

Why did the Peasants' Revolt fail?

(10 marks)

SYK paragraph

The defeat of the remaining peasants at Billericay in late June 1381 and the months of government retribution that followed signalled the failure of the revolt to achieve its aims. "Peasants you are and peasants you will remain" Richard II reminded them!

SWYG paragraph

For a revolt to be successful several factors need to be present and for those taking part in the "Great Revolt" sadly these were lacking.

Paragraph 1

A successful revolt needs good leadership and planning. Watt Tyler was not a natural leader and lacked the ability to control those taking part. Added to this there appears to have been no orchestrated plans of action. Even the demands of the rebels became extreme and unattainable as the revolt deepened.

Paragraph 2

The majority of the rebels had a naïve belief that Richard I, their king would listen to their demands and sympathise with them. Richard used this misplaced loyalty to buy time and organised a military response. (Henry VIII and Pilgrimage of Grace 1536)

Paragraph 3

The success of the revolt always lay on a knife edge. The support that London gave the revolt was vital. When the rebels rioted in London and went on a killing rampage, the support of the Londoners evaporated. Without this support the revolt started to crumble.

Conclusion/summary

Tyler's death was the final nail in the revolt's coffin. However, at the end of the day, two factors could not be forgotten. Richard although initially caught out by the revolt could not afford to allow the revolt to succeed. He would resort to any tactics to crush resistance. He also knew that at the end of the day that the rebels army would be no match for the royal army, when it was eventually recalled. Although the Revolt is generally considered a failure, it did succeed in showing the peasants that they were of some value and had some power. After the revolt, the term 'poll tax' was no longer used.