
A-level History

7042/2N Revolution and dictatorship: Russia, 1917–1953
Report on the Examination

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General

This first examination under the new specification proved quite successful. The great majority of students wrote substantial answers and seem to have been prepared well for most aspects of the examination. Answers to the compulsory source question usually showed a good depth of knowledge. All three of the optional essay questions had a good take-up. Students appear to have coped well with the time constraints of the examination, with few examples of students having had difficulty in completing their answers.

It is also important to emphasise the difference between this specification and previous ones. The specification contains content which clearly has a social, economic and cultural dimension in addition to more 'traditional' emphases, such as political ones. For example, in this question paper, Question 2 had a distinctly economic focus and Question 3 had a distinctly social focus. These elements are in the outline of the specification, but student responses suggested that in some cases, students were not prepared for this, because sometimes quite knowledgeable students found it difficult to apply their knowledge to the actual question set. The importance of the key questions outlined in the specification must also be emphasised. All concepts must be tested at some point, and examination questions take account of this, particularly in Assessment Objective 01, which explores concepts such as cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

Section A

Question 1

This question addressed AO2: the ability to analyse and evaluate primary source material within an historical context.

There were three elements to this question: an evaluation of provenance; an evaluation of content and argument (both of which required an application of own knowledge); and a judgement on the overall value of each source. It was not required to address all three aspects in equal measure, but all were important, especially the focus on value. Sometimes the overall judgement emerged in the conclusion, although often in the best answers assessment of value was made evident throughout the bulk of the answer. It was expected that all elements should be addressed, and it was a weakness of some answers that this did not always happen, and reduced marks particularly when the key element of value was only superficially addressed. There were a number of students who in their responses also made a comparison between the relative value of the three sources in line with the comparison element in the AS examination. Although this did not necessarily detract from the answer it is important to note that this is not a requirement in the A-level examination and answers can deal with each source individually. This is often the most effective way to address the question as comparison can, and did, lead to confusion in some answers.

The majority of students coped with the second element well and showed good understanding of the content of the sources and commented meaningfully on the views which they represented. Most students understood the views and the context of the Kronstadt newspaper in Source A, explaining why the use of terror had become such an issue and how the Kronstadt sailors had become disillusioned with the Bolshevik leadership after their initial support for the party. The content and argument of Source B proved to be a little more challenging. Most students capably explained Trotsky's argument that the sailors remaining in Kronstadt were not the ones who had supported the Bolsheviks in 1917 and that they were simply rebelling to try to get better

rations and were able to assess this view using context and the provenance. However, there were a number who took this at face value and accepted Trotsky's argument showing less understanding of the historical context. While others missed the difference between Trotsky's assertion that the sailors wanted 'privileged rations' and the point that part of what the sailors were fighting for was fairer rationing so claimed Trotsky was accurate in his assertion. There were also students who misinterpreted Trotsky's initial comments on the sailors and argued he was supportive of them and critical of the Party.

The majority of students dealt well with the content and arguments of Berkman in Source C explaining his sympathetic views towards the sailors and stark criticism of the Bolshevik leadership with many picking up on what the source highlighted about the causes of the rising, the way it was dealt with and the aftermath. This was often supported by good contextual knowledge of the period. There were some issues with students over emphasising the reference to concessions and the 'death knell of Bolshevik dictatorship', claiming that the rising ended in a victory for the Kronstadt sailors.

There was mostly effective evaluation of the provenance of the three sources. Again, Source A was most effectively dealt with in this respect with the majority of students showing awareness that Source A could not be taken at face value, since it had a strong undercurrent of propaganda and self-justification. Students understood how the extract was being used to publicise the sailor's cause and encourage support for the uprising. Some took this too far and claimed this then completely devalued the source despite how the points being made were supported by the historical context.

The timing of the publication of Source B did cause some problems. Not all students picked up on when the source was actually published and for what purpose and so did not take the issue of the show trials into consideration when assessing provenance. Others misinterpreted Trotsky's motive in producing the letter and saw it as an attack on Stalin and Bolshevism due to him having been exiled by Stalin. Despite these issues many students provided a very good analysis of why the source was produced and how this affected the value of the source taking into account the context of both 1921 and the 1937 show trials.

Many students gave good consideration to the provenance of Source C identifying the issue Anarchists had with Bolshevik rule and how this impacted on the tone and emphasis of the material presented. There were some simplistic statements about a personal memoir being truthful because it was not intended for public viewing and others about the source being balanced and objective because it was from someone not directly associated with either the Bolshevik Party or the Kronstadt sailors.

Students need to be reminded that comments on provenance need support, and most students did achieve this, because they were knowledgeable about the events. Simple statements of 'unreliability' or 'bias' are not sufficient, but most students did avoid this trap. There were also a number of responses making very simplistic comments about the sources being valuable simply because they were produced at the time of the events which should be avoided.

There was variability in the extent to which students commented effectively on the 'value' of the sources as evidence and evaluated how each contributed to an understanding of the Kronstadt Rising at this time. Students realised that because the sources were written in different contexts, they had different qualities. Many students emphasised that the sources would be valuable in explaining events at Kronstadt from different angles. The point is that any judgement was equally acceptable provided that it was well reasoned and based on secure knowledge. The less effective

answers usually contained just assertions about the sources being valuable. Very occasionally students simply explained the content of sources using good contextual knowledge but did not link this to the value of the source in understanding the Kronstadt Rising. By showing no understanding of what this question required, they answered the question badly, even though in some instances they did have a lot of potentially valuable knowledge.

Section B

Question 02

This question required a comparison between the NEP covered under the Bolshevik consolidation of power area of the specification and the First Five Year Plan relating to the early part of the Economy and Society area of the specification. It focused on the first bullet point of the Bolshevik consolidation section: 'the NEP and its political and economic impact', the second bullet point of the Economy and Society section: the organisation, aims and results of the first three Five Year Plans; new industrial centres and projects, and there could also be reference to material from the third bullet point of the Stalin's rise to power section of the specification: Economic developments: reasons for and impact of the 'Great Turn'; the economic shift; the launch of the first Five Year Plan and the decision to collectivise. The key focus was to compare how successful the two policies were in improving industrial performance. Therefore the emphasis did need to be on the economic aspects of NEP and the First Five Year Plan and how they impacted on the industrial economy specifically. The question addressed particularly the AO1 concepts of change, continuity and significance.

This question had a good take-up. It was about the key developments in industry under the two different economic policies. Given the time period involved, it was expected that students would confine their answers to the 1921–32 period, because that is all that could be asked for, and such an answer could earn full marks. A few students provided unnecessary levels of detail on the economic situation before 1921. A brief outline of this to show how NEP aided recovery was fine but a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of War Communism was not relevant. Some students went beyond the end of the First Five Year Plan and discussed the subsequent Five Year Plans and the early years of Soviet performance in the Second World War. Where there was clear reference to how the First plan had laid foundations for later achievements this was credited but when the focus on the question was lost and answers just gave information on the later period this could not be credited. Students wrote about the strengths and limitations of the two economic policies: gradual improvement under NEP, the problem with the Scissors Crisis, the grain procurement crisis and its impact on industrial development, increased industrial output under the First Five Year Plan, the role of Gosplan and target setting, large scale industrial projects such as Magnitogorsk, issues with the accuracy of production figures, the problem of quantity over quality. These issues were often tackled well and provided a good analysis of the two economic policies. The strongest answers tended to consistently compare the two policies and follow a clear line of argument throughout. While other good answers gave an analysis of the NEP then the First Five Year Plan in turn and reached a conclusion about to what extent the First Five Year Plan was the most successful. Weaker answers tended to simply provide a description of what happened under each plan without the comparison or focused on one of the economic policies almost entirely without making sufficient reference to the other policy. Another issue was staying focused on industrial performance. Some answers tended to stray into ideological or political issues which were not relevant to industrial performance. The social aspect of the two policies was also considered by some students. Where this provided specific detail and was then clearly linked to how it impacted on industrial performance then this could be credited but the weaker answers often just made reference to living standards without showing how this could have impacted on industrial performance. There was also an issue with some answers which lost focus on industry and talked

about agricultural performance. Again, where the developments in agriculture were clearly shown to impact on industry this material was credited but simply discussing issues in agriculture could not be.

Question 03

This question related to the fifth section of the specification, 'Stalinism, politics and control, 1929–1941' and focused on the third bullet point: Culture and society: church; women, young people and working men; urban and rural differences; 'socialist man' and the impact of cultural change; similarities and differences between Lenin's and Stalin's USSR. The question addressed AO1 in terms of exploring to varying degrees concepts of change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

This was quite a popular choice of question which yielded very mixed responses. There were a large number of students who clearly understood the concept of a social revolution and had carefully studied this part of the specification. These students gave well developed responses analysing the policies adopted by Stalin in terms of the family, religion, young people and workers. They went on to provide thoughtful assessments of the impact of these policies on the lives of ordinary people and how far the results should be considered a social revolution. There was good insight into how in some areas there had generally been a continuation of Leninist policies while in others there had been a stark break from the Leninist period. Many answers also dealt well with how far these changes were a positive move forwards or a regression back to previous times and showed a very good understanding of what could or could not constitute a social revolution. These answers reached well substantiated judgements about how different areas of society had been affected by the Stalinist regime of the 1930s showing that the term could not be applied across all areas but did apply in some.

There were then a number of responses which did not fully understand the term social revolution and seemed to have limited awareness of this area of the specification. Some students made the mistake of confusing a social revolution with a socialist revolution and focused on how Stalin had made the country more or less socialist during the 30s, which of course is not relevant to the actual question. Others just took it as how much society had changed during the 30s and explained the high profile policies of collectivisation, five year plans and terror. Some of these answers made partially relevant points which could be credited but these were not well developed in response to the requirements of the question. Others had very little of any relevance at all. There were students who partially explained some of the issues relevant to a social revolution, such as attacks on the church or the changes brought about by the Family Code, but then in attempts at balance lost focus and went into how the terror or five year plans brought greater changes to society than these social policies. There were some students who misinterpreted the question and focused on how Stalin maintained control over society through using a combination of propaganda and terror. Sometimes there were relevant points raised here but the emphasis was very much on Stalin's level of control rather than whether this constituted a social revolution. The issues of propaganda, Socialist Realism and the Stalinist cult were problematic with this question. The stronger students used examples from these areas to show how there had been significant changes for certain areas of the population from the relative artistic freedom of the Leninist period and directly showed the impact on the people of Russia. Whereas the weaker responses simply described the personality cult or Socialist Realism without analysing the impact these policies actually had on society or how far this differed from what had gone before. The varying quality of responses to this question confirmed the importance of students reading the question carefully and ensuring that there is a clear focus in the answer. It also demonstrated the importance of covering all areas of the specification in equal measure as there were students who showed extensive knowledge of

collectivisation, the five year plans, the great terror and use of propaganda but clearly did not have a strong understanding of the social and cultural aspects of the specification.

Question 04

This question related to the final section of the specification, 'The Great Patriotic War and Stalin's Dictatorship, 1941–1953' and focused on the final bullet point: The transformation of the Soviet Union's international position: the emergence of a 'superpower'; the formation of a soviet bloc; conflict with USA and the capitalist West. The question addressed AO1 in terms of exploring to varying degrees concepts of cause, consequence and significance.

This too was a popular choice and largely demonstrated a good understanding of this section of the course. The majority of students were able to give reasons for the Soviet bloc being formed due to the need for international security and compare this to other motives for the creation of the bloc such as to aid economic recovery, establish the USSR as a superpower and to spread Communism. The difference in quality of responses mostly came with the degree of detail provided in analysing and assessing these different motives. There were many very good responses which provided a range of precise detail on the formation of the bloc due to the need for international security covering issues such as, the devastating effects of the Second World War on the USSR, the ease with which the Nazis had entered the USSR, the aggressive attitudes towards the USSR from the West (referencing the Long Telegram, Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' speech, the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Aid), and the use of the nuclear bomb by the USA. This knowledge was then balanced out with some excellent detail on the counter arguments including, the economic problems in the USSR, the threat of the USA meaning a land barrier of buffer states would not be an effective security measure, the development of the USSR's own nuclear capability being a better source of protection than the Soviet bloc, and Stalin's desire to see an increase in Soviet and Communist influence across the world (shown in his actions in Berlin and Korea). Many students dealt well with analysing these issues and the strongest showed how they were inter-related to provide convincing and supported judgements. There was also some high level discussion of Stalin's approach to foreign policy and the issue of permanent revolution versus socialism in one country to add greater depth to judgements in the top answers.

The weaker answers tended to identify a few relevant points but not develop these in sufficient detail. There were some very one sided answers mostly just dealing with the issue of international security and a few providing very little on international security and just discussing other motives. Problems also arose when answers simply described what Stalin did and how he took over parts of Eastern Europe without addressing why he was doing this. Occasionally issues with chronology arose with some students trying to argue that the events surrounding the Berlin blockade were a motive for Stalin forming the Soviet bloc when by this point the bloc had already been established. There was also a tendency in some answers to focus almost entirely on the period up to and during the Second World War to explain Stalin's motives without then analysing the key events and issues of the post war period which the question is focused on. This did illustrate an issue with some students appearing to have a much stronger knowledge of the period up to the Second World War than the post-war period, again demonstrating the importance of covering all areas of the specification.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.