
A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2N: Revolution and Dictatorship: Russia, 1917-1953
Report on the Examination

7042
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Question 01

The three sources proved accessible for the vast majority of students. Consequently, there were hardly any responses in Level 1 and relatively few in Level 2. At the other end of the mark scheme, there were not very many responses in Level 5 either. This tended to be because able students often overlooked the need to provide substantiated judgement on the value of each source. Some students were hampered by an overly mechanical approach to the question, writing separate paragraphs on provenance, tone and content; this prevented them from explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the provenance in relation to the content and context of the source. As a result, comments on provenance were often generic and non-specific.

Source A

Less able students made the incorrect assumption that this source was about life in a gulag, and therefore did not show an effective understanding of the content of the source. For those that misinterpreted the source completely this limited their mark as they were unable to show an understanding of all three sources.

The vast majority of students were able to link the content of the source to some supporting contextual information about life in postwar USSR. The range and depth of this contextual knowledge was a key differentiator between Level 3 and Level 4 answers. Most students were able to offer comment on the prevalence of famine and starvation in these years, as well as the desire of the Soviet regime to cover up the suffering of the people in the press. More effective responses developed the explanation of context, often focusing on the causes of the famine, such as the overwhelming focus on industry under the Fourth Five Year Plan.

In terms of provenance, the source proved accessible to most students who often made reference to the date of the source, as well as the fact that the author had been arrested and sent to a gulag. In Level 3, these comments tended to lack depth and, although there may have been some balance, there was often no judgement. In Level 4, some judgement was offered although this tended to lack depth. As mentioned above, few students provided sufficient depth of judgement to access Level 5.

Source B

There were very few poor responses with regard to this source as almost all students were able to recognise the value of the source as an example of propaganda and the cult of personality. At the weaker end of Level 3, some students took the source at face value and declared that it was valuable evidence of life in the Soviet Union, and genuine adulation of Stalin, without considering the inherent limitations. Mid-level 3 answers tended to point out the limitations of the source as propaganda but did not go much further than that. In Level 4, students developed the balance further and offered greater depth, perhaps identifying aspects of life in postwar USSR which did not match with the overly optimistic tone of Source B.

Most students were able to provide supporting contextual information about the cult of personality, including Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations. Some students drifted into an explanation of terror in these years, which was not precisely focused on the content of the source. In Level 4, some students expanded the breadth of contextual knowledge to include explanations of the Fourth Five Year Plan targets in relation to the drive for 'new output achievements'. As above, for Source A, there were relatively few students who developed the balance achieved in Level 4 into substantiated judgement about the value of the source overall.

Source C

This proved to be the source which students analysed most effectively. As with Source B, there were very few students who did not show an understanding of the content and provenance of the source to a reasonable degree.

In terms of content, the vast majority of students were able to make reference to the Zhdanovshchina and the cultural restrictions imposed after the war. At the lower end of Level 3, responses did not go much beyond these references and some students misinterpreted the opening sentence, claiming that these showed people's disillusionment with life in postwar USSR. Some lower Level 3 answers also got rather sidetracked by the reference to 'little cogwheels' and proceeded to provide quite a lot of information about the five year plans and collectivisation, which, whilst partially relevant, was getting away from the main thrust of the source. In Level 4, students were able to provide more precise supporting contextual information about different authors, poets and artists who suffered at the hands of the censors and secret police in this period. They were also able to relate this to the claim that postwar life 'turned out to be more complicated than life at the front'.

With regard to provenance, most students made reference to the fact the source was written by a poet who would have a good understanding of the cultural purges. Most answers also made reference to the date of the source, arguing it was freer from censorship and therefore more likely to be valuable. In Level 3, if there was any balance it tended to be limited to assertions such as the poet would not be able to explain what life was like for 'ordinary people', or that he would be feeling bitter against the regime. In Level 4, the quality of balance was better developed, for example some students argued well that the poet's claim that 'Stalin's greatest crime was not the arrests and shootings [but] the corruption of the human spirit' can be questioned in light of the extent of the postwar terror and police state. As above, not many of these Level 4 answers developed into the substantiated judgement required for Level 5.

Question 02

There was a full range of answers to this question across all levels of the markscheme. At the bottom end, some students confused the February and October Revolutions and wrote about the storming of the Winter Palace, thereby offering very little content and comment worthy of credit. Level 2 responses showed some awareness of the question but supporting detail was inaccurate or very limited in scope. This often came in the form of vague generalisations about the weakness of the Tsarist system which could have been applied to any period from 1855 onwards. Alternatively, some Level 2 answers became overly descriptive and/or lacked precise relevance. One example of this was answers which gave a detailed description of the influence of Rasputin over the Tsar and his household, which many students evidently knew a lot about, but which lacked any precise link to the question.

Rasputin continued to make regular, and often lengthy, appearances in responses credited in Level 3. Whilst relevant, content and comment on Rasputin tended to outweigh his significance to the February Revolution, given that he was dead by the end of 1916. Level 3 answers tended to be somewhat generalised in context. Students in this level often provided relevant factors about the causes of the February Revolution, often going back to 1905, without giving much precise detail about the events of February and March 1917. Therefore, there were some competent explanations of the long-term problems of Tsarist government under Nicholas II, and of the impact of the First World War, without linking these explanations to the events of February 1917 beyond some rather superficial comments.

In Level 4, students were able to offer some specific details about the events of 1917. Knowledge of the army mutinies in Petrograd was often strong, as was detail concerning the strikes and protests amongst workers. More able students also offered evidence about the role of the army generals in bringing about Nicholas' abdication, and also the role of the Progressive Committee of the Duma. The most successful answers, in Level 5, developed the specific points mentioned above into convincing and consistent judgement as to which factor was the most significant. Most often, these answers concluded that the actions of the army were the most significant factor as this gave the protesting workers greater strength and removed the ability of the Tsar to crush the protests as he had done in 1905.

Question 03

Although on the surface this appeared to be an accessible and straightforward question, a significant number of students found it difficult to marshal their knowledge into an effective answer focused on the requirements of the question. Almost all students showed an understanding of Stalin's rise to power, therefore, there were very few answers in Level 1. However, there were a significant number of responses in Level 2 as many students wrote an answer focused on the reasons for Stalin's victory in the power struggle, rather than focusing on the actual question asked. This included several very knowledgeable and eloquent students who, unfortunately, launched into a general analysis of the reasons for Stalin's rise to power without directly addressing the question.

In Level 3, students tended to make links to the question but these were often superficial and not very convincing. These answers tended to want to answer an alternative question about the reasons for Stalin's victory and just about managed to demonstrate some understanding of the actual question set. Effective focus in these answers was more likely to come from the argument that Stalin was not motivated by ideology as he changed sides in the debate on the NEP through the 1920s. In balance, however, these answers then tended to give an overview of 'other factors' such as Stalin's position as general secretary or his opponents' weaknesses, which lacked a precise focus on Stalin's determination.

There were plenty of Level 4 and Level 5 answers from students who recognised the precise focus of the question and were able to organise their knowledge effectively in response. The point referred to above, about Stalin's changing approach to the NEP, was included in most answers, but there were additional effective points in balance about his consistent commitment to Socialism in One Country. The more effective answers often argued, in addition, that Stalin's 'true' ideological commitment was revealed through the launching of the Five Year Plans and collectivisation in 1928 and therefore he was genuinely motivated by ideology. In balance, these responses offered a range of effective points to support the argument that Stalin was really motivated by his desire for political power and a range of evidence was used to support this point.

Question 04

The focus of this question proved to be an accessible one for the vast majority of the students who attempted it. The main differentiator in quality between responses was the depth and precision of supporting evidence offered. There were few responses in Level 1. In Level 2, less able students tended to lack the necessary factual knowledge to build an effective balanced answer to the question. For example, some essays were limited to a discussion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact which, therefore, only provided a partial response.

In Level 3, students were generally able to achieve some balance. This was commonly achieved through contrasting Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War - for ideological reasons - with Stalin's other actions, eg joining the League of Nations, signing non-aggression pacts and defeating the Japanese in 1939, which all provide evidence of his desire to protect the USSR's borders. These level 3 answers tended to briefly refer to these aspects of Stalin's foreign policy rather than explore them in much depth. There was also some inaccuracy in some of these answers, most commonly around Soviet relations with Germany from 1929 onwards.

Level 4 and 5 answers provided a greater range and depth of supporting information and explanation. There was often effective balance in the assessment of individual foreign policy issues. For example, the Spanish Civil War was often assessed effectively both in the context of ideological motivations and also the wearing down of fascist forces in order to protect the USSR. Similarly, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was assessed as a way of protecting the borders through preventing war and creating a buffer zone, but also in terms of Stalin's desire to expand Soviet territory into Poland and the Baltic states.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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