



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/1H Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855-1964
Report on the Examination

7042/1H
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Section A

Question 01

In this compulsory question, students are asked to read three extracts and assess how convincing the arguments put forward in each of these are, in relation to a given topic. On this year's paper, the topic was 'the reasons for the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II'.

Most students recognised that the key argument in Extract A was that the effects of the Great War brought about the end of Tsardom. However, after identifying this, too many proceeded to consider the extract line-by-line, commenting on what was written, with scant regard for how the sentence chosen related to the causes of Nicholas' demise. This approach led some, for example, to comment on the monarchy's refusal to 'admit to political power the industrial and professional classes', asserting that this was a reason for the abdication, without referencing what happened in 1905. Others spent too long in tangential debate on whether the October Manifesto offered 'a new opportunity to foster stability' or not. There were also a number of misreadings concerning the revolutionary threat faced by Nicholas in 1914, with some completely ignoring the earlier part of the sentence which stated 'it would be incorrect to deduce that...'

Able students, however, made good use of the references in the extract to the longer-term growth of tension and the diminishing support base on which the Tsar could rely, and such used their contextual knowledge of what happened in and after 1905 to good effect. Regardless of approach many answers produced some good comment on the effects of war on Russia. Well-rounded evaluations considered not only the political and military, but also the socio-economic effects of the war and linked these to the pressure on the Tsar to abdicate.

The extract's arguments were sometimes criticised effectively with respect to the inherent loyalty and patriotism seen at the beginning of the war which was still prevalent in some quarters in 1917. Some students also argued that, contrary to what the extract said, the breaking-point had been reached by 1914 and the war merely prolonged Nicholas' reign by a few more years. Less effective criticism focused on what the extract omitted, along the lines of 'the extract says nothing about what actually happened in 1917' or took issue with an unrelated statement such as the degree of stability in 1905, or whether 'absolutism gave way to constitutional monarchy'.

Students need to be reminded to link their evaluations closely to the question focus and not assume that everything written in an extract is 'an argument'. Constant and unthinking repetition of 'this makes the argument convincing' and 'this is unconvincing because...' does not help to make an answer any more effective. Very mechanical responses with one or two paragraphs in support of the argument followed by the same number challenging it can also be inhibiting. Sometimes a good but quite concise commentary explaining and upholding the extract argument was followed by a very lengthy but unconvincing attempt at criticism. In such cases the student would have been advised to devote more time to commenting on the argument's strengths whilst acknowledging relevant limitations more briefly.

Extract B focused on the shorter term causes of the abdication, particularly the part played by the ordinary workers and soldiers in February/March 1917. Although it acknowledged that socialism had been a potent force in Russia since the 1890s, it took pains to argue that the revolution that forced Nicholas' abdication proceeded without socialist leadership. Some weaker students missed this vital link and spent far too long explaining the rise of socialism, failed socialist activity and the evolution of Bolshevism. In some cases, this left no time to consider the extract's key argument. It also led a few to become completely muddled and to suggest that the abdication was brought about by a Bolshevik rising and the storming of the Winter Palace.

Those who had absorbed the full import of the extract were able to explain the position of the socialists by the beginning of 1917 and concentrate on how the workers' strikes led to a popular revolution which was given further impetus by the 'changed mood of the soldiers. Frequent reference was made to the soldiers' disillusionment in wartime, but the best answers were also aware of the soldiers' refusal to fire on the crowds in Petrograd in February 1917 – a development that was often contrasted with the soldiers' loyalty in 1905.

Valid criticisms were made as to how far such short term factors could explain the reasons for the abdication and here reference to earlier opposition was often used effectively. Plenty made the case that the events of February/March were not sudden and unexpected and that the reasons behind the abdication could only be understood from a long-term perspective.

Overall this was the least well-evaluated of the three extracts, possibly because students felt less secure about the events of February/March 1917 and perhaps because they saw the first four lines as providing openings for them to write about what they knew, irrespective of the question. Students do, therefore, need to be reminded of the necessity of reading the entirety of an extract before committing pen to paper and of revisiting the question focus as they move from extract to extract. This focus was much better acknowledged in responses to Extract A than those to Extracts B and C.

The key argument of Extract C was generally well identified. This extract stressed Nicholas' own responsibility for the impasse reached in early 1917 which left him with no alternative but to abdicate. Most students had something to say about his incompetence, lack of talent and what they often interpreted as his arrogance, as seen in the Extract argument. Such comments were sometimes over-stated and unduly one-sided, although better students offered a more nuanced appraisal.

Once again, a literal approach got students some way into an evaluation of argument, but did not afford the best route to a successful response. Long descriptions of the establishment of the Zemstva and the restrictions imposed by Alexander II and Alexander III, sometimes appeared in a misguided attempt to place the first line in context. There was more pertinent discussion of Nicholas' 'disregard for political change', however, and many students saw this as a springboard for a discussion of the limitations of the State Dumas, sometimes in considerable detail.

Most students were able to explain a variety of reasons why Nicholas alienated others. The better answers also recognised that it was the alienation of the politicians in the Duma, the generals in the army and, or to a lesser extent, the prominent opposition movements, that really mattered. The effect of the Tsar's move to the War Front, described in the extract as 'fatal' was generally addressed. This produced comments of varying depth on the effects of devolving power to the Tsarina and Rasputin, as well as undermining Nicholas' prestige in associating him with wartime failure. The link between 'running away from government' and the actual abdication was not as frequently stressed as might have been hoped, however, with a good number of students trying, somewhat unconvincingly, to suggest that Nicholas was so totally determined to uphold autocracy that he decided to abdicate.

Students may benefit from a reminder that each extract is assessed separately and a mark awarded, according to a generic mark scheme, on the basis of all three evaluations. The overall criteria used to assess answers embrace three distinct requirements: the understanding of the argument, the evaluation of that argument and the contextual knowledge used to support the evaluation. There is no need for an introduction or conclusion, setting the scene or summarising the three evaluations at the end. Furthermore, in order to meet the mark scheme requirements, an equal amount of time needs to be devoted to each of the three extracts. It was clear that some

students spent too long on unrelated and unhelpful contextual detail in responding to Extract A with the result that the response to Extract B was less developed and that to Extract C rushed and, in some cases, quite inadequate.

Section B

Question 02

This question on the popular topic of Alexander II's reforms produced a wide range of answers. Whilst virtually all responses had, at their core, some consideration of the strengths and limitations of Alexander's measures, what distinguished the better from the weaker answers was the degree to which the student engaged with the concepts of 'half-hearted' and 'effective'.

In the more limited answers the quotation terms were rarely mentioned save, perhaps, in the introduction and conclusion. It was therefore left to the reader to infer from the statements made whether the reforms were half-hearted and ineffective. By contrast, strong answers examined the concept of 'half-hearted' from a variety of viewpoints including Alexander's commitment to reform, the weaknesses inherent in the terms of his various reforms, the results in practice as opposed to in theory and the longevity of the measures. Good assessments of 'effectiveness' also considered 'effective for whom?'. Here, the best answers differentiated between different types of effectiveness: reforms that were effective in relation to the Tsar's or his advisers' aims, reforms that were effective for the maintenance of autocracy and reforms that helped bring about 'the common good', with reference to greater liberalism or greater freedom and equality in society.

As well as the degree to which responses addressed the words of the question, answers were also assessed according to the range of reforms considered and the students' recognition that some, but not all of these reforms were retracted in Alexander II's later years. As this question appears on a 'breadth' paper, some appreciation of the effectiveness of the reforms by 1881 was reasonably expected.

In a quotation question such as this, students need to be reminded of the need to shape their answers according to the key words given and not simply reproduce work they may have previously written on a similar topic. Several were keener to write about whether Alexander II deserved the title, 'Tsar Reformer' or not, than to discuss whether his attempts at reform were half-hearted and ineffective. There were also those who wanted to write about why Alexander II brought about a series of reforms and sometimes to describe the reasons for his later return to repression at more length than was justified by the question asked.

Question 03

Many students had a good grasp of Lenin's and Stalin's agricultural policies in the years 1917 to 1941. The majority approached the question chronologically and analysed each policy in turn with respect to its economic and social impact. This was a sensible approach although some responses suffered from too many stretches of narrative description with references to 'economic success and social failure' tacked on, somewhat mechanically, to the ends of paragraphs. However, those students who adopted an alternative method and tried to address the economic results of policies first and the social ones in the second half of the response found it more difficult to sustain an argument and generally produced rather repetitive answers.

Obviously, the key to a successful A level essay lays in its analysis. Knowing the detail of agricultural policies was insufficient in itself. The most thoughtful students spent time considering

what made an economic success, perhaps considering the actual output of grain, the diversification of farming, the feeding of industrial workers and the extent to which agricultural products could be used to boost national income. They also probed 'social failure' and often made a distinction between the resultant standards of living, contentment and quality of life, and the leaders' desire to promote 'socialism', meaning the communist drive for equality and co-operative living. While weaker answers often saw all policies as ending in economic and social failure, the better responses discerned change over time and recognised the improved situation, at least economically, by 1941.

This essay question, along with questions 02 and 04, was assessed according to a generic mark scheme that makes a crucial distinction between answers that are clearly focused on the question and those that show only a partial recognition of it. In this case the few answers that addressed industrial rather than agricultural policies, restricted their answers to the Stalinist years alone or only commented on the negative social impact of policies were deemed only partial responses. At the other end of the scale, those who were able to offer a substantiated judgement which drew on material from the whole question period and used it effectively to debate policy outcomes scored highly.

Question 04

This question focused on the extent of threats faced by both Stalin and Khrushchev from internal opposition. 'Internal' was used in the question to indicate threats from within the USSR, as opposed to threats from the satellite states or elsewhere in the world, although some interpreted 'internal' to mean threats from within the Communist Party. Such answers were assessed on their merits as valid attempts to answer the question but fully-rounded answers also made reference to the opposition emanating from cultural dissidents and, perhaps, other internal groups, such as the 1956 demonstrators in Tbilisi. The threat posed by external countries, for example the USA, was necessarily deemed irrelevant.

Most students were knowledgeable about Stalin's impregnability in his later years. They emphasised his cult of personality and his status as a Great War hero. Better responses also identified with his ever-increasing paranoia and considered the extent to which he was really threatened by those whom he presumed to be opposing his authority. Zhukov, Beria and the Jewish Doctors were frequently cited as 'presumed opposition' which he felt the need to deal with and more developed answers also considered the imposition of the Zhdanovshchina and its success.

Most agreed that Khrushchev faced more realistic threats than Stalin and although comparison between the two was not required, comments to this effect sometimes helped to show a student's understanding of the different context in which Khrushchev led USSR. Some were better able than others to analyse the threats posed by the different manifestations of opposition which Khrushchev faced from within the party during his rise to power and time in office. However, some spent too much time explaining how and why Khrushchev provoked opposition, describing his policies, both at home and abroad, rather than focusing on the extent to which his authority was threatened.

When included, knowledge about cultural dissidence and its more subtle form of opposition was usually good. Although it was generally considered far less threatening, at least in the short-term, a few argued, successfully, that what the cultural dissidents stood for was actually more threatening to the authority of Khrushchev and Communism in general than the internal party squabbles.

Again students should be reminded to look carefully at the dates and demands of the question. Weaker answers often wandered outside the period asked for to describe Stalin's purges and rule in the 1930s. Brief reference to this in order to explain the lack of opposition post-1945 was acceptable, but it was expected that the analysis of threat would focus primarily on the given dates. Furthermore, since both Stalin and Khrushchev were included in the question, it was expected that students would devote a reasonable amount of attention to each of them and not dismiss Stalin in less than a paragraph, concentrating on Khrushchev for the far greater part of the answer.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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