



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2N Revolution and Dictatorship: Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917-1953

Report on the Examination

7042/2N
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Question 01

The average mark for this question was a little below the average for 01 in previous years. The main reason for this was that many students did not have a range and depth of contextual knowledge about the experience of the Soviet people during the Great Patriotic War, nor did they have a very precise understanding of the events of the war in relation to the content of the sources. As a result, quite a lot of the supporting contextual knowledge deployed by students was generalised in nature, limiting marks to Level 3 or below.

As in previous years, the two main pitfalls into which several students fell were, firstly, to assess the provenance of the sources entirely separately from the content, thereby limiting assessment of provenance to generic and rather superficial comments. Secondly, many students again adopted a 'line-by-line' approach to assessing the sources, which caused them to overlook the main argument of the sources in relation to the question. Examples of this will be picked up in relation to the individual sources below.

However, 17% of responses achieved a mark in Levels 4 or 5. These stronger responses demonstrated an effective understanding of the provenance, content and tone of the sources in direct relation to the issue raised in the question. Answers in these higher levels also achieved some balance and judgement. To access Level 5, it is important for very able students to provide some substantiated judgement about the value of each source.

Source A

In relation to the provenance of the source, Level 3 responses tended to point out that Kravchenko fought in the USSR during the war and therefore he would have had good knowledge of resistance to the Nazis. In balance, Level 3 answers often pointed out that due to his defection from the USSR, Kravchenko may be 'biased' against the Stalinist regime, however these Level 3 answers did not develop this point further in relation to the content of the source. A less convincing point made by average to weaker students was that, as Kravchenko defected in 1944, he was not in the USSR for the whole war, therefore limiting his evidence.

Stronger responses in relation to the provenance of the source were able to link points about provenance to the content. For example, in identifying Kravchenko's antipathy towards the Stalinist regime, more able students often argued that he did not give enough credit to the impact of Stalinist propaganda during the war, as stated in the final line of the source. Stronger answers also pointed out that as a captain in the Red Army, he would have come into contact with partisan groups, resistance fighters and refugees, thereby lending his evidence greater credibility.

The 'line-by-line' approach adopted by several students – often resulting in a mark in Level 2 – can be exemplified by looking at the first two sentences of the source. Several students latched onto the phrase, 'had the Nazi invaders displayed good political sense', and immediately launched into an assessment of the weaknesses of Hitler's planning for Operation Barbarossa and the reasons for its failure. This content and assessment was not relevant to the question. Similarly, several students read the next sentence on collectivisation and then provided contextual evidence from the 1930s about how valid it is to argue that the peasants 'abhorred' the policy. Again, this assessment was not relevant to the question. It is very important for students to read the precise focus of the question and the whole content/argument of the source, before starting their assessment.

Stronger responses did provide more relevant and precise supporting context. There were references to the actions of the Einsatzgruppen and massacres such as that at Babi Yar in support of the main argument of the source about the actions of the Nazis inflaming Soviet resistance. Several more able students also pointed out that, at the start of the war, the Nazis enjoyed some support from the national minorities who had been persecuted by the Stalinist regime but that this soon turned when the reality of Nazi occupation became clear.

Source B

A key differentiator in relation to this source was the precision of students' contextual knowledge in relation to the siege of Leningrad. In Level 3, contextual support was often limited to general points about the number of civilians killed in the USSR as a whole during the war. In addition, further generalised context was provided in relation to the nature of Stalinist propaganda and censorship. Stronger responses – in Levels 4 and 5 – were able to provide more precise context often providing details about the siege of Leningrad such as the level of food rationing, the death toll in Leningrad itself and the reports of cannibalism.

Average and weaker students found it hard to achieve balance in relation to the content of the source. However, stronger responses did evaluate the claims towards the end of the source that Leningrad had been abandoned and ignored by the regime, and was merely exploited for propaganda purposes. These better answers were able to provide some contextual knowledge of the supply route across Lake Ladoga or the Leningrad Symphony by Shostakovich.

In relation to the provenance of the source, most students made use of the date, author, purpose and audience of the source to provide some balanced assessment. In Level 3, comments of this nature tended to be brief and undeveloped, whereas in Levels 4 and 5 the assessment of provenance was developed effectively, often taking into consideration the content of the source at the same time.

Source C

This proved to be the most challenging source for the majority of students. Many average and weaker students misunderstood the content of the source and assumed that the resettlement operation referred to was the moving of factories and workers to the east to save them from being overrun by the Nazis in the early months of Operation Barbarossa. Unfortunately, for many students who had provided a reasonable assessment of Sources A and B, this misunderstanding of Source C limited their mark to Level 2.

Stronger responses did recognise that the source is about the deportation of national minority groups, who had been accused of 'treasonous activities'. More able students were able to provide some supporting contextual knowledge in relation to other deportations carried out by the regime, such as the forced movement of Volga Germans. A few very able students were able to question how far this policy was a result of the Great Patriotic War and whether it was more of a continuation of the persecution of national minorities which the regime had begun in the 1930s and was to continue after 1945.

A further misconception which arose in relation to the content of the source was the reference to 'religious authorities'. Hardly any students were aware that the Chechens, Ingush and Tatars were Muslims. Instead, students sometimes questioned the value of the source on the basis that Stalin actually allowed greater freedom to the Russian Orthodox Church during the war. Alternatively, other students drifted into a broader assessment of Stalin's persecution of religion in general, providing evidence from the 1930s. Neither of these approaches was effective in answering the question, however, no students were marked down because of this as it was clear that very few had grasped the specific nature of the religious persecution referred to in the source. Ineffective attempts to analyse this aspect were, therefore, simply ignored.

students were more comfortable assessing the provenance and tone of the source and the vast majority were familiar with the name Beria and understood the nature of a secret telegram to Stalin. The more developed assessments suggested that Beria may have been trying to impress Stalin with his leadership and the efficiency of the NKVD, which was used to question the value of the source.

Question 02

This was the most popular of the essays, with around 90% of students choosing to answer this question. The most common approach was to balance the role of Lenin in 1917 against the role of Trotsky and the failings of the Provisional Government. Stronger responses demonstrated a good range and depth of contextual knowledge and drew effective analytical links between the different factors. For example, some students made analytical links between the impact of Lenin's leadership in building support for the Bolsheviks with the failings of Kerensky and the Provisional Government, and with the tactical leadership of Trotsky. A common analysis made in stronger responses was that Lenin created the political momentum towards the revolution – in both April and October 1917 – but that the failings of the Provisional Government and Kerensky were vital in providing the Bolsheviks with the opportunity to strike and limiting resistance to the revolution in October/November.

Level 3 answers often covered a similar range of factors but lacked some depth and precision to supporting factual information. For example, some Level 3 answers wrote about the importance of Lenin's return in April, but did not mention any further contributions made by him thereafter. Other responses were limited to Level 3 due to some imprecision of factual knowledge, eg around the specific events of the Kornilov Affair or Lenin's role in October. In particular, several students in Level 3 provided rather general details about the weaknesses of the Provisional Government in 1917, with some explanation of the impact of the First World War in creating social and economic problems but in a rather generalised context that went back to 1914, therefore lacking specific focus on 1917.

In Levels 1 and 2, it was rather disappointing to come across a number of responses that were confused between the February/March and the October/November revolutions. It is obviously imperative for an effective understanding of the course for students to be able to distinguish between the downfall of Nicholas II and the Bolshevik seizure of power from the Provisional Government.

Question 03

This was the least popular of the essay questions, being answered by 40% of students. It was also a question which generated the widest spread of marks. Those stronger students, who knew the topic well, were able to provide a good range and depth of supporting contextual knowledge covering the Civil War, the Comintern, Rapallo and relations with Britain. Such students were also able to engage analytically with the question and assess the extent to which the Soviet state was isolated in this period. Almost all students rejected the proposition that Communist Russia was completely isolated in these years, however there was a range of interesting evaluative judgements as to the nature and extent of isolation.

Students achieving Level 3 demonstrated an understanding of the question but the supporting contextual knowledge they provided lacked depth. There were more answers in Levels 1 and 2 for this question than for any of the others on this paper. Some students clearly did not have sufficient knowledge of the topic to construct an effective response. Some answers were limited to the Civil War period and little else. Others provided a lot of factual content on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which was not well linked to the question. Another fairly common limitation was the attempt by some students to argue that Russia was not isolated because Britain and France sent assistance to the Whites in the Civil War. This was, of course, not a valid point in response to the question on the isolation of the Communist regime in Russia.

Question 04

This essay question was answered by 70% of students. It is an open-ended question which invited a range of approaches in response. All relevant approaches were credited. For example, some students focused on the extent of change to the lives of peasants and workers experiencing the policies of collectivisation and industrialisation. Other students focused on changes to the lives of women and young people. Many students included a paragraph on changes to religion. Alternatively, there were responses which focused more on propaganda, culture and/or terror.

As usual, the range and depth of supporting contextual knowledge was the key differentiator between the levels of response. However, to access Levels 4 and 5, it was important for students to introduce an element of balance into the essay. Most students achieved this by comparing Stalin's policies with Lenin's from the 1920s to assess how much change Stalinism brought about in the 1930s. For example, several students argued that Stalin's persecution of religion was largely a continuation of Lenin's approach, whereas Stalin's 'Family Code' of 1936 was quite a significant shift away from the more liberal policies of the 1920s.

Weaker responses tended to be rather descriptive in nature and often drifted away from a focus on cultural and social aspects. For example, whilst content on the lives of workers and peasants was credited, factual detail on industrial production under the Five Year Plans was not. Likewise, it was possible to include points about Stalin's use of terror in the 1930s in a relevant way, but narrative accounts of the show trials were not effectively focused on the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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