



AS LEVEL HISTORY

7041/1H-Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855-1964
Autocracy, Reform and Revolution: Russia, 1855-1917
Report on the Examination

7041
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General Comments

Most students showed a sound understanding of the period covered in this paper and were able, not only to address the compulsory question 01 with some confidence, but to select a question about which they could write with some ease from the essay choices in 02 and 03. There were, of course, a few who had failed to develop sufficient chronological understanding to appreciate the dates given in the 02 and 03 questions, and some whose understanding was muddled. These were, however, very much the minority. The biggest issue faced by students was in the planning of their answers to meet the full chronological range of the questions and to address the key issues contained within them directly. Passages of description suggested some solid learning of factual material but did little to advance the arguments sought in responses at this level.

Section A

Question 01

Most students were able to identify the very different interpretations of Alexander III given in Extracts A and B and many sensibly stated that overall interpretation at the beginning of each evaluation. When this was not done, students were apt to comment, sometimes in quite a perfunctory way, on the general statements made in the extracts with less regard for the overall argument.

Many considered Extract A fully, illustrating elements of the Tsar's character and policies, as referred to in the extract, with examples from their own knowledge. Whilst the majority simply supported what was written, deeming the extract to be a convincing interpretation, some of the better responses were more evaluative and questioned this one-sided portrayal. Common criticisms of the interpretation included citing Alexander's continuance of some reforms, such as serf-emancipation, and the need to place the responsibility for specific policies on others. Alexander III was, for example, sometimes praised for his prompt action in dismissing Vyshnegradsky in 1892, laying the blame for economic failures firmly on his minister's shoulders. A few students, showing excellent contextual awareness, took issue with the final sentence of the extract which spoke of 'an oppressive police state'. Such pointed to the limitations on the Tsar's authoritarian control and so argued that the extract gave a misleading impression.

In commenting on Extract B, most students referred to the beginnings of industrial growth and considered both the positive and negative implications of this for Alexander III's reign. A number also evaluated the influence of Pobedonostev, with some seeing him, rather than the Tsar, as the man responsible for the more backward-looking and repressive image of the reign. In support of this argument, some thoughtful students suggested that Alexander III deserved to be thought of more highly for the conscientious way he set about upholding his autocratic inheritance. Broader contextual knowledge of the problems the Tsar faced, thanks to the growing political opposition, was also successfully employed in some of the better answers to explain Alexander's concern for 'public calm'.

A number argued that the significance of the industrial take-off was such as to make Extract B the more convincing interpretation of Alexander III's reign. However, by far the majority argued that Extract A offered the more convincing interpretation. The award of levels was influenced by how effectively this comparative judgement was developed and supported. Some weaker students merely stated their preference for one extract over the other at the end of their answer; some went little further when concluding that Extract A had to be considered the more convincing because the

interpretation it offered was 'widely-held'. The best responses gave far more specific reasons for their choice, perhaps pointing to Extract A's emphasis on the lack of liberalism and political advancement as the defining feature of the reign or suggesting that the absence of major uprisings meant that Extract B offered the more convincing interpretation of the reign as a period of gradual modernisation and 'calm'.

Section B

Question 02

Although students were expected to know something about the liberal opposition to Tsarist autocracy in answering this question, the main focus was on the causes of the 1905 revolution and their relative importance. Clearly, the best answers showed a good understanding of what is meant by liberal opposition and they addressed the liberals' role in pressing for change and leading the discontent in 1905 directly. Some more pedestrian responses were less secure on what constituted 'liberal' opposition. Students often took this to mean any political opposition, both radical and liberal. This approach was credited (although not at the highest level) when students balanced their knowledge of opposition in general against other long- and short-term factors leading to the 1905 revolution. The better the argument and supporting evidence, the higher the mark.

Good responses evaluated the activities of the various strands of opposition, and the Tsar's reaction to these, with reference to the full period from 1894. They were then able to set the additional pressures of 1904/5 - the Russo-Japanese war, Bloody Sunday, the Potemkin mutiny and multiple strikes - in context. Weaker answers tended to start with the events of 1905, sometimes quite descriptively, and then failed to consider the longer-term pressures emanating from 1894 altogether.

It should be stressed that in this breadth study, it is important that students appreciate the need to cover the full period of the question. To address only one element of it is to supply a partial answer which, however well done, can never achieve high marks.

Question 03

There were many very good responses to this question from students who had a well-developed understanding of the position of the peasants as a result of the changes promised in 1905 and the strengths and failures of Stolypin's agricultural reforms. Most addressed the problems of agriculture - usually with respect to strip-farming and antiquated farming methods - within the general framework of their answers, although a few, equally acceptably, offered a separate section on this. Others ignored this aspect of the question, which meant that their answers were rather less well-rounded.

Good answers were well-balanced and generally argued against the proposition in the quotation. The limitations on private ownership and the continuation of rural poverty, exacerbated by a growing population, were usually cited as the reason for this. A few, however, tried to argue in favour of the quotation with varying degrees of success. Perhaps the most convincing took the view that, as the output of grain increased, agricultural problems were being resolved and the opportunities afforded by reform were well on the way to resolving the 'peasant-problem' by 1914,

even if more time was needed for a complete resolution. Whatever view was adopted, answers were credited according to the degree of substantiation offered in supporting the conclusion.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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