



History 7042
Additional Specimen Question Paper 1H (A-level)
Question 01 Student 2
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

Specimen answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 1H (A-level): Additional specimen question paper

01 Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing the arguments in these three extracts are in relation to the impact of Stalinism on people's lives in Russia by 1941.

[30 marks]

Student response

When considering people's lives in 1930s Russia, it must be remembered that 'people' covers a variety of individuals and social groups. Traditionally, Stalin's USSR has often been presented as a monolithic, totalitarian society in which there was very little individualism. The reality was different. How people responded to Stalinism, however it is defined, depended on many different things. It might depend upon age, class, and profession, economic standing, where one lived, whether one was a peasant, a factory worker, a politician, a soldier, a teacher or someone from many other walks of life.

Given these qualifications, the three sources all give us some idea of the impact of 1930s Stalinism. Stalinism can be characterised in various ways. It certainly meant an authoritarian political system; and a state-run economy in which the state rather than consumer choice determined priorities. It meant a police state which tried to influence people's lives and thoughts through a combination of propaganda and coercion. It was a state which controlled education and all aspects of the mass media. People responded to these aspects in different ways, and at different times.

Source A presents a balanced argument about the impact of Stalinism. The authors remind us that Stalin was a dictator or authoritarian leader, because basically he got his way in most things. Especially after the beginning of the Terror in the mid 1930s, his compatriots would not dare to openly contradict Stalin. Hence Stalin's views were 'decisive'. Stalin's authority was reinforced throughout the country by extensive propaganda and a cult of hero-worship.

Nevertheless, Source A also points out that it was still possible to have a limited amount of debate in Russia, for example about the economic direction, albeit within close limits. Stalin's old comrade Ordzhonikidze disagreed with Stalin about economic policy and committed suicide, possibly to avoid being purged. Stalin also gave a limited amount of independence to some subordinates such as his secret police chief – as long as it suited him. However, the important point made by the authors is that Stalin's USSR was not particularly efficient. It meant that many people managed to avoid the 'directives from above.' The impact of Stalinism could well depend on local circumstances. For example, someone living in a remote part of the USSR might be less influenced by events in Moscow than an urban dweller nearer Moscow. It could depend upon the zeal with which the local Party organisation carried out the directives from the Kremlin.

The impact of Stalinism could also depend upon one's standing. Members of the Party were in the forefront of political events, and probably more likely to be purged arbitrarily during the 1930s. This did not necessarily mean arrest, but it could mean demotion or losing one's Party

badge. Members of certain professions were more likely to be investigated and/or purged than others: for example those whose work brought them into contact with foreigners, and who were therefore, in Stalin's eyes, potentially disloyal. Teachers and intellectuals might be at risk. In the early 1930s, during collectivisation, peasants were at risk. However, the nature of this 'disorganised' regime was so arbitrary, it is difficult to generalise. For example, in some areas, if the local NKVD unit was finding it difficult to find its quota of kulaks to arrest, it would simply arrest the nearest peasants and label them kulaks in order to make up the numbers. That is why the source emphasises that no-one was immune. Other historians such as O. Figes in *The Whisperers* have shown the devastating impact of the Terror on many individuals and families. Yet Source A also reminds us that many people supported the regime, because they believed the positive propaganda, and did not need to be coerced to live with the regime. Hence the balanced nature of Source A.

Source C is similar to A in some respects. It also emphasises the arbitrary nature of the bureaucracy, and the fact that many felt frightened and coerced by this. However, the source also points out that there was still criticism of the regime, and that this could well have often been not because of the coercive nature of the regime, but because Russians disliked the economic impact of Stalin's policies. In the mid 1930s there were severe shortages and rationing. Initially there was much starvation in the countryside. Not everyone accepted the idea that they must make great sacrifices until socialism was achieved at some unspecified date. Things did improve for many people. The source points out that there were welfare benefits. Although education was closely controlled and geared to a particular ideological viewpoint, urban dwellers were now more likely to get an education and become literate. They might also get better medical care. In the countryside, the availability of these benefits was more patchy. But it was not all gloom and doom. This is why the impact of Stalin's policies on the population would not have been uniform.

Source B presents a somewhat different interpretation than A and C. B is an example of what became known as 'revisionist history', mainly because the author was arguing that Stalin was not trying to systematically terrorise the population. Rather, according to Source B, he panicked in response to his fears and insecurities and over-reacted in an arbitrary manner. There are elements of this interpretation in the other sources, but B goes further in emphasising the limited impact of Stalin's terror. The argument cannot be totally dismissed. Thousands of ordinary Russians every day had no compunction in writing to the Kremlin with some complaint about the authorities – hardly a sign of feeling completely crushed by the regime and afraid of it. These letters are still in the archives. Source B is perhaps less convincing when it asserts that 'terror touched a minority of the citizens,' since many undoubtedly suffered.

Source B's assertion that many citizens still had some control over their own future is true to the extent that it was possible for many people to become upwardly mobile if they avoided the worst aspects of the Terror. There were openings to better oneself in the rapidly industrialising USSR. The message of Source B, even more than A and C, is that Russia was not a uniform state under Stalin.

The impact of Stalinism was very varied, depending on so many different factors. A Muslim in one of the Asian Republics might have felt the impact very severely as the regime introduced measures such as the emancipation of women (on paper at any rate). A churchgoer in Russia would have been affected because the regime dissuaded churchgoing (although it was not actually banned), and many churches were closed. Intellectuals and artists had to toe the Party line to survive. Families were affected by new laws on divorce and abortion. Many Russians,

especially younger ones, seem to have been won over by the propaganda, and devoted their energies and spare time willingly to Party activities. Others may have conformed outwardly, but thought differently – which meant they were influenced by Stalinism. It is difficult for us to know precisely. What is clear is that the vast majority of Russians were affected to a greater or lesser extent by Stalinism, either positively or negatively from their standpoint. All three sources are convincing to some extent about the impact, because they make the point that we cannot talk about a genuinely totalitarian state. Whatever Stalin's motives or train of thought as leader of the USSR, he did not have a uniform impact on the entire population. Individuals prospered, suffered, or just got on with their lives in a variety of ways.

Commentary – Level 5

This is a highly sophisticated answer and reflects a candidate of very high ability. The extracts are set in context with an incisive introduction directly linked to the question and each extract is assessed in a mature, controlled and well-supported manner. There is comparison and cross-referencing and whilst these are not explicitly required by the question (each extract can be assessed separately and discretely), these do add to the quality of the answer. It is clearly a top Level 5 answer. Indeed, it exceeds what is required for even a top mark.