
A-level

History

7042/2T The Crisis of Communism, 1953–2000
Report on the Examination

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Section A

Question 1

There were three elements to this question: an evaluation of provenance and tone, an evaluation of content and argument (both requiring some application of own knowledge) and a judgment. Although these three elements did not need to be addressed in equal measure, and it was sufficient for the judgment to emerge in the conclusion, something of each was expected in answers. Although some did provide comparative judgment, there is no requirement for this at A-level.

Evaluation of provenance and tone was reasonably effective, with most students being able to state something of worth. Less able students often took the provenance of the three sources at face value, asserting that Source A was definitive evidence due to it being an official document, that Source B had limited value because it was from an ill-informed student, and that Source C was informative due to it being from a political leader. More able students delved deeper and made comment on the timing of Source A, and how Communists were blaming perestroika for the demise of the USSR. With Source B, more able students often made reference to the authorship, noting that the ordinary person seemed blissfully unaware of the attempted coup, mainly due to the failings of Glasnost. More able students also drew attention to the untypical nature of the authorship of Source C – that Zhirinovsky, being an extreme nationalist, was clearly upset at the direction in which Russia was heading. Comments on tone tended to be descriptive and unrelated to source value. For example, many students alluded to the partisan tone of Source A, and the immediate and personal tone of Source B without making reference to how the tone of each source impacted on its value.

Students managed the content of the three sources more effectively. Most were able to identify the overarching arguments in each source and most attempted to engage with and evaluate the material, although some did this more successfully than others. Whilst some evaluation was assertive, most students attempted to evaluate the content of the sources using contextual knowledge to both corroborate and criticise the material. In source A, more able students centred their discussion upon the failings of perestroika and the stiffening of resistance to Gorbachev, particularly within the party. Good responses to Source B tended to focus in on the political manipulation and disenchantment of the Soviet peoples. With Source C, more able students focused their discussion on the actual events of the coup itself in order to corroborate/refute Zhironovsky's account. Students who used precise knowledge to support comments made on the source as a whole, achieved better than those students who used patchy knowledge to address content through a sentence-by-sentence approach.

In terms of judgment, more able students did as asked and commented on the 'value' of the sources as evidence, and provided evaluative summaries of how each would contribute to an understanding of the August Coup. Better answers made judgement throughout, although there were some very good responses that dealt with judgment effectively in the conclusion.

Section B

Question 2

This was the most popular of the three essay questions. Generally, students responded well to this question. However, some students presented Khrushchev very negatively, and hence produced very narrow accounts, preventing them from reaching beyond level 3 on the mark scheme. Yet, most students incorporated balance, and whilst arguing against the notion in the question, that

Khrushchev was actually toppled due to failing policies, more able students demonstrated that he achieved some success, albeit limited. Good responses tended to evaluate a range of factors - De-Stalinisation, the cultural thaw, foreign policy and peaceful co-existence with the West, the Virgin Lands Scheme and the Seven Year Plan, and the Space Race. The more precise the information and the tighter the links to the question, the more likely the answer was to reach the higher mark levels. Stronger students often disagreed with the view in the question, judging that despite the severity of the situation facing the USSR in 1956 and Khrushchev's good intentions, he was overthrown due to his policies mostly failing.

Question 3

This question was answered more effectively than Questions 2 and 4. Most students had a good to excellent grasp of the subject knowledge necessary to achieve well. There were some descriptive responses, which received less reward than those that adopted a more analytical stance. However, these descriptive responses often comprised impressive knowledge with occasional references to the question and so still managed to reach level 3 on the mark scheme. Most students offered balance but with differing levels of sophistication, with less able students either focusing too heavily on either the Prague Spring or the Hungarian Rising, or too heavily on either the similarities or differences between the two. However, most students adopted an even approach in terms of balance, and provided good support for comparative points made. In terms of similarities/differences, more able students discussed a range of factors – the influence of local communists, the impact of De-Stalinisation, the ambitions of Nagy and Dubcek, the influence of the West, the use of Soviet/Warsaw Pact forces, and the consequences of the risings. Better responses often judged that both Nagy and Dubcek had similar motives and that therefore the causes of the Prague Spring and the Hungarian Rising were mainly similar. Yet, more able students tended to argue that this was not the case as events unfolded, that there were in fact more differences than similarities, mainly due to Dubcek learning from the mistakes made in Hungary in 1956.

Question 4

This was the least popular of the three essay questions. Whilst there were some good responses, this question was done less effectively than questions 2 and 3. Some responses lacked the necessary substance to achieve. There is an expectation on the depth paper for students to demonstrate good knowledge, and unfortunately some students failed to provide the range and depth of knowledge required for this question, preventing them from reaching beyond level 3 on the mark scheme. Also, whilst most students dealt with the named factor (western influences) in the question reasonably competently, some failed to look beyond this and hence produced rather narrow accounts, which again prevented them from reaching beyond level 3 on the mark scheme. However, better students argued that whilst western influences did cause instability in the satellite states, so too did a number of other factors. In good responses, factors addressing western influences such as Reagan and Thatcher, the Helsinki Accords and Charter 77, and the western media, were balanced out by factors such as stagnation under Brezhnev, internal pressures for reform from within the satellite states, the relaxation of repression, and the final phase of the Cold War. Better responses often judged that whilst western influences contributed to the instability in the satellite states and perhaps acted as a catalyst, it was the general plight of the Soviet Union that played a more significant role.

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.