that had taken place. You need to decide whether the rebellions were the result of the long-term changes or whether they were a response to specific changes in government policy under Edward. A major issue for you to consider is how far the revolts were class-based and whether the monarchy was ever seriously challenged.

KEY DATES

1540s	Rapid population growth, inflation and rising unemployment.
1547	Jan Death of Henry VIII. Feb Edward Seymour created Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector.
1548	Sep Invasion of Scotland. Proclamation to remove images from churches.
1549	April Dissolution of the Chantries. June Murder of William Body at Helston, Cornwall. June Enclosure Commission to enforce existing laws. June Tax on Sheep and Cloth. More Enclosure Commissions.
	Jan Act of Uniformity and Book of Common Prayer.
	June Introduction of First Prayer Book. Western or Prayer Book Rebellion.
	July Ket's Rebellion in East Anglia.
	Oct Fall of Somerset. Poor harvest.

1 Introduction

Although the concept of a mid-Tudor crisis has been challenged over recent years, it is difficult to escape the fact that the years 1547-1553 saw a large number of disturbances. In particular, 1549 saw two serious rebellions and numerous other minor disturbances, which some historians believe brought England close to class war.¹

There were tensions in both town and countryside as economic problems reached new levels of intensity. Changes in central government and religion had also loosened loyalty to the regime so that

those discontented by the hard times were ready recruits for those who wished to overturn Tudor rule.

2 The Social and Economic Context

KEY ISSUES Was there an underlying economic crisis in mid-Tudor society and, if so, how far did it contribute to the unrest of the period?

For the first time since the Black Death of the fourteenth century the population of England was rising steadily and from about 1525 it appears that the rise was more rapid. It is very difficult to be precise about this growth as there is no reliable statistical information. However, it would appear that it had risen from about 2.3 million in 1525 to 3 million by 1551.² Although this rise was nowhere near as significant as that of the eighteenth century it did contribute to the problems of Edward's reign and would be an issue in the later sixteenth century. There is evidence that people were marrying at an earlier age and therefore the average family size was rising. Meanwhile there was an increase in the 'dependency ratio' as there were an increasing number of children who did not contribute to the productivity of the nation, but who were consumers of food. Although the population rise helped to stimulate industrial demand and production was able to respond accordingly, this was less true of agriculture. Here demand outstripped supply and resulted in a period of rapid price rises. The population growth also created other problems. Jobs were created by the growing industrial demand, but in times of slump it meant that workers became unemployed and, lacking any other form of income, they became either dependent upon charity and poor relief or vagrants who were seen as a threat to law and order. Agricultural production struggled to keep pace with the growing population. In times of good harvests this was less of a problem, but when harvests were poor the problem was very serious. Unfortunately for the government a significant number of harvests in the period 1540-59 were deficient, putting further pressure on food supplies. It was very difficult to increase productivity in the short term given the lack of scientific measures available to farmers. The only available measure was to increase the amount of land under the plough, but this frequently meant bringing marginal land under cultivation where returns were poor. At the same time the demand for cloth grew and farmers saw that there was a very lucrative market available to them in sheep farming. This required less labour, but also encouraged enclosure, particularly of common land. It was the peasants who lost out by this. Fewer labourers were required to work the land as it takes less labour to look after a flock of sheep than it does to till the soil. Secondly the peasants were dependent upon the common land to

Nicholas 47
Peelers
" Disorder &
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Tudor
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graze their flocks and supplement their diets through catching rabbits or gathering the berries. It is therefore hardly surprising that many of the disturbances of this period were protests against enclosure. There were even worse problems in the towns. The lack of an internal transport system meant that it was very difficult to supply the urban areas and a local harvest failure soon created problems for the local authorities. Starvation in either the towns or countryside could soon turn into desperate violence and a challenge to either local or central government.

The rising population was also a factor in the price rise of the mid and late sixteenth century. Although there is still much debate about the precise causes, what is clear is the impact that it had. The inability of the agricultural sector to keep pace with population growth resulted in inflation, particularly in food prices, throughout the sixteenth century and on an unprecedented scale. However, as the chart below shows, this rise was even worse in the mid-Tudor period. This corresponds with the period of Henry VIII's and Edward VI's wars against both France and Scotland. In order to finance military activities the government debased the coinage by reducing the amount of silver content. This simply put more money into circulation and that inevitably had an impact on prices as the amount of food available did not rise.

The chart shows that prices had more than doubled over the first half of the sixteenth century, and the situation was even worse for grain prices. This had important consequences as bread was the staple diet of the masses, and the peasantry found themselves frequently in a state of poverty. As all the available evidence also suggests that the rise in wages was even slower, it resulted in a considerable fall in living standards.

The fall in the standard of living resulted in a rise in the number of poor. Estimates have suggested that about half the population were unable to support themselves. The dissolution of the monasteries and enclosure had already increased the number of poor people. However, the size of the problem increased at times of harvest failure and during depressions in the cloth trade, both of which were serious

Prices for the Years 1500–1550
(The figures are based on an index, where 1508=100)

Year	Index	Year	Index
1500	94	1540	158
1508	100	1545	191
1520	137	1546	248
1530	169	1549	214

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issues in mid-Tudor England. Poverty was a particular cause of concern in towns because of the size of the problem and the concentration of large numbers of vagrants who were perceived to be a threat to law and order. It was a serious issue because many of the poor turned to crime, whilst others became beggars. This latter group often included former soldiers and sailors who were often armed. Without a police force, the government was often left to take draconian measures to try to ensure that these vagabonds did not become involved in insurrection. This culminated during Edward VI's reign in the notorious 1547 Act, which condemned vagrants to slavery for two years for a first offence and life for any subsequent misdemeanour. The passage of such a savage act is clear evidence of the government's concern at a growing problem. It was obvious that earlier legislation was not working and that given the scale of the economic problems in mid Tudor England a clear warning was necessary to discourage the peasantry and prevent the likelihood of riots.

3 The Religious Context

KEY ISSUE How far had the religious changes of Henry VIII undermined society?

The religious changes of Henry's reign had left a confused situation. Many of the old catholic practices still remained. The sacraments were untouched, clerical marriage was forbidden and the old mass was still common practice. However, the monastic orders had gone, the royal supremacy had removed papal authority, and the vernacular Bible and services in English gave many access to the word of God. More importantly the changes had undermined church authority. The sacrificial role of the parish priest had been reduced with the destruction of rood screens lessening their elevated status, whilst the growth in the belief in justification by faith challenged their role as the link between man and God. At the same time the peasantry were being taught that charity and good works did not shorten their time in purgatory. Moreover, the dissolution of the monasteries implied that purgatory might not even exist. Traditional religious practices that still satisfied the majority of the population had been undermined.

More importantly for the government the religious changes had dismantled one element of traditional authority. The church had traditionally helped to underpin the hierarchical nature of society, but the attack on the role of priests, monks and nuns had left a void in local society and removed one of the ties that bound society together. With the decline in the sacerdotal and sacramental role of the priest he lost much respect and could no longer be relied upon to impose order from the pulpit. As a result one of the long-standing props of

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Yorkists. If this was the case it shows that the Tudor succession was still not accepted by everyone. The rebels also called for Richard Crispin and John Moreman to be released so that they could preach again in the west. Although they appear to be demanding the return of two clerics, whose religious views coincided with their own, there was also a political significance to this request. Moreman had opposed Henry's divorce from Catherine and Crispin had served as Chaplain to Courtenay. Therefore it could be argued that the rising raised again the spectre of the White Rose of the Yorkists, as great a worry for Somerset as it had been for Henry.

Despite the economic and social grievances of the time it is surprising that the demands do not reflect these concerns. Although there is evidence that the rebels condemned the new sheep tax, which if applied would hit them hard, it does not appear in their final list of grievances. However, the action of the rebels does suggest that social tensions were an important factor in the rising.

c) The actions of the rebels

The first major challenge to the primacy of religion as a cause of the rising came in 1900 from A.F. Pollard, who suggested that social issues were at the core of the rising. Throughout the rebellion the behaviour of the rebels appears to make it clear that the gentry were their enemies. The Cornish rebels had started by attacking and robbing the gentry at St. Michael's Mount and at Bodmin they had shouted 'Kill the Gentlemen'. Meanwhile, in Devon the rebels had killed William Hellyons, the only member of the gentry class who was brave enough to resist them. They attacked Trematon Castle, plundered it and put its owner in gaol.

However, it was not just the rebels who carried out acts of class warfare. Government forces set fire to part of the rebels' defences at Crediton, causing one historian to note that 'the charred barns and houses stood as grim reminders of the widening cleavage between the landowning gentry and the masses of working men and women'.⁴

This interpretation is also supported by the actions of the city government during the siege of Exeter. Following the failure of negotiations the rebels were able to create a food shortage within the city and to cut its water supply. These actions added to the tensions and there was near rioting within the city. The mayor and other officials feared that the poor would hand over the city to the rebels. In order to try to prevent this some of the more wealthy citizens organised a continual guard, provided poor relief, sold firewood cheaply and distributed food at either a low cost or free to the poorer elements within the city. This was a success and the mayor was able to unite the town. However, their view of the rebels outside the walls as 'refuse, scum, and the rascals of the whole county' is further evidence of the divide that was apparent in local society.

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A closer examination of the rebel demands may also support this view. Both articles 13 and 14 hint at tensions within west-country society. The rebels wanted to limit the number of servants that the gentry could employ and they also called for the restoration of some monastic lands. This would have hit the gentry as they were the very group who had gained from the dissolution and had bought up former monastic estates. In fact, it is possible to suggest that there is a link between the rebels' religious grievances and their attack upon the gentry: it was after all the gentry who had gained from the Reformation. They had also been responsible for the implementation of the unpopular religious policy. Therefore, the rebellion gave the peasantry an opportunity to attack both causes of their dissatisfaction: the religious policy of Somerset and the failings of the gentry.

Contemporary commentators agreed that social issues played an important role in the rising. Even the leader of the royal army sent against the rebels drew attention to the exploitation of the commons by the nobility who raised rents excessively. In the past the nobility had cared for their tenants, particularly in times of crises. But the concept of 'good lordship', where the commons received fair rents, employment, protection and generosity from their superiors, had disappeared. This concept may always have been a myth, but what is clear is that, while it had once existed in the minds of many of the peasantry, it had gone by the mid-sixteenth century. As a consequence, they were subject to ever increasing burdens. Therefore, when trouble broke out the gentry, the traditional keepers of law and order, were not only unable to keep the peace but were the targets of the rising.

6 Ket's Rebellion

KEY ISSUES Was Ket's rebellion just an anti-enclosure riot, or was it the result of class conflict?

a) The events

The major disturbance in East Anglia took its name from its leader Robert Ket. The rising had started as an attack on enclosure with riots at the Norfolk towns of Attleborough and Wymondham. In particular the rioters were angry with a local lawyer, Sir John Flowerdew, who had been putting up fences and had bought the local abbey church which he was now pulling down. Flowerdew was also involved in a land dispute with Ket and tried to turn the rioters against him. However, Ket was able to seize the initiative, assume leadership and turn the rebels against Flowerdew's land. Ket had soon gathered a force of some 16,000 men and they proceeded towards Norwich, setting up camp at Mousehold Heath on the outskirts. The local

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for the lower orders. Secondly, the lower orders perceived that in the Protector they had a champion and that with others, such as Bishop Latimer, preaching against the greed of landowners, they might at last have support among the government. Therefore, when the government failed in their actions, many of the commons may have been encouraged to take the law into their own hands and pull down the enclosures themselves. It is therefore hardly surprising that many of the riots and rebellions of 1549 had enclosure as a cause.

5 The Western Rebellion

KEY ISSUE Was the Western Rebellion caused by the religious changes or was the rising the result of social conflict?

a) The events

The Western Rebellion is also known as the Prayer Book rising and an examination of events before it occurred suggests that this is an accurate description. There had already been discontent in Cornwall in 1547 when William Body, a local archdeacon and known protestant sympathiser, had been attacked. In 1548 he had returned to the area in order to supervise the destruction of images and was murdered. Finally, in 1549, many of the peasants in Cornwall had risen against the imposition of the Act of Uniformity and set up camp at Bodmin.

However, the rising in Cornwall was only the prelude to a much larger event in Devon. The rising started at Sampford Courtenay on Whit Monday when the locals objected to the use of the new Prayer Book and insisted that the priest say Mass according to the old style. By June 20 the rebels from Devon and Cornwall had joined forces at Crediton, where they were offered a pardon if they would disperse. However, this offer was rejected and the rebels proceeded to set up camp at Clyst St. Mary, near Exeter. When negotiations again failed the rebel army of some 6,000 began to besiege Exeter. Meanwhile Lord Russell had been sent to put the rising down. He had been delayed because he had to deal with other outbreaks of unrest in Oxfordshire, but once he did arrive the rebels forces were destroyed and some 4,000 killed.

b) The demands of the rebels

The rebels' demands were drawn up by the clergy. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that they illustrate a strong sense of religious conservatism.

They complained about the religious changes that they thought were taking place in baptism and confirmation. The rebels also wanted the restoration of many of the old religious practices, hence

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Item we will have the Laws of our Sovereign Lord King Henry VIII concerning the Six Articles, to be in use again, as they were during his reign.

Item we will have the mass in Latin, as it was before, and celebrated by the priest without any man or woman communicating with him ...

Item we will have holy bread and holy water every Sunday, palms and ashes at the accustomed times, Images set up again in every church ...

Item we will not receive the new service because it is like a Christmas game, but we will have our old service of Matins, mass, Evensong and procession in Latin not in English ...

Item we will have every preacher in his sermon, and every priest at mass, pray individually for the souls in purgatory, as our forefathers did ...

12. Item we think it is right that because Lord Cardinal Pole is of the king's blood, he should not only have a free pardon, but also be sent for from Rome, and be promoted to be first or second in the king's council ...

Item we will that half the abbey and chantry lands, in every man's possession, however he came by them, be given again to two places, where two of the chief abbeyes used to be ...

article two's call for the restoration of the Six Articles. This would undermine all the work of the Edwardian reformation (outlined on pages 50–1). There was a strong desire for much of the ceremony and ritual of catholicism – hence the rebels' desire to have the mass in Latin, even though they did not understand it, and the restoration of images. They also wanted the return of many old traditions, such as holy bread and water. There was also a wish to see traditional doctrine brought back as they asserted a belief in both transubstantiation and purgatory. Most clearly of all the demands was an attack on protestantism. The rebels attacked communion in both kinds and the new Prayer Book, which was seen as symbolic of the new religion.

However, although religious grievances dominated the demands there are indications of other complaints. Article 12 demands the return of Pole. But, what is interesting is that the request is for him to return, not as a Cardinal, but as a member of the king's council. The rebels probably hoped to be able to use him as their political leader. Perhaps the rebels believed that if they could get a religious conservative on to the council then their grievances would be listened to, or that he could reverse the changes that Somerset had introduced. Pole also had Yorkist connections and it is possible that, by demanding a political role for him, they were hoping to see the crown revert to the

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the state had been called into question. The religious innovations had also caused changes in people's perspective and in communal activities. Accessibility to the Bible had made new ideas available to the masses and further challenged fundamental acceptance about the role of the individual within society.

4 Short-term Problems: The Reign of Edward VI

KEY ISSUE How were the problems of the early years of Edward's reign responsible for the unrest of 1549?

a) The Minority

The last years of Henry's reign had witnessed an intense faction struggle as it became obvious that the king would die before his son was of age. At stake was control of the government. The struggle was between the Seymour faction, led by the Earl of Hertford (later the Duke of Somerset), and the Norfolk faction. By the end of Henry's reign Hertford had been able to secure power as Protector and was in a position to reward his supporters. However, there was no guarantee that the Protectorship would be accepted. There were fears of conflict and the clergy had to be ordered to preach obedience from the pulpit. Somerset's difficulties were added to as he lacked the trappings of royal authority. He could not fall back on the claim that he was God's anointed, whilst unpopularity in his policies could easily lead to his position being challenged.

This factional struggle had an increased intensity as it was mirrored by a religious divide in the royal council. Whoever controlled the boy king would be able to determine the religious direction of the country. Moreover, as religious loyalty and the succession became intertwined, the hope for political stability became even less. Although it was not inevitable that a minority would create problems, regencies had ruined the rule of earlier monarchs. The reigns of Henry III and Henry VI had led to conflict among councillors, whilst Richard II had been deposed and Edward V murdered.

b) Religion

The religious position at the end of Henry's reign was confused. However, the triumph of the Seymour faction appeared to ensure a protestant victory. Edward was brought up by protestant tutors and was himself a firm supporter of the reformed religion. Thomas Cranmer had survived all the conservative attacks against him and was now in a position to implement change. By the start of 1549 it was apparent that England had made at least a cautious move towards protestantism. This was evident with the smashing of images, destruc-

tion of wall paintings and the breaking of stained glass windows. Proclamations had to be issued in London to restrain the crowds and prevent the iconoclasm turning into open riot. However, this was just the start; these attacks were followed by the dissolution of chantries, where masses had been sung for the souls of the dead. This appeared to complete the process begun by Henry with his attack on monasteries. Not only had the visual appearance of churches changed, but also the doctrinal position moved closer to protestantism. The Prayer Book of 1549 and Act of Uniformity appeared to confirm this as they denied the real presence and affirmed that the communion service was only commemorative. The ambiguity that was present with the retention of altars and traditional vestments did not do enough to satisfy many conservatives, whilst it did not go far enough for the radicals.

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Despite a growing belief on the continent that the people should accept the religion of the ruler, this was undermined in England by Edward's youth. The attacks on the church under both Henry and Edward had done much to undermine its credibility and confidence in the official doctrine was missing. Most of the country was still conservative in its religious outlook and it is hardly surprising that these changes were, at least in part, the cause of unrest or that complaints about the religious direction figured prominently among the grievances of the Western rebels in 1549.

c) Social Problems

There were already many long-term social and economic issues facing the new government. However, their attitude and policies often served to make matters worse. In order to try to improve his own position Protector Somerset continued the war with Scotland, hoping for the success that would secure his position. This never came, but it did ensure that the policy of debasement was continued and that inflation rose even faster. This determination to continue the Scottish war may also explain Somerset's decision to tackle the issue of enclosure.³ Many contemporaries believed that the greed of landowners, who were enclosing land and thereby depriving the peasantry of work and reducing the amount of food grown, was the primary cause of inflation. In this atmosphere it was vital that something be done if the government was to avoid trouble. Therefore, in both 1548 and 1549, commissioners were appointed to investigate enclosure. This was seen as even more important when the harvest of 1548 was poor. However, these commissions achieved nothing practical as landowners objected to the interference and blocked attempts in parliament to limit enclosure. Somerset then issued a proclamation to force landowners to reverse their enclosure. This had two effects. Firstly, landowners and other nobles, upon whom Somerset relied for support, were not pleased with him, believing that he was showing too much sympathy

56 authorities were unable to disperse the force and it was left to the royal herald to offer the rebels a pardon to disperse. Unfortunately for the authorities, this had the opposite effect and the rebels seized Norwich. With the second city of England in rebel hands the government was forced to act and so sent the Marquis of Northampton with 14,000 troops against the rebels. Northampton was able to take the city, but was forced to abandon it the next day. The government now sent Dudley, Earl of Warwick, against the rebels. He brought the rebels to battle at Dussindale, just outside Norwich, where over 3,000 rebels were killed. Ket was captured and hanged for sedition.

b) The Demands of the Rebels

The rebels drew up a list of 29 articles. These demands show that the causes of the rising were wide ranging and only one article refers specifically to enclosure.

Despite the wide variety of demands, there were a number of areas of life that received particular attention. Enclosure was just one among many agricultural demands made by the rebels, and many of these complaints concerned particular farming practices in certain

Articles of the Norfolk Rebels 1549

3. We pray your grace that no lord of the manor encloses the common land.

5. We pray that Reed ground and meadow ground are the same rent as they were in the first year of King Henry VII.

8. We pray that priests or vicars that are unable to preach and set forth the word of God to their parishioners may be removed from their benefice and the parishioners choose another ...

10. We pray that no man under the status of knight or esquire keep a dove-cotes, unless it was an ancient custom.

14. We pray that copyhold land that has an unreasonable rent is let at the same rent as it was in the first year of King Henry VII ...

16. We pray that all bond men may be made free for God made everyone free with his precious blood shedding.

19. We pray that the poor mariners or fisherman have all the profits of their fishing

28. We pray that those local officials who have offended the commons, and where it has been proved by the complaints of the poor commons, give 4d to these poor men for every day they have remained there.

29. We pray that no lord, knight, esquire, or gentlemen graze or feed any bullocks or sheep if he has an income of £40 per year from his lands, unless it is for the provision of his house.

57 areas of East Anglia. The first demand expressed concern about saffron, a valuable crop grown in the area around Saffron Walden. Meanwhile, demand 29 expressed anger about the gentry's manipulation of the foldcourse system used in Norfolk and North West Suffolk. According to this custom the gentry had the right to graze their sheep on the peasants' fallow and unsown land. The gentry had been extending the length of time in the year that they could use this right by lengthening the stubble period and allowing their sheep to wander over winter corn. The gentry had also been overstocking the common land, as is suggested in the third demand, particularly in the heavy soil areas of central East Anglia. It was in this region that enclosure was an issue and there is evidence of fences being thrown down. However, farming in East Anglia also included fishing as many peasants relied upon this to supplement their diets. The rebels wanted rivers to be open to all for fishing and in article 19 made demands about the coastal fishing industry.

Closely linked to the agricultural demands were those concerning the rents on land. The peasants were already under pressure from gentry encroachment on to common land and now they were also put under increasing financial pressure. In a period of rising prices landlords were looking to recoup their losses by increasing rents in a variety of ways. Articles 5 and 14 are just two of the demands that call for rents to be at the level they were under Henry VII when economic conditions were more favourable. These demands suggest that perhaps the harsh economic conditions of 1549 were a major cause of the unrest.

The rebels also had religious grievances, but unlike the Western Rebellion these demands were decidedly protestant. They supported the religious changes and often wanted them to go further. Article 8 is concerned about poor clerical standards and called for the removal of incompetent priests who were unable to preach. This article looked forward to Elizabeth's reign when ministers who taught and preached regularly were in demand. The rebels' actions at Mousehold Heath appear to support this as they brought in ministers who were able to preach and used the new Prayer Book. Later articles also expressed concern about non-resident clergy and the need for priests to teach children the basic Christian beliefs.

However, perhaps the greatest number of complaints concerned the social structure and local government in the region. The demands suggest that there had been a breakdown in trust between the governing class and those just below on the social ladder. We have already seen complaints against the nobility and gentry as landlords, but there were also grievances against them as officers of local government. In particular they criticised officers of the Court of Wards: the feodary and escheator. But when it is realised that Flowerdew was the escheator, such antagonism is easily understood. Perhaps the greatest rebuke to local government officers is shown in article 28

58 where the rebels demand that each officer who has offended them pay them 4d for every day they are assembled. The rebels also accepted the privileges of the gentry. This is shown in their concern about the right to keep doves and rabbits by those under a certain rank. However, if the gentry had certain privileges, they also had certain duties and were expected to preserve traditional social boundaries.

The demands appear to indicate a socially conservative peasantry. Even the deferential opening of each demand appears to support this view. However, despite their language it is important not to be misled by their conservatism. In their demands this is shown most clearly by article 16, where Ket appears to be showing concern for the poor. Although serfdom had largely disappeared from England it had been retained on some of the Howard's estates in Norfolk. With their demise in 1547 this was the ideal time to end the process and to establish a commonwealth of free men.

If Ket's demands were to be achieved, they required sweeping action from the government. However, the rebels also put forward suggestions as to how this could be achieved. In the past local government had been in the hands of the gentry, power would now be put in the hands of the people. Their actions set out to show that this would work.

c) The actions of the Rebels

Some historians have explained the events of 1549 in terms of class conflict. According to this interpretation the social and economic changes that were outlined in Section 2 had created antagonism between the governing classes and the lower orders. As the rich got richer, through the exploitation of rents and other feudal dues, so the poor got poorer. The lower orders reacted by establishing an alternative system, whereby they excluded the gentry and tried to re-establish an imaginary past where all knew their place. How far do the actions of the rebels support this interpretation?

The rebels' actions certainly showed that they wanted to establish an alternative system of local government. In establishing a series of camps at centres associated with local government, such as Norwich, Ipswich and Downham Market, they were making a clear statement that they did not want mob rule. From the camp at Mousehold Heath Ket issued commissions and writs, in the same form as the Crown purveyor, to some of the rebels to bring in food and drink from the local area. Once again this was designed to give the appearance of authority and show that, although they were perceived as the lower orders, they were able to behave without the leadership of the gentry.

The camps were used to administer justice, suggesting that not only did the rebels have a concern for law and order but that they were keen to show that they could maintain discipline, something

59 that the traditional rulers had failed to achieve. At Mousehold gentlemen were brought before Ket and were put on trial under the 'old oak' or 'the tree of Reformation'. However, the trials also show that there was social tension in society. This is made clear by the comments of a contemporary commentator:

- 1 those gentlemen they captured they brought to the tree of Reformation where they asked the people what they wanted to do with them: some cried hang them and some kill them. Some, who were unable to hear shouted like the rest and when asked why they did that, answered that
- 5 they copied their fellows. They also pushed their weapons into the gentlemen in order to kill some of those brought to them, and they did this with such malice that one Mr. Wharton, who was being guarded by a line of men on both sides all the way from the tree to the city, was pricked with their spears and other weapons on purpose to kill him ...
- 10 and moreover, the rest of the gentlemen they imprisoned were bound with chains and locks and they appointed (guards) to prevent them from escaping.

(Adapted from Nicholas Sotherton, *Commoysen in Norfolk, 1549*)

Although this account was written from the viewpoint of the gentry it does give some indication of the atmosphere within the camp. Stories of gentry mistreatment soon circulated. One who tried to negotiate with the rebels took food and drink with him, but was still attacked and only just escaped with his life. As a result others soon fled, leaving the area in the hands of the commons.

Social tensions were also evident within Norwich. The inequality of wealth within the city, where 6 per cent of the population owned 60 per cent of the goods, made it vulnerable to class struggle. The decline of the local cloth industry only exacerbated the social and economic problems and may explain why the rebels were able to take the city so easily. Once in the city the behaviour of the insurgents reinforces the interpretation that the rebels were eager to show that they were more than a mere rabble. Private property was initially respected, but on the other hand after some of the citizens had let in Northampton's army, the rebels set fire to much of the city. But it was the houses of the rich and those who fled that received most of the damage.

This lack of respect towards their superiors was also shown on other occasions. The first instance was when Ket's army attacked Norwich. As Sotherton reports:

- 1 They were so shameless and so desperate that the poor vagabond boys, trouserless and bare arsed, came among the thicket of the arrows and gathered them up. When some of the arrows stuck fast in their legs and other parts they most shamefully turned up their bare
- 5 bottoms against those who did the shooting.

Secondly, when the rebels captured one of Northampton's mercenaries, they hung him over the city walls stripped naked as a sign of

60 their contempt for his finery. Finally their treatment of the captured Lord Sheffield, who was brutally beaten to death, shows how some of the rebels showed their anger towards a hated ruling class.

An examination of the management of the rebellion shows that, on the whole, the lower orders conducted their affairs well. This interpretation is supported by MacCulloch who argues that 'the frightening lesson of 1549 was that those outside the magisterial class could get on very well without them [gentry] until confronted with brute force.'⁵

7 The Other Risings

KEY ISSUE In what ways were the lesser risings a threat to the government?

Disturbances in 1549 were widespread. As the chart below shows, unrest affected at least 25 counties from the south to the north of England. It resulted in the loss of life and the destruction of property. Although most of the rebellions were easily put down by the local gentry some did require the use of government troops. However, it is essential to have an understanding of the lesser risings so that those in East Anglia and the West can be seen in a national context.

Month	Areas
March	Lincolnshire
May	Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Kent, Sussex, Essex, Staffordshire
June	Devon, Cornwall (Western Rising)
July	Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Warwickshire, Suffolk, Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk (Ket's)
August	Leicestershire, Rutland.

Many of these disorders were the result of the long-term economic and religious developments outlined earlier. Although we have to be careful about being simplistic in our interpretation of the risings, it is clear that two causes stand out. The first was enclosure. Opposition to this was certainly evident in Lincolnshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Kent. Although the advantage of hindsight allows us to see that many of the disturbances were stopped before they had started or were no more than local protests, at the time they appeared to constitute a major challenge to the government. More importantly we must also remember that under slightly different circumstances they could have developed into major rebellions that rivalled those in East Anglia and the West. If the rebels had been able to find leaders of the calibre of Ket and co-ordinated their actions, the government would have faced a major crisis.

61 The second cause of the trouble appears to have been religion. This appears to be the case in at least Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Yorkshire. Contemporaries blamed these risings on Catholics who were opposed to the religious innovations. Although we have to be careful about accepting these views at face value, there is certainly evidence that local clergy were hard at work encouraging the risings. In many instances the clergy even assumed the leadership. But single cause explanations are unlikely to reveal the whole truth and many of the rebellions were a combination of economic and religious grievances.

8 The Defeat of Rebellion

KEY ISSUE Why were the Western Rebellion and Ket's rising able to develop into serious challenges?

Although 1549 witnessed a large number of risings only the Western and Ket's required the government to commit large military forces to defeat them. Why was it that these risings developed into large scale challenges? Most risings were usually dealt with at a local level by the resident nobility or gentry, yet in both instances these groups were either absent or unable to act in face of the massive demonstrations. This gave the rebels the chance to increase their numbers and present an even greater challenge. As soon as they were able to either seize or besiege a major city the government had to take the threat seriously.

However, the government was not always aware of the seriousness of the situation. This was particularly true of the Western Rebellion. It was some time before the government knew that the rising had spread from Sampford Courtenay and had joined with the Cornish rebellion. At the same time the government were faced with many other uprisings that required action and also with the threat of an invasion from France. All of this gave the Western Rebellion and Ket's the chance to develop.

Given the other problems faced by Somerset, it is hardly surprising that the government had tried the traditional methods of appealing to the rebels to disperse and offering a pardon. Both of these had the advantage of not costing the government money or requiring the use of troops that Somerset needed for his campaigns in Scotland and to counter the possible invasion. Even after deciding that force was needed commanders found that they were diverted to deal with other troubles. This meant that it was a considerable time from the start of the risings to the arrival of a sufficiently large force to defeat the rebels.

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9 The Significance of the Risings

KEY ISSUE How close was the monarchy to collapse in 1549?

The large number of risings suggests that there was a crisis in mid-Tudor England. The situation appears even more difficult when it is remembered that the government was weak: this was not the powerful regime of Henry VIII, but a newly established minority government which might not be able to count upon the support of the political nation. The policies they followed did not always have support and some questioned the legality of the religious changes they were implementing. The large number of risings stretched the government's resources to the limits and foreign wars and threats of invasion only added to their difficulties. Two of the risings had to be put down using full-scale military force. However, historians still disagree about the significance of the risings as these two extracts show:

- 1 The 1549 revolts were the closest thing Tudor England saw to a class war. No single cause was responsible: agrarian, fiscal, religious and social grievances fused. It was a hot summer and the crops failed; prices rose and the Protector compounded the problem by fixing maximum prices at terrifyingly high metropolitan levels.

Somerset mishandled the revolts. He vacillated in the spring of 1549 not wishing to disrupt his Scottish campaign. He relied on pardons and proclamations and was criticised for ignoring the Council's advice. In July he ordered military reprisals without scruple and cancelled his Scottish project, but the charge of procrastination levelled against him turned into an accusation of unwarranted leniency, even sympathy with the rebels.⁶

This view of Somerset's handling of the disturbances is in direct contrast to that of Michael Bush in his study of Somerset:

- 1 In quelling disorder, the government's policy towards the rebellions of 1549 was eminently successful. Most of the risings were dispersed as the government intended, with minimal effort and expense. This was true of both the spring risings and the summer ones. Plenty of evidence continued to justify the government's initial policy of delaying direct military action, and the year demonstrated that the traditional offer of a royal pardon and promises of remedy was the most effective way to subdue peasant rebels. Furthermore, in the exceptional circumstances where the government applied the sword, it easily accomplished its objective without heavy losses of capital and men.

5 While sympathetic towards certain of the grievances which the rebels professed, his [Somerset's] attitude towards rebellion was one of conventional antipathy. His policy towards rebellion stemmed not from radical sentiments but from his urgent need to wage war, as well as to demonstrate the efficacy of redressing social ills as a means of quelling disorder. When conciliation failed, he proceeded to use force.⁷

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In order to reach a conclusion about the threat the risings presented it is necessary to ask – what were the aims of the rebels, did they seek to overthrow the regime, or were they trying to restore what they perceived to be the natural order and punish those who had overturned it? Whatever the answer, there were members of the ruling class who were not prepared to wait and find out. They acted quickly, removed Somerset and followed a policy of repression.

References

- 1 John Guy, *Tudor England*, p. 208.
- 2 E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (2nd Edition, CUP, 1989), pp. 531–2, 568.
- 3 M.L. Bush, *The Government Policy of Protector Somerset* (Edward Arnold, 1975), p. 58.
- 4 Barrett L. Beer, *Rebellion and Riot: Popular Disorder in England during the Reign of Edward VI* (Kent State University Press, 1982) p. 55.
- 5 D. MacCulloch, *Ket's Rebellion in Context* (Past and Present 84, 1979), pp. 58–9, also reprinted in P. Slack (ed.) *Rebellion, Popular Protest and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (CUP, 1984).
- 6 John Guy, *Tudor England*, pp. 208–210.
- 7 M.L. Bush, *The Government Policy of Protector Somerset* (Edward Arnold, 1975) p. 97.

Summary Diagram

The 1549 Rebellions: A Comparison

WESTERN REBELLION		KET'S REBELLION
Conservative	← RELIGION →	Evangelical
Sheep Tax	← ECONOMIC →	Rents
Servants	← SOCIAL →	Society of Orders
Crispin & Moreman	← LOCAL GRIEVANCES →	Farming and Local Government
Treatment of Gentry	← CLASS CONFLICT →	Treatment of Gentry
Pole	← GOVERNMENT →	Local Officials
Attack gentry	← FORCE →	Burn Norwich
Exeter	← REGIONAL CAPITAL →	Norwich

Source-based questions on Chapter 4

There is one other type of source-based question that you are likely to encounter, that is the comparison between two documents.

1. The Western Rebellion

Read Articles 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9 of the Western Rebels' demands on page 53 and Article 8 of the Norfolk rebels on page 56.

- a) Compare the view of the Western Rebels and Ket's rebels towards the role of the clergy. (20 marks)

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When tackling this question it is again important that you do as the question requires and compare the documents. That does not mean that you write one paragraph on one source and another on the other source: if you do that you will be fortunate to score half marks. Instead you need to look for points of similarity and difference; these may be in their attitude to a particular issue or in why they were written. In this example, both sources want the clergy to preach, but Ket's rebels place a much greater emphasis on this ability and want those who are unable to fulfil this requirement to be removed. You should also draw attention to the fact that Ket's rebellion was more forward looking in its religious demands, suggesting that parishioners should be able to choose their own priests, whilst the Western rebels took a more conservative view of the role of the priest. You would need to explain this and show how they wanted a return to the sacred nature of the priesthood.

2. Sotherton's views

Read the two descriptions by Nicholas Sotherton of the behaviour of the rebels on page 59.

- Explain the reference on page 59 to 'the tree of Reformation'. (10 marks)
- How reliable is Sotherton's account of the behaviour of the rebels? (20 marks)
- 'Ket's rebellion was no more than a protest or demonstration.' How far do the sources and your own knowledge support this view? (60 marks)

Sometimes the examination boards also require you to contrast the views of historians. This can be tackled in the same way as the comparison of two sources.

3. Historians' views

Read the descriptions of the 1549 risings by John Guy and Michael Bush on pages 62-3.

Compare the two views of Somerset's handling of the risings. (20 marks)

5 Mary Tudor and the Struggle for the Throne

POINTS TO CONSIDER

This chapter focuses on the two major challenges to Mary's right to the throne. As you read the chapter you will need to consider the role religion played in both attempts to alter the succession. You will need to ask why Mary was able to establish herself on the throne and maintain her position in the face of two serious challenges. Throughout your reading you should be looking to build up a list of reasons for the failure of the rebellions, whilst deciding which presented the greatest threat.

KEY DATES

1553	May	Guildford Dudley, Northumberland's son, marries Lady Jane Grey
	June	The Devises for the Succession alters the Succession
	July 6	Death of Edward VI, Lady Jane Grey proclaimed Queen, Mary Tudor proclaims herself Queen
	July 6-19	Reign of Lady Jane Grey
	July 14	Duke of Northumberland reaches East Anglia to arrest Mary
	July 19	Mary Tudor officially proclaimed Queen
	Aug	Duke of Northumberland executed
	Oct-Nov	Parliament repeals many Edwardian religious laws
	Dec	Marriage Treaty between Mary and Philip presented to Council
1554	Jan	Marriage Treaty ratified
	-	Wyatt's Rebellion
	Jan 25	Wyatt raises his standard at Maidstone
	Feb	Wyatt enters London
	Feb 9	Elizabeth arrested for supposed involvement in Wyatt's rebellion
	Feb	Execution of Lady Jane Grey
	July	Marriage of Mary and Philip
	Nov	Pole arrives in England as Papal Legate
	Dec	Heresy Laws reintroduced
1555	Jan	Restoration of Papal Supremacy
	Feb	Heresy persecutions start
		Poor harvest
1556		Poor harvest
1557		Stafford Conspiracy
1558		Loss of Calais
		Death of Mary