
AS-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 7041/2N
Report on the Examination

Specification 7041
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Component 7041/2N

Revolution and dictatorship: Russia, 1917–1953

Component 2N: The Russian Revolution and the Rise of Stalin, 1917–1929

General Comments

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. Both 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 3 had a distinctly economic focus. These elements are in the outline of the specification, but student response 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 and tone; an evaluation of content and argument (both of which required an application of own knowledge); and a comparison of the extracts. It was not required to address all three aspects in equal measure, but all were important, especially the comparative element. Sometimes the comparison emerged in the conclusion, although often in the best answers the comparison 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 comparative element was only superficially addressed.

The majority of students coped with the second element well. The great majority showed good understanding of the content of the two sources and commented meaningfully on the opposing views which they represented. There were some blips. Most students understood the context of Stalin's pronouncements in Source A, explaining why factionalism was such an issue for the Communists and how Stalin was still attempting to establish his credentials as Lenin's true heir. However, a minority, less secure in their knowledge, thought that Stalin was attacking Lenin rather than trying to assume his mantle. Most students understood what was happening in Source B,

because they had an impressive knowledge of the leadership struggle during these years. A few students were confused about the relationship between the factions, those on the Right and Left of the Party, but this was relatively rare. Most were able to explain why Kamenev encountered a mainly hostile reception during the Congress and could explain this in terms of Stalin's gradual dominance of the Party and how he was succeeding in isolating the Left Opposition. Students understood both the personal and ideological issues at stake. The best answers showed a detailed awareness of the context; less secure students provided less effective contextual support.

There was mostly effective valuation of provenance and tone. Most students were aware that Source A could not be taken at face value, since it had a strong undercurrent of propaganda and self-justification: Stalin was continuing Lenin's attack on factionalism, albeit in a more strident tone, and was also trying to consolidate his role as a leading Bolshevik at a time when his position had been under threat because of the furore over Lenin's Testament.

Most students made constructive comments about Source B. They noted that since it was an 'official' record of Congress proceedings, it might be hoped that it would be an accurate account of what took place, since censorship was not as draconian as later. In terms of tone, students commented on the measured determination and implicit menace which could be read into Source A, while Source B revealed the growing tension and implied threat which confronted those like Kamenev who were losing the fight against a gradually Stalin-dominated Party.

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 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 divisions in the Communist Party at this time. Students realised that because the two sources were written in different contexts, they had different qualities. They pointed out that Source A was the view of one man. They pointed out that Source B did not give much hard information about actual policies, but recognised that since it did very much centre on party organisation and the role of 'leadership', it provided a useful counterpoint to Source A.

Many students emphasised that both sources would be valuable in explaining Party divisions 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 which extract was 'better'. Very occasionally students simply ignored the requirement to actually compare the extracts. 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. This might be displayed by analysing each extract in turn, but then not comparing the results of the analysis.

Section B

Question 02

This question related to the first section of the specification: 'Dissent and Revolution'. It covered the first bullet point, 'The condition of Russia before the revolution of February/March 1917; the Tsar and political authority; the war effort; the economic and social state of Russia; discontent'; and also part of the second bullet point, 'The February/March Revolution of 1917: causes and course of

revolution; issues of leadership and the Tsar's abdication.' The question addressed particularly the AO1 concept of cause.

This question had a good take-up. It was about the events of 1914–1917 leading up to the February/March Revolution. Of course, given the time period involved, it was expected that students would confine their answers to the 1914–17 period, because that is all that could be asked for, and such an answer could earn full marks. Students wrote about conditions in Russia, the disastrous military campaigns, growing disillusionment with the Tsar among the Duma and other sections of society. This was often done well, although the obsession with Rasputin led some students to devote much more time to this aspect than was really necessary. Able students discussed pertinent issues such as the role of radical parties and the extent to which they galvanised or reflected popular opinion, or indeed had any significant impact at all on the fall of the tsarist regime. A few students were much less secure and got very confused between the two revolutions of 1917, for example talking about the Bolsheviks taking on the tsar and storming his palace as part of the first revolution.

The majority of students also wrote about longer term causes of the 1917 Revolution, taking their answers back to 1905 and in some cases back into the nineteenth century. This material could be made relevant and was rewarded, as long as these students also focused sufficiently on the war period, which fortunately they usually did. The important point is that no student was disadvantaged by doing just what the question demanded, which was to focus on the 1914–1917 period.

Question 03

This question related to the second section of the specification, 'Bolshevik consolidation 1918–1924' (the last part of the third bullet point, 'the NEP and its political and economic impact') and the third section 'Stalin's rise to power' (the third bullet point, 'Economic developments'). The question addressed AO1 in terms of exploring to varying degrees concepts of change, consequence, difference and significance.

This was quite a popular question and almost all students who attempted it had extensive knowledge of some aspects of the New Economic Policy. Answers often began with a description of War Communism to set the scene for the change in 1921. Sometimes students spent too much time on this, describing or explaining in some length the faults of War Communism. This was unnecessary, since the question was not about the motives for NEP but its impact.

There were many good answers to this question, but also many which were less effective than they should have been. One reason for this was that many answers were too restricted in the range of years covered, and the other was to do with not focusing on what the question asked for. The question was clearly about the economic impact of NEP. Many answers focused too much on other aspects. Some focused on ideological factors, some focused on the social impact, some focused on the political power struggle of the 1920s. If students had confined themselves to the question, they would have concentrated on the extent to which NEP was or was not an economic success.

Too many answers focused too much on the first two or three years of NEP and did not include the later 1920s. Most students wrote about the fact that NEP made concessions to the peasants, basically by stopping forcible grain requisitioning and encouraging the peasants to grow more and do some private trade, which had a positive impact on production. Unfortunately, several answers did not go much beyond this. Many answers paid much less attention to industry or virtually ignored it. Too often, when industry was discussed, it was as if all industry suffered the same fate.

Relatively few answers discussed the fact that private small-scale industry often did well, whereas the state-controlled heavy industry sector did much less well, being bedevilled by poor management, lack of investment and poor labour productivity, among other problems.

Students were credited for identifying the improvement in trade and for discussing the contribution of Nepmen to oiling the wheels of the economy. Other popular topics students wrote about were not relevant – for example the social problems such as drunkenness and prostitution – unless students were able to relate them to the performance of the economy.

Too many answers ignored the later years of the NEP. They often mentioned the scissors crisis, but did not discuss the economic problems of the later 1920s, culminating in the Urals-Siberian requisitioning episode when the government became concerned at the lack of grain coming on to the market. There was no discussion of the problems of heavy industry and increasing unemployment. There was no awareness of the fact that many peasants felt increasingly unhappy about NEP and its impact on their life and work.

A few answers did discuss these aspects, and these answers therefore had a good overview of the NEP's impact. For example, they discussed what should have been an obvious point that NEP was not regarded as an economic success by most Bolsheviks. This was because it clearly was not achieving the economic results which could modernise the economy and provide a sound basis for industrialisation, which Communists saw as essential if Russia were to become a modern industrialised society, which in turn would allow socialism to be created. This was one of the few cases where it was legitimate to bring in ideology, since there was a clear ideological link between economic success and political/ideological requirements. Students who made these points were precisely those who scored the highest marks, since their overall judgements showed good perspective as well as providing supporting evidence from the whole period.

The fact that there were relatively few very high-scoring answers, and a substantial number of 'middling' ones that were imbalanced because they only addressed part of the question, confirmed the importance of students reading the question carefully and ensuring that there is a clear focus in the answer. Had students done this, there would have been more better balanced and highly-rewarded answers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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