

To what extent should somerset be blamed for the outbreak and the mishandling of ...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

There were two rebellions in 1549 the first was The Western Rebellion. The reason for this rebellion was mainly down to Religious Policy's, which were directed by Cranmer more than Somerset. The Rebels opposed to the new prayer book, this was in English, and therefore another grievance was that the Cornish could not understand it, parishioners refused this new book of Common Prayer. The rebels called for a return of the six articles, as they were more Catholic than Protestant and disliked the 1st act of Uniformity.

The Dissolution of Monasteries was greatly hated as it proved lots of charity for the commons, also the commons wanted to say prayers for the dead, this was not possible now due to the sale of chantries, these lands were then sold to the Gentry, the commons detested this as they believed it should have been common land. The main form of employment was the tin trade, during this period it was paid very poorly.

Other economic problems such as 'engrossing farms' hit smaller yeoman farmers (land owners) very hard as they could not compete against the larger farms. During the period Somerset put taxes on Cloth and Sheep, this was a popular trade in the south west and this policy was despised. In 1548 and 49 there were bad harvest's this resulted in high price inflation and people starving. When tensions finally flared the local JP's were incapable of contain the initial uprising.

This resulted in the Rebellion growing larger and as time past the Rebels must have thought that Somerset was being sympathetic towards them (Source B, implies that Lord Russell is urging Somerset to take strong action and enforce the full authority of the law upon the rebels, this therefore

suggests Somerset is ignoring advice and is then responsible), though 11 weeks later Royal troops destroyed the rebellion, there is evidence in source B that Somerset was informed that a rebellion was imminent, as Lord Russell is inform him of the discontent of the commons.

The blame for this rebellion must be taken by the Government, though I do not believe that Somerset should take all of the responsibility. The mainly cause of the rebellion seems to be religious policies, this would have been promoted by Somerset but it would have been mainly down to Cranmers doing. Source A infers that the South Western Rebellion was caused by religious changes, the final manifesto comments on the Act of Six Articles should be brought back and that the Cornish should not have to use the English language.

Also that the images should be placed back in Churches and the Old Catholic ceremony be used. The article does not seem to refer to Somerset at all, therefore implying he was not responsible for the uprising. It can be argued that the source was aimed at Cranmer, as he was the main motivator of reformist religious policies. Another cause is the power vacuum in Cornwall due to Henry VIII's legacy, in 1538 Marquis of Exeter Henry Courteney was executed because of his relationship to Reginal Pole (who was in exile) and of his Plantagenet blood.

This led to the appointment of Lord Russell, who was absent, therefore meaning there was no resident Lord to enforce law and order. The local landowners were asked to crush the rebellion from London, but there did not listen as the Landowners need the peasants to work for them, therefore

<https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-should-somerset-be-blamed-for-the-outbreak-and-the-mishandling-of-the-rebellion-of-1549-essay-sample/>

generating food and cash. This then causes delay, the responsibility for not putting down the rebellion is therefore down to the land owners who should have responded to the plea from the government.

Somerset has to be seen to have mishandled the situation as it took him so long to raise an army, it suggests that Somerset was not sure what to do, hesitant and therefore not a strong leader. The second rebellion was Kett's Rebellion, the Rebels were protesting against engrossed farms (two or more farms being forcibly joined together, often resulted in surplus farm buildings become derelict). Illegal enclosure, high prices, rack-renting (rents increasing to high), low wages and landowners who denied tenants their customary rights.

These problems are down to local authority, and since the leading Nobles, the Howard Family and been removed, there was a power vacuum. Again there was the failure of JPs and local Gentry (Local Gentry - too bothered with their own affairs and also lacked the ability.) to address the rebels complaints. The Duke of Somerset was reluctant to act either harshly or speedily, but other councillors felt force was essential and supported the Earl of Warwick and an army to crush the rebellions.

This rebellion was in East Anglia, an area which had a large Protestant population, the Protestants wanted fairness for the commons as it was very apparent that they were being suppressed. Though Somerset needed to be firm in his approach, Kett's rebellion/appeal was not against the King's councillors but against the local officials, this implies that the people

responsible for the rebellion are the local gentry, but as they did nothing, the responsibility falls upon Somerset.

Source C displays the grievances of the Rebels, issues spread from rents (set by local gentry), and religion. The source suggests that Somerset is sympathetic, as the rebels are appealing to him; therefore the commons believe he has the solution. Somerset seems to delay and not listen to the grievances; this implies he is mishandling the situation. It is obvious again that Somerset was not total sure how to react and deal with the rebels and therefore Somerset was seen as weak in his approach.

When discussing if Somerset was responsible for the rebellions, it must be considered that "was he the cause for the rebellion", Ketts rebellion is defiantly based on the economic problems (Source C, implies that Enclosure was a main cause for the Rebellion as it is the first point on the list of grievances), commons jealousy towards/against the rising wealth and power of the gentry and that the gentry was suppressing them with inflation/high rents (point 2 on the list of grievances comments on which were placed by the "lord of the manour" and suggest that the Lords were abusing their rights and powers) / and no rise in wages.

Source C's position is based on protestant ideas, this is implied by point 4, "that priests from henceforth shall purchase no lands." And the "lands that they have in possession may be letten to temporall men.". Somerset is largely responsible for the economic problems which inflamed the commons in to rebellions. Somerset was seen as sympathetic and a humanitarian but did nothing to stop price inflation, or prevent the Nobles and Gentry from

lowering wages. Somerset continued to debase the coinage, this therefore weakened currency and discouraged trade.

However many economic problems were down to Somerset inheriting debts and a severe lack of Crown revenue. This lack of revenue and reduced trade meant that with poor harvests and the recovering/increasing population there were limited food supplies. Somerset was criticised by William Paget, for being too sympathetic, Paget states Lord Protector was "soft" and being too "good to the poor (poor)" this implies that Somerset's attitude towards the situation was too soft and not approved of by his colleagues.

Therefore it can be believed the Somerset's approach makes him responsible. Historians once claimed that Somerset sympathised with the poor and oppressed (Good Duke). This was because he shared views with members of the commonwealth movement. He believed that governments had a Christian duty to help the common people. Revisionist Historians have questioned Somerset's genuine concern for the poor, suggesting that he was more interested in preventing internal disorder while at war with Scotland.

Economic hardship caused popular rioting (J. GUY) and poverty made the peasantry unfit for effective military service. Somerset's policy towards Vagrants can be used as evidence for his responsibility for the rebellions, The Vagrancy Act ordered able bodied people to find work or be put into slavery. This was enforced by local authorities, it's not known how but it seems to be widely disliked. John Guy in Source E, seems to suggest that Somerset was a 'bad duke' and that he is responsible for the rebellions and that Somerset mishandled the situation.

Guy states that " [the] protector compounded the problem by fixing maximum prices at terrifying high metropolitan levels", Somerset did this so that prices did not increase any more, this would avoid the possibility of richer people buying all the food, and selling it at a profit. Guy seems to stress that with the bad harvests of 1548, this fixing of prices and other problems caused the rebellions, therefore it can be claimed that this due to Somerset's inconsiderate nature making him responsible.

It is implied in source E that " Somerset mishandled the revolts", the first reason is that he did not wish to remove English troops from Scotland, the second is that Somerset ignored the Councils advice and that he relied on pardons and proclamations. This implies that the decisions and actions taken by Somerset are able to be blamed on him personally. Somerset's Religious policies were largely unpopular, but these policies only seem to apply to the South Western Rebellion as it was lead by Religious Men.

The government moved cautiously, this would have caused a sense of ambiguity and people (mainly commons) would not understand what it meant. Somerset's government repealed the Act of Six Articles and the Treason Act this increased increasing Debate and the promotion of more radical ideas. In the countryside there were many people who did not want change, they wanted to stay Catholic. The First Act of Uniformity 1549, laid down punishments for anyone who refused to use the new prayer book (published by Cranmer containing English prayers plus tradition catholic rituals) or failed to attend services at least once a year.

The laity faced fines and the loss of possessions, the Clergy faced the loss of earnings, dismissal and imprisonment. This was the main cause for religious leaders to spur the peasants up into rebellion. Therefore this all suggests that Somerset's actions, via proclamations and acts of parliament for religious policies imply that he is responsible for Somerset removed the Chantries, by The Chantry Act, this abolished Masses for the Dead and the government seized Land, cash and goods donated to chantry priests. This service was very popular with commoners and also the rebels loathed how Church lands were purchased by the Gentry and Nobles.

I argue and so does M. L. Bush (Source F) that the policy which his government had formulated had been the work of the council, and the ideas behind it, in contrast to some of his methods of application, had received support in government circles; so much so that they continued to be held after his fall. Yet Somerset had on occasions gone against councillors advice; justifying his behaviour on the grounds that as Lord Protector he was entitled to do so. The Somerset believed the government was under obligation to protect the commons against abuse, this idea was influenced by the commonwealth movement.

One typical response was to dismiss these complaints as lacking in authenticity, as often it was the work of trouble-makers leading the commons astray with lies. Another was to admit that the commons had a point. In the case of Somerset's government the former response was used against the Prayer Book Uprising (South Western): as a dedicated Protestant, Somerset had no difficulty in blaming the rising on papists and in remaining unmoved by the religious complaints submitted. This, however, was not <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-should-somerset-be-blamed-for-the-outbreak-and-the-mishandling-of-the-rebellion-of-1549-essay-sample/>

possible with the agrarian revolts simply because he was convinced that their complaints were genuine.

His apparent populism, then, was shaped not by radical design but by traditional devices and current concerns. The expectations of the commons and the fears of the lords that they aroused came from the indiscreet way in which he proceeded. Neither was justified. Driving him on was no novel design but differences he had encountered in 1548 and 1549, in government circles and the county establishments, over how to apply agrarian reform. Bush in Source F, argues that Somerset was “eminently successful” with dealing with the rebellions in 1549. He suggests that the rebellions were dealt with effectively, with minimal effort and expense.

M. L. Bush implies that Somerset was wise and a ‘good duke’ as he tried to conciliate with the rebels first and then as a final resort using force. In conclusion it seems that Somerset is to blame for mishandling the situation in 1549, but it seems that Somerset can not be totally blamed for the rebellions. Somerset’s responsibility has been widely exaggerated by historians like John Guy (source E) but in fact his role is far lesser than had been believed. The main responsibility falls upon the New Religion and The Gentry’s lack of ability to suppress the rebellions before it required the Government and Kings (and Lord Protector’s) intervention.

All the sources apart from D imply that Somerset was not responsible of 1549, as pointed out by Guy (source E) there were too many other problems, “agrarian, fiscal, religious and social grievances fused” causing the rebellion. The over view of the sources and my personal belief is that

<https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-should-somerset-be-blamed-for-the-outbreak-and-the-mishandling-of-the-rebellion-of-1549-essay-sample/>

Somerset is to blame for mishandling the rebellions of 1549, as is implied by Guy (Source E) that Somerset was too bothered waging war in Scotland and by Paget (Source D) criticises Somerset motives and procedures.