

Tuesday 5th May 2020

'The war with Spain was the main reason for the problems Elizabeth faced after 1590.' How far do you agree?

Many historians have argued that the final years of Elizabeth's reign were a time with crisis. There is no doubt that the war with Spain that England had been involved in since 1585 played a big role in the problems faced, due to both the economic and the social impact of the war. However, it is important to remember that Elizabeth also faced other problems, for example the threats of rebellion in Ireland, her own declining popularity, numerous domestic issues and Essex's rebellion, and to say that the war with Spain was the main reason for the problems could be disregarding the impact of these other problems.

The war with Spain was a big issue for Elizabeth and her country for many reasons. Aside from the threat of Catholic invasion if the Spanish were successful, the war had a large impact on England's domestic policies and played into many existing issues facing Elizabeth. Many historians believe that after 1590 Elizabeth's popularity in England began to decline, and the war with Spain definitely contributed to this. Over 100,000 men were sent to fight, and the fear of conscription and the feeling of 'war weariness' caused by this angered many of the poorer people in society, negatively impacting Elizabeth's popularity. The war also cost over £4.5 million. Any surplus money that Elizabeth's government had built up was spent and by the end of the reign the government was struggling to pay its bills, another issue caused by the war. This increased expenditure also meant that Elizabeth cut down on her expenditure at court, which involved leaving positions vacant, which contributed to the issue that Elizabeth's privy council was already shrinking as she relied on her elderly advisors and their sons. This caused some tensions and anger at court, which may have contributed to Elizabeth's declining popularity and also meant that more people at court were open to bribery, which led to Elizabeth's final years being marked by an increase in corruption at court. The war with Spain also caused problems for Elizabeth as it contributed to the Essex-Cecil factional conflict which eventually became so intense that it effected nearly every decision made at court. The war contributed to this tension as Cecil, along with many other privy councillors wanted to keep the Netherlands secure and the king of France safe from Spanish control, meaning that the policies were largely just responses to the situation as issues arose. However, others, including Essex, wanted the war to be more than 'petty invasions' and simply favoured action in any form. These issues all show the massive impact that the war with Spain had on England and suggest that, without the war, Elizabeth's final years would not be seen as much as years of conflict.