



A-level **History**

7042/2L

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

It is a truism that successful examination answers depend upon a secure knowledge of the specification and a clear understanding of what the question requires. The two are linked. Students responded well to the questions again this year and there were many examples of focused, thoughtful, and well-informed answers.

The compulsory sources question requires knowledge of the historical context, as well as the ability to understand and evaluate source material. The topic this year, the Corporate State, is prominent in the specification, and the ideas of Corporatism are central to Fascist Italy in the 1930s, with a national and even international impact in the context of the Great Depression. Contextual knowledge is required to understand and evaluate the sources, and students should ensure that they use the opportunity to show what they know related to the issue. As it is a compulsory question the expectations of knowledge are set at a reasonable level, but it is difficult for a student to progress beyond Level 2 if they were solely reliant on the information given in the source and the attribution.

Students are increasingly willing to link their discussion of the provenance of a source with the content, and to use the historical context to evaluate both elements. Often the key to the most successful answers is the identification of the purpose of a source, whereas less successful responses are still tending to accept the information in the source at face value. The evaluation of the sources is assessed across the whole answer, recognising that some sources are more balanced and so less susceptible to challenge.

The requirements of the essay questions were understood. The date ranges in 03 and 04 were well observed, although this proved more of a challenge in 02. Some allowance can be given for comment on events or issue which are a little outside the frame of the question, as long as the issue is made relevant to the question. However, some students discussing pre-war Italy are still borrowing heavily from the nineteenth century, with events such as the Banca Romano Scandal. It was evident that knowledge of the period from 1911 is stronger than the earlier years of twentieth century Italy.

The ‘given factor’ in question, of ‘Fascist opposition to Socialism’, was accessible to most, and this was the most popular question. Question 4 on the consequences of the war in Abyssinia, was the most successfully answered, though this was only marginal. Responses to this question used the period well. Events to 1939 were developed with an awareness of the consequential links to Abyssinia, with an inevitable and expected tapering of detail as those events became more remote in time.

Question 1

The sources were on the issue of ‘the Corporate State in Italy’, with a focus on the use of the corporations to involve or control the workers in the Fascist state, as well as more general references to the provision of welfare, the management of the economy, and the degree of worker support for Fascism. The sources were chosen to reflect a variety of provenances.

Source A was successful as an opening source. Students have become familiar with the nature of Fascist propaganda, and many were able to detect the purpose of Mussolini in making this speech. The wider context of the collapse of the ‘capitalist economy’ was recognised by many as a reference to the Wall Street Crash. The most successful answers challenged the claims that Mussolini was making, even pointing out that the Corporate State dated from 1925-1926 and so this linking to 1929 could be a relaunch. This was seen as evidence that the Corporate State had failed in Italy. Less successful answers

tended to take information from the source, about the founding of the corporations and the role of the workers, without effectively challenging the claims that Mussolini was making. In such cases the provenance of the source was commented on but not developed. The last line of the source, which makes the claim that ‘the mass of the Italian workers has come to support the Fascist Revolution’, could have been subject to more scrutiny.

Source B was recognised as a contrasting judgement from a critic of fascism. Students were ready to agree with many of the points made by Togliatti and commented on the context in which the lecture was made, which was regarded as a weakness of the source. There was some recognition of why Communists were interested in the fate of the workers in Italy and why they were in exile. More successful answers were able to challenge the claims of the source, suggesting that the achievements of the Corporate State were being overlooked, for example the protection of the workers from some of the effects of the Great Depression.

Source C was seen as valuable for giving an independent perspective, from a journalist who was able to make comparative comments. It was the most balanced of the sources. Those with good or very good contextual knowledge were able to support the judgement that the workers had lost the most under the Corporate State. There were thoughtful comments on Gunther’s claim that Mussolini had propped up the capitalist structure, though not by intention. Wider context was sometimes deployed to reflect on Mussolini’s relationship with the industrial elites. The content of this source was supported with reference to the fall in real wages in the 1930s.

Question 2

The question gave the students a framework for a balanced assessment of Italy in the decade before the First World War. Knowledge of the policy of ‘trasformismo’ is quite secure, although there is less acknowledgement of the electoral management that this involved. There is a misapprehension that there were established political parties such as the PPI in Italy in this period. Giolitti was recognised as a stable political element, with reference to the breadth of support for his social reforms. The consequences of the Libyan War, the extension of the franchise, and of the Gentolini pact in 1913 were deployed to suggest political instability. The economic situation of Italy was familiar, particularly the continuing north-south divide. Less successful answers showed an awareness of the issues of the period but lacked a secure chronology.

Question 3

‘Fascist opposition to Socialism’ proved to be a very successful route into an analysis of Mussolini’s rise to power. Good use was made of the time period, up to and including the March on Rome. The role of violence was recognised, and the importance of the contrast with the apparent ineffectiveness of the Liberal government. This was seen as helping the Fascists to build a relationship with the elites, and the support the Fascist received in the years to 1922 was acknowledged. Strong answers also commented in the importance of ideology, and the changes made by Mussolini to make Fascism more acceptable for government. Balancing factors included the weakness of the Liberal government, the mutilated victory and the economic problems after the war. The strongest responses saw links between the factors. Students are to be reminded that, in questions such as these, the ‘given factor’ must have some consideration. It is usually more successful to do this before ‘other factors’ are introduced, as this enables links to be identified and explored.

Question 4

This question focused on the consequences of the Abyssinian War in the period 1935 to 1939. The content of this period is familiar. The question enabled students to deal with ‘Mussolini and Italy’ as a single entity, or to distinguish between them as a means of analysis. Either approach was effective. The stronger answers offered an analytical framework by setting out a clear argument at the outset. The distinction between short- and long-term consequences was used, as was the overall view that the Abyssinian War represented a ‘turning point’ for Mussolini. The consequences were explored both domestically and in international affairs and good use was made of the period to 1939.

The answers showed good knowledge of the propaganda value of the war, the role of ideology, and the fulfilment of colonial ambitions. The negative economic consequences of the war are well known. Whilst some answers described events after 1935 with only a cursory examination of the link with Abyssinia, stronger responses explained the consequential ties, for example the economic and diplomatic dependence on Germany. There were good comments on the links to the radicalisation of the regime in the later 1930s.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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