



AS **History**

7041/2N Revolution and dictatorship: Russia and the Soviet Union,
1917–1929

Report on the Examination

7041
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Question 01

The sources and question were quite demanding for students due to the relatively narrow timeframe, however, the question did discriminate effectively and there was a full range of responses across all levels of the mark scheme.

The authors of both sources were clearly familiar to all students and the most common point made was that they would both be valuable as Lenin and Trotsky held senior positions in the government and would, therefore, know a lot about Russia's relations with the West. This sort of assessment was typical of Level 3 responses. Stronger responses were able to achieve some balance in relation to the provenance of the sources. This was more common on Source A as a good number of students pointed out that Lenin was using this speech as a propaganda tool to boost morale within the party and would, therefore, give an inflated impression of the prospect of revolution in the West and the weaknesses of the western powers.

It proved harder for students to assess the provenance of Source B in depth as Trotsky's motives and tone are quite nuanced. The most common points made were that Trotsky was quite bullish and confident in his responses to the foreign journalists, perhaps because the Bolsheviks had just won the Civil War. In addition, Trotsky was very dismissive of the West and some more able students explained effectively that could be due to the limited progress of Comintern in pursuit of international revolution by 1922. Some linked this to the emerging support for the position later described as 'Socialism in One Country'.

In terms of the content of Source A, students achieving Level 3 tended to take the source content at face value and argued that the source is valuable because what Lenin said is accurate. This was linked to some contextual knowledge, such as an awareness that the international revolution was 'developing slowly' in countries such as Germany, or that Comintern had been 'successful', eg in inspiring uprisings in central and eastern Europe. A lot of students also linked the description of the Bolsheviks as 'violators of all of the laws of God' to the general antipathy in the West towards communist ideology. Answers that moved towards Level 4 added more depth often through linking the comment on trade to the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement of 1921, or by linking the negative impression of relations between Russia and the West to the ongoing Civil War in 1920. Stronger answers achieved more balance to assessment by combining a range of the above points supported by precise contextual knowledge.

In relation to the content of Source B, weaker and average students relied rather too heavily on repeating or paraphrasing the source content. Weaker comments in relation to the question tended to be limited to arguing that Source B is more valuable as it has more details in, eg about the US and the Genoa Conference. Comments that explained the general hostility between Russia and the West as depicted by Trotsky were credited in Level 3, however more specific contextual support was needed to move above the middle of L3. The most common factual support offered in stronger answers was to refer to the Treaty of Rapallo, which led many students to argue that the source lacks value as Trotsky did not fully reveal the nature of Russia's relations with the West in 1922. The Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement was also used in a similar context. Stronger answers achieved more balance to assessment, often arguing the source is valuable for revealing Trotsky's ideology concerning the West in 1922 but less valuable in relation to the reality of some of the agreements that had been made between Russia and the West.

Question 02

This was by far the more popular of the two essay questions. There was a wide range of responses across all levels of the mark scheme, although mainly in Levels 3 and 4.

Level 3 responses demonstrated an understanding of the question usually through providing a paragraph on economic problems and a couple of paragraphs on the tsar's failings. The main reason why many responses were placed in Level 3, rather than higher, was that the contextual information provided tended to be rather general in focus. For instance, there were many explanations of Russia's economic problems going several decades back into the 19th century, which therefore lacked a precise link to February 1917. Content on the tsar's failings did not tend to be as general in focus but was often restricted to the years 1915 and 1916 with limited detail on the tsar's actions in February 1917. Most students in Level 3 offered points covering the tsar's decision to take personal charge of the army in 1915 and about the growing influence of Rasputin during the war. The most common conclusion was that the tsar's failings were the more significant reason for the February Revolution, although this often included some less convincing comment that the tsar was responsible for all of the economic problems too.

Stronger answers, in Levels 4 and 5, provided more precise contextual knowledge in relation to the events of February 1917. Therefore, there was reference to the protests against the bread ration and the strikes in Petrograd bringing hundreds of thousands of protestors onto the streets. In relation to the tsar's failings, stronger answers were able to comment on his dismissal of the Duma and his rejection of Rodzianko's telegram in February 1917. Such answers sometimes linked the tsar's poor war leadership with the decision of the army generals to abandon him in February, as well as the mutiny of the Petrograd garrison. Conclusions to the strongest answers sometimes argued that whilst economic problems brought the masses out onto the streets in protest, therefore initiating the revolution, it was actually the tsar's political failures that caused this to result in his abdication in favour the Provisional Committee who were, by 27th February, supported by the army leadership.

Several answers included paragraphs on factors other than the economic problems and failings of the tsar mentioned in the question. The most common additional factors identified were the First World War and the existence of opposition groups and ideologies. These paragraphs did not tend to focus effectively on the question and were not judged worthy of additional credit for answers which had already achieved Levels 3 or higher. Several students would have been better advised to spend the time used in writing about these additional factors to write in more depth about the two factors identified in the question, particularly to provide greater depth of contextual detail about February 1917.

Question 03

Although this was a far less popular question than 02, it was answered very well by most of the students who chose it. Stalin's motivation to win the power struggle was balanced against other factors such as the ideological motivation to create a more socialist economy, the weaknesses of the NEP and the need to catch up with the western powers industrially and militarily. Almost all students rejected the proposition in the question, arguing that Stalin had largely won the power struggle by 1928 and that his motivation was more influenced by one of the other factors.

In relation to the power struggle, this was an aspect that students clearly knew well. Some responses got bogged down in a bit too much descriptive or narrative detail on this factor, starting their explanation in 1924 and moving through chronologically to 1928/29. This was more typical of answers in Level 3. More

analytical answers, in Levels 4 and 5, used their knowledge of the power struggle to make a point in direct response to the question. This was usually that Stalin had already defeated his main rivals for power – Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev – in 1927 and had filled the party and Politburo with loyal supporters. Therefore, although the Great Turn helped him to defeat Bukharin and the Right, this was not his most pressing priority in 1928.

Many students demonstrated strong conceptual understanding of the NEP and its ideological compromises. This led to some arguing that, in 1928, the desire to move away from the capitalist elements of the NEP towards the more socialist policies of collectivisation and the Five Year Plans was Stalin's main motivation. This was sometimes combined with an explanation of the weaknesses of the NEP, including the Procurement Crisis and the limited development of heavy industry by 1928.

Some responses focused very effectively on the war scares and international developments of the second half of the 1920s, citing Pilsudski's rise in Poland and tensions with Britain as examples. This was sometimes coupled with an awareness of Germany's stronger ties with the western powers and developments in China. This led some students to argue that Stalin's main motivation for the Great Turn was to improve the USSR's strength in the international context of growing tension and threats to the USSR's security.

In achieving analytical balance between factors, as suggested above, many students answering this question achieved marks in Levels 4 and 5. The main differentiating factor between Level 4 and Level 5 responses was in how thorough and substantiated the judgement provided was. Level 4 answers tended to leave an overall judgement to the conclusion, whereas Level 5 answers built a coherent and substantiated argument from the start 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.