The Mid- Tudor Crisis

The Tudor Background:

War of the Roses:
- Between Richard III and Henry VII
- Henry VII has troops from France. Lord of Stanley (a good general), started to lose trust in Richard III and defected to be on the side of Henry
- Married Henry VII to Elizabeth of York in order to join the House of Lancaster and House of Tudor thus eliminating Lancastrian

Henry VII:
- Very French influenced
- Henry VII’s policy was both to maintain peace and to create economic prosperity
- restored the fortunes of an effectively bankrupt exchequer by introducing ruthlessly efficient mechanisms of taxation
- ensured that nobles paid more taxes
- taxing the nobles made sure that the nobles never gained enough power to overthrow him
- Rebuilt relations with France and Spain as Henry VII had no interest in gaining French territory. Established foreign relations in order to protect British land
- Set up trade relations with the Netherlands (wool), France which in turn improved foreign relations and the economy
- Concentrated on creating a strong Dynasty

Henry VIII:
- The government in his final years had been marked by factional rivalry whose objectives was control of the young Prince Edward with motives that the knowledge of control of Edward would be key in political power after Henry’s death
- Henry’s will laid down that a council of 16 members should rule after his death until Edward VI was of age to rule
- The English political system, laid out by Henry VIII made it so that ultimate authority lay with the Crown.
- However, there were a large amount of limitations in the exercise of royal power:
  - The importance of law and the supremacy of the parliamentary statute over other forms of the law
  - The lack of a paid civil service to admin the country
  - The lack of paid officials on enforce the law
- Reliance in the localities on unpaid volunteers
- Limitations of the Crown finances

- These limitations, along with religious disunity characterised the period and also this led to the fraught relationship between the people and the State

**Henry VIII and His Wives:**

![Family tree of Henry VIII and his wives]

**Henry VIII and the Break with Rome:**

- For centuries England had had substantial religious unity as part of the Catholic Church, whose leader was the pope in Rome.
- The Break with Rome is the rejection of the authority of the Pope over the English church and therefore cutting ties with Catholicism.
- To Catholics, the authority of the Pope guaranteed that religious practice had been transmitted from the earliest Christian church.
- He had ensured in 1554, the break of the English Church from the Church of Rome and had created the Church of England with himself as the supreme head. In the process he had severed a relationship that had lasted for almost 1000 years.
- By creating the royal supremacy, the King had ensured that in practice, the religious opinions of the monarch would shape the official doctrine of the church.
In order to enforce the religious changes the Crown had increased its power. For example, the Treason Act of 1534 significantly widened the scope of what constituted treason.

Religious disunity meant political conflict as different members of the government were either Protestant and Catholic and many did not see eye-to-eye with each other.

- Key members of Henry's council, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Earl of Hertford were Protestant. All of Prince Edward's tutors were Protestant and Henry VIII's 6th wife was Protestant.
- Against this grouping was a powerful Catholic faction led by the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Winchester.

In 1536 all monastic property was seized by the crown and a significant portion was sold to the nobility. This is called the dissolution of the monasteries.

Results:
- The result was a country whose emerging religious divisions would become even more stark.
- The dissolved monasteries led to the push of English Church in a Protestant direction.

Economic Problems during Henry VIII's Reign:
- Henry's search for personal glory led to expensive wars with Scotland and France.
- Despite the fact that the English captured Boulogne, to defend it, new fortifications had to be built and to pay for these escapades, Henry sold off crown assets and debased the coinage.
  - Due to debasement, money was worth less and led to rapid inflation causing economic instability.
- The wars with France and Scotland were so expensive that Henry was forced to sell much of monastic land the Crown had acquired from the dissolution of the monasteries.
- Henry VIII left both Crown finances and the country's economy in an uncertain situation. Debasement of the coinage in order to pay for the expensive wars against France and Scotland had triggered inflationary pressure that would get much worse during Edward VI's reign.

The Mid-Tudor Crisis 1547~1548:
- David Loades (Revisionist view) – there was “simmering discontent” in the countryside, where people could not understand why, in a time of good harvests, bread should be so expensive.
- Some historians argue that the changes were so radical and wide-ranging that they contributed to a MTC.
- However, other historians argue that the changes that did occur were natural and what one might expect from a period spanning over 50 years.
- The permanent machinery of State continued to function without a break after 1547.
  - Shows that the overhaul of government under the first two Tudor monarchs had achieved a firm basis. The main beneficiary of this stability in government was Elizabeth in whose reign the Privy Council evolved into a versatile and effective institution.
• Although there was considerable rivalry between the political factions under Edward VI, it was no greater than it had been during the reign of Henry VIII

Whig interpretation:
• Whig historians did not see any great or “progressive” events take place during the MTC
  
  o Perhaps overly harsh because Mary did set up an important naval foundation which Elizabeth benefitted from
  
  o Mary also set up a financial reform

• Lord Protector Somerset and Lord President Northumberland were seen as the people who have created history and little attention was given to the mass of the population or the underlying issues that shaped events

Revisionist and Marxist interpretation:
• There are two broad schools of historical thought:
  
  o Revisionist – largely concentrated on the short-term changes in the constitution, politics, and foreign policy brought about by the ruling elites
  
  o Marxist – largely concentrated on the long-term changes in the economy and society.

• They generally agreed that the feudal crisis and chronic anarchy of the late Middle Ages enabled western European monarchs to gain power at the expense of the Church and aristocracy
  
  o This was seen in both Mary and Edward’s reign
  
  o In both Edward and Mary’s reign, aristocrats’ wealth was mainly untouched especially under Mary who had to compromise her power for her subordinates’ wealth

New approaches:
• Many recent historians have argued that the mid-Tudor government is now considered to show considerable strength in overcoming a series of potentially damaging difficulties

• Religious change is similarly seen as having been achieved with remarkably little disruption when compared with developments on the continent

• Although there was popular unrest, this was thought to have been caused by economic stresses rather than any weakness on the part of the authorities

• The major crisis point is now thought to have been the economy, which suffered not only from government mishandling, but also from problems which were out of the governments’ control

• The period from the final years of Henry VIII’s reign to the death of Mary constituted the Mid Tudor Crisis and was overcome in Elizabeth’s reign

• The main features of the crisis are:
  
  o A crisis of authority in which the monarchs were compromised by religious factional fighting
Social and economic crisis marked by poor harvests, government debasement of the coinage resulting in inflation

Foreign policy problems in which England’s second-rate status among the European powers was all too evident

- The abundance of political, social and economic factors was sufficient to create a structural crisis in which the authority of monarchy and nobility was itself under threat

**English government system:**
- England was a constitutional monarchy – a system whereby a monarch governs the kingdom within the limits of an agreed framework
- They had to rely on the revenue from royal estates, and whatever money they could persuade parliament to grant them
- This meant that they could rarely afford to keep a standing army of mercenaries
  - They had to rely on the goodwill of the aristocracy and gentry to raise troops from among their tenants

**Order:**
- Order was seen as the central problem for the 16th century state
- Monarchs had to raise money for the ever-increasing machinery of government needed to maintain peace and security
- They would have to increase their revenue
  - Extra taxation was unpopular and likely to provoke rebellion - > collapse of government
- English monarchs depended on the active support of the majority of landowners (Marxist historian: bourgeois) and on the passive obedience of the great mass of the population

**The Reign of Edward VI 1547~1553:**
- Whitney Jones (1973) – the weakness of the monarchy, accompanied by a decline into factionalism, was itself the main cause of mountain economic and social distress in the period. This fundamental lack of political authority transformed problems such as population growth, price rises, unemployment and vagrancy into crisis
- John Warren – crisis undoubtedly peppered Edward’s reign, but these should be seen as the result of poor judgement by Somerset in particular and by unlucky circumstance, such as the death of Edward, rather than a crisis of authority stemming from fundamental weakness in monarchy
- Michael Tillbrook – The circumstances that the new monarch had inherited in 1547 would have been difficult even for a mature adult. However, the accession of a 9 yr old king created additional problems.
- G. W. Bernard and David Loades – although Henry had avoided civil war and had made careful provision for the succession of Edward, the prospect of a minority government posed a serious threat to the stability of the government
  - Factions at court were deeply divided over religious issues
Edward did not have the age or political experience for authority

- As a child, Edward was educated by a dogmatic and harsh tutor of whom his personalities were adopted and transplanted in Edward's reign.
- Edward was crowned believing that it was his duty from God to purify the church and embarked on a policy of Puritanism.
- Edward believed in central control and strict planning
- Edward did not believe in conquering more land but only for fortify and defend England
- Edward inherited the throne at 9 years old and so the Duke of Somerset acted as Lord Protector and often used his position to further his own interests
- Edwards young age created problems – periods of minority government were often times of potential political unrest
  - Henry VIII had tried to prevent trouble by establishing a Regency Council led by Edward Seymour

**System of government:**

**Privy Council:**
- The day-to-day administration was carried out by the Privy Council
- Members of the Council were chosen by their monarch from among the nobles, higher clergy and gentry
- They were selected for their loyalty and their administrative or military skills
- The Privy Council was responsible also for the running of local government, with the support of the nobles, higher clergy, and gentry

**Local Government:**
- Administered by the nobles and higher clergy in each county
- Expected to:
  - Maintain order
  - Administer justice
  - Collect taxes
  - Raise troops
  - Carry out instructions from the Privy Council
- Supported by the local gentry who acted as Justices of Peace and commissioners for collecting taxes
- The major problem with this system was that if the leading local families did not support the government, or did not like the legislation, they often failed to carry out instructions
Duke of Somerset:

- David Starkey – Thomas Seymour was the leading malcontent of Somerset’s reign

- Michael Tilbrook – Somerset’s policies had either provoked rebellion in the West Country or encouraged in East Anglia. His vision of uniting the crowns of England and Scotland lay in ruins and, while the threat of French invasion of the English mainland had been reduced, the English possessions in France were in danger of being lost

- Nigel Heard – Somerset failed to show the leadership necessary to compensate for the absence of an adult monarch

- Relied on his brother Thomas Seymour, Viscount Lisle, the Earl of Essex (Catherine Parr’s brother), Sir William Paget, and Earl of Arundel, all very important people, to support him in being the Lord Protector.

- Somerset rewarded his supporters and himself with promotions within the peerage and grants from Crown lands

- Within weeks, the original Regency Council (set up by Henry VIII’s will to exercise power during Edward VI’s minority) was overthrown and Somerset took control, granting members of his own household position to be in the Privy Council

- Original members of the Privy Council were angered by additional members and so, Somerset ordered for the arrest of Earl of Southampton, to set an example

- The atmosphere of Somerset's regime was abundant of factional rivalries
  - Thomas Seymour was angry for being left out of the Regency Council and tried to further his career by marrying Princess Elizabeth.
  - Seymour sought to turn Edward VI against Somerset and tried to turn the Earl of Southampton against Somerset. Because of this, Somerset pressed treason charges against Seymour and thereby achieved his readmission to the Council

Government under Somerset:

- Nigel Heard – what can also be said is that Somerset failed to show the leadership necessary to compensate for the absence of an adult monarch

- The Privy Council was made up of men who had risen to power under Henry

- They used the same methods and machinery of government to cope with similar problems

- The real differences were the lack of effective leadership, and the fact that existing problems had grown worse

Somerset’s Foreign Policy:

- Somerset wanted to:
  - reassert the ancient claim of Edward I to suzerainty (feudal overlordship) over the Scottish throne