
A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2N Revolution and Dictatorship: Russia, 1917-53
Report on the Examination

7042
June 2022

Version: 1.0

Further copies of this Report are available from aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2022 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.
AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Question 01

Just over half of students achieved a mark in Level 3 for this question, with approximately 24% of students achieving a mark in Level 2, and a further 21% in Level 4. There were very few responses in Level 1 as almost all students engaged to some effect with more than one source. However, only 3% of students achieved a mark in Level 5. The main reason why some good answers did not access Level 5 is that, whilst balanced, they lacked a substantiated judgement on each of the sources.

The two key differentiators between Levels 2, 3 and 4 were the depth of contextual knowledge provided, and the precision of focus on the question. Weaker answers (L2) provided very limited supporting contextual detail, or provided descriptive detail that was not focused on the question. In Level 3, responses provided some effective contextual support but this tended to lack depth, and the focus on the question was not always precise.

Stronger responses tended to consider the provenance and content of the sources together, drawing links between them; for example, writing a paragraph explaining the strengths of the source in terms of both provenance and content, and following that with a paragraph in balance, explaining the limitations of the source. Many students adopted quite a formulaic approach to the task, writing a paragraph about provenance, then a separate paragraph about content (and possibly one on tone as well, although these tended to be rather descriptive in nature and not well linked to the value of the sources). It was possible to gain Level 4 with this more formulaic approach, however it did limit the qualities of analysis and evaluation in several answers, and was more typical of answers in Levels 2 and 3.

Source A

In terms of the content of the source, stronger responses were able to link Lenin's characterisation of the Provisional Government as bourgeois to their own knowledge of the make up of the new government, and then link this to the question through explaining the class divisions that existed within the Dual Authority. Stronger responses often linked Lenin's claim that the Provisional Government would not grant the 'liberties' they promised to the lack of land redistribution and the delaying of elections to a Constituent Assembly. However, such responses also achieved balance through observing that the new government did grant civil liberties, release political prisoners and abolish the death penalty, all of which counter Lenin's claim in the source. Balance was also achieved by many students through pointing out that Lenin's depiction of the Petrograd Soviet as 'weak' is not wholly convincing as they were able to exercise significant influence, e.g. through Order No. 1.

In relation to the content of the source, weaker answers struggled to focus on the question or provide specific contextual support. For example, several weaker responses latched onto the first sentence of the source about workers fighting against the tsarist monarchy and provided some contextual information about the February Revolution, however this was not relevant to the question. Likewise, weaker responses often drifted well beyond May 1917 and provided information about the Kornilov Affair and the October Revolution, neither of which are specifically relevant to the question.

In relation to the provenance of the source, most students commented on the date and the fact that Lenin was in exile when writing this letter. In the majority of cases, these points were used to suggest that the source lacks value to historians studying the Dual Authority from March to May

1917. Stronger responses linked the provenance and content together by pointing out that the letter laid the foundations of Lenin's 'April Theses', which caused a growth in support for the Bolsheviks after April 1917 and which consequently posed problems for the Provisional Government and the Dual Authority. However, in balance, many students also pointed out that Lenin was clearly writing for propaganda purposes, limiting the value of the source, and that the Bolsheviks were not particularly well-supported between March and May 1917.

Source B

Stronger responses were able to link the content of the source effectively to contextual knowledge; for example, the problems of the Dual Authority in relation to the war were linked with the resignations of Milyukov and Guchkov in May 1917. The ongoing issues of inflation, food shortages and land redistribution were also explained well in good answers. Many students used Soviet Order No. 1 as evidence in relation to this source as well, to support the claim that the Provisional Government was 'powerless'.

There was some confusion in several responses over the respective positions of the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet in relation to the war. Many students asserted that the Provisional Government wanted to continue the war and the Soviet wanted to end it. This was an over-simplification which caused some students difficulty in assessing the reference in the source that representatives of the Soviet should join the Provisional Government to keep the country 'on a war footing'. Some weaker students simply dismissed this quote as untrue, which was not an effective evaluation.

In relation to the provenance of the source, stronger responses were able to identify and explain the difficult position of the Petrograd Soviet in May 1917 and how the source reveals the delicate balancing act the parties of the Soviet were trying to achieve in continuing the goals of the revolution, whilst supporting the Provisional Government and a defensive war effort. Most students commented on the date of the source, considering it to be a strength in relation to the question. Weaker responses, often conflated Lenin's views with those of the Soviet and made links to the growth in support for the Bolsheviks up to October 1917. Such points were not effective in answering the question.

Source C

The strongest responses identified the main argument of Source C effectively, which is most clearly expressed in the first and last sentences of the source. Again, Soviet Order No. 1 was a commonly used piece of evidence to support the claim that the Provisional Government was 'timid' and that the Petrograd Soviet was always set to triumph. Contextual knowledge was also linked effectively, at times, to the difficulties facing the Dual Authority outlined in the source such as the 'increasing cost of living' and the food supply to the towns.

Weaker responses tended to take a more 'line-by-line' approach to evaluating the source content. This resulted in assessments which did not always focus on the question precisely; for example, the sentence on lines 3 and 4 regarding the breakdown of tsarism offering the prospect of immense social change was often not effectively linked to the focus of the question on the difficulties of the Dual Authority. As with sources A and B, there was also a tendency in weaker responses to provide evidence from well beyond May 1917, with many references to the October Revolution, which were not effectively focused on the question.

The provenance of Source C provided many students with sufficient opportunities to comment effectively. Stronger responses identified the potential issues of the influence of hindsight as well as the political affiliation of the author. Weaker responses were less effective at identifying these weaknesses and tended to focus on the potential strengths of the source, taking it more at face value. At the weaker end, there were quite a few generic comments on provenance, e.g. that the source provides ‘an outsider’s perspective’, which were not very effective or convincing.

Question 02

The availability of the Advance Information meant that the vast majority of students were well prepared for a question on Stalin’s rise to power. As a result, fewer than 2% of responses were placed in Level 1 and fewer than 11% in Level 2. Since most students provided a reasonable, or better, range and depth of supporting information, the key differentiator between Levels 3, 4 and 5 was the precision of focus on the question.

In Level 3, students often showed a recognition of the question by providing some information on Trotsky’s errors. However, sometimes this information lacked precision in differentiating between Trotsky’s ‘errors of judgement’ and his broader ‘weaknesses’. Level 3 answers also had a tendency not to revisit the precise focus of the question after providing a paragraph on Trotsky, proceeding to provide a more general assessment and explanation of Stalin’s rise to power thereafter. Level 3 conclusions tended to be rather brief and provide little more evaluation than saying that there were several factors behind Stalin’s rise to power before asserting which one was the most important.

Level 4 answers were more precise in identifying Trotsky’s ‘errors of judgement’ and also in providing more comparative assessment of the importance of these errors in relation to other factors, such as Stalin’s strengths and the weaknesses of other contenders. The most common line of argument, and an effective one, was that Trotsky’s errors were not the most important factor as he was only one of several leading Communists vying for power and, following his downfall, Stalin still had to eliminate Bukharin and the ‘Right Opposition’, which suggests that Stalin’s strengths were a more important factor in securing his rise to power.

Just under 9% of responses achieved Level 5. These answers were fully analytical in relation to the question, often linking Trotsky’s errors into every paragraph, to provide a sustained and coherent assessment of the relative importance of a range of factors. Substantiation of judgement in Level 5 responses tended to be provided throughout the essay rather than just in conclusion.

Question 03

Whilst clearly helpful to students, the Advance Information relevant to question 03 was a little more wide ranging than for question 02. As a result, some weaker students struggled to select from their knowledge the points that were most relevant to the question. Consequently, the average mark for question 03 was below that of 02.

Just under 23% of responses were in Level 2. These responses tended to be rather descriptive in nature, providing an account of collectivisation and the Five Year Plans without focusing effectively on the precise focus of the question regarding the quality of life of peasants and workers. Even Level 3 responses struggled to control descriptive content. Just under 40% of responses were in

this level. Whilst showing an understanding of the question, Level 3 responses also had a tendency to drift into description of Stalin's economic policies, providing a lot of statistics regarding industrial growth, which did not focus precisely on quality of life. Quite a few responses in Level 3 did achieve some balance, e.g. mention of the Stakhanovite movement as evidence of improvements for some workers, but this tended to be rather brief and undeveloped.

Just under 35% of responses were in Levels 4 and 5. These stronger responses focused much more effectively on the issue of quality of life and also provided more development and balance. For example, several stronger responses identified the Stakhanovite movement as potential evidence of improvements in the quality of life for some workers, but then proceeded to develop the analysis by explaining that this was largely a propaganda exercise and that the majority of workers resented the Stakhanovites for increasing labour norms and disrupting routine production.

There were a few students who adopted a different approach to this question by balancing the impact of Stalin's economic policies against other factors, such as terror, as the main cause of reducing the quality of life for workers and peasants in the USSR in the 1930s. This approach was credited as valid and some of these answers attained Level 4 due to effective evaluation and balance.

Question 04

The average mark for 04 lay between those of 02 and 03. As for the first two essay questions, this was to a significant degree, influenced by the nature of the Advance Information. Students were generally well-prepared for a question on Stalin's foreign policy and the international position of the Soviet Union after 1945, however weaker students struggled to control the descriptive content they had revised, whereas stronger students were able to select evidence from their own knowledge that was more precisely focused.

Level 2 responses tended to be rather narrative in structure and style. These often started in 1945 and provided descriptive content on the Yalta and Potsdam summits, which was not well-linked to the focus of the question on 1953. These narrative answers often proceeded to provide quite a lot of detail on the Berlin blockade and airlift, which again was not explicitly linked to the context of 1953. There was also a fair amount of description of 'salami tactics' in eastern Europe.

Level 3 responses achieved more of an effective focus on the question, however, they still struggled to control description and narrative in places, especially on the issue of 'salami tactics' as mentioned above. Level 3 answers also tended to lack some range and depth of content. Answers in Levels 4 and 5, were much more precisely focused on the context of 1953 and provided a greater range of supporting information. At these higher levels, there was some developed evaluation as to whether the response of the US and NATO to the USSR was a sign of the USSR's strength or weakness. Several responses in these higher levels also engaged effectively with the precise wording of the question, assessing whether the USSR was in a 'very strong' position or just 'strong', or indeed adopting an alternative word as a final judgement.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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