



**General Certificate of Education  
June 2011**

**History 1041**

**Unit HIS2L**

***Report on the Examination***

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## Unit HIS2L

### Unit 2L: The Impact of Stalin's Leadership in the USSR, 1924–1941

#### General Comments

The overall response to this examination was quite positive, bearing comparison with last summer's examination, although the 'mean' or average mark last year was slightly higher, possibly reflecting the fact that there were probably two questions on this year's paper that candidates appeared to find relatively difficult compared to the others. Nevertheless, there were again many high-scoring scripts which demonstrated knowledge, understanding and the full range of analytical and evaluative skills. Answers were often lengthy, and candidates appeared to cope well with the time pressures of the examination, since there were comparatively few unfinished or 'rushed' answers. Most candidates seemed quite well prepared for the examination.

#### Question 1

- 01** In most respects candidates coped well with this question. Candidates found the sources accessible, since comprehension was good. Once again, candidates often proved skilled at answering this type of question, recognising the need to combine quite precise source analysis and evaluation with their own knowledge and understanding of the topic, this being the impact of Stalinism. Candidates recognised that there is a debate about the impact of Stalinism on the lives of the Soviet people, and that different factors came into play: propaganda, the use of terror, the impact of economic developments and so on. The best answers, as always, integrated source references with candidates' own knowledge effectively, rather than dealing with them as separate entities. Candidates recognised the different nuances of the sources, when considering how much the lives and thoughts of Soviet citizens were affected by Stalin's policies. They managed to find points of agreement and disagreement between the sources. Less successful were candidates' attempts to link the content of the sources with their provenance. Explaining provenance is not an essential component of these questions, although if it is addressed well, the material will be credited. However, most candidates take a simplistic view of provenance. Many assumed that the writers of these sources were subject to the same pressures as were Soviet historians, and would find it difficult to write 'unbiased' accounts. Comments about primary or secondary sources or 'revisionist', 'orthodox' or 'Western' historians are generally not helpful unless carefully explained in context. As in previous examinations, some candidates got sidetracked into simplistic evaluations of reliability, obsessed with whether one source was inherently more 'reliable' than the other, and so on.
- 02** Many candidates wrote good answers to this question, remembering both to use the sources and apply their own knowledge in their answers. Some candidates forgot the thrust of the question, writing accurate material, but not relating it sufficiently to the issue of how well prepared the USSR was for war. Others ignored the time constraints of the question, and wrote too much pre-1934 material, for example by focusing on the process of collectivisation. However, many answers were broad and balanced, considering a range of relevant factors such as the impact of the purges on both the army and on the general population, Stalin's personal qualities, and the impact of the Second and Third Five-Year Plans. Whilst historiographical knowledge is not expected, many candidates did appreciate that there are different interpretations of exactly how well prepared the USSR

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was in 1941, and the quality of supported analysis took many answers into Levels 4 and 5.

### Question 2

- 03** This question was answered better than any other question on the paper. Most candidates were very knowledgeable about Trotsky and the reasons why he did not become leader of the USSR: a combination of his own personal weaknesses and mistakes, circumstances, luck, the policies and activities of others. Answers did not have to be lengthy, just focused and analytical when answering this question. A few answers suffered by focusing too much on what Stalin did, and Stalin's personal qualities, in their answer. Whilst it was legitimate to cite Stalin's own qualities as a factor in Trotsky's failure to come to power, focusing too much on Stalin and not enough on Trotsky himself deprived some candidates of high marks.
- 04** This question produced the weakest response of all the questions on the paper. Although the period covered was clearly part of the specification, it appeared that many candidates just did not understand the 1920s Soviet economy in any depth. They knew the broad outlines: that is, they understood the context of the Soviet economy at the time of Lenin's death in 1924; and the fact that the economy operated under NEP. Although candidates are not expected to know pre-1924 material, many did explain that NEP had been brought in to counteract the disastrous consequences of War Communism, and they were credited for this. However, actual knowledge of the period 1924–1928 was often patchy. Candidates were usually more secure on agriculture, showing an awareness of the discrepancies between the success of kulaks and poorer peasants. Many wrote about this period as being a 'golden age' for the peasantry, ignoring the fact that there was a lot of peasant dissatisfaction at Bolshevik rule, long before Collectivisation became an issue. Many answers virtually ignored industrial developments, and candidates did not seem aware of the issues affecting Soviet state-controlled industry, such as gross inefficiency and heavy subsidisation. Therefore although candidates could often legitimately write about the debate amongst the Communists about NEP and the need for industrialisation and a major economic change, answers were often either very thin or else inaccurate on the detail. Some candidates ignored the dates in the question and wrote at length about Collectivisation and the Five-Year Plans, perhaps because they felt on safer ground. The economic aspects of NEP are treated less fully in some books than the period of Stalin's economic Revolution. However, there is good material available on both the rural and industrial economies under NEP in books such as Brovkin's *Russia After Lenin* and Alec Nove's economic history, and candidates should be better prepared for questions on this period of Soviet history.

### Question 3

- 05** Although this question was not answered quite as well as the equivalent Question 03, there were a lot of solid responses. As indicated above, most candidates had some understanding of the issues in agriculture during the NEP period, and were credited for knowledge of related economic, political and social factors, all of which concerned the authorities: the fact that many peasants were reluctant to release grain on to the market when prices were low; the fact that the regime had to resort to requisitioning under the Urals-Siberian method; the fact that many peasants were disillusioned with the regime; the fact that Stalin and co did not regard peasants as good Communists; the fact that the Left believed that agriculture had to be radically changed if the USSR were to industrialise and progress to Socialism. Candidates were often secure on these and other issues. What were not credited were answers which ignored NEP and wrote about the effects of collectivisation, which were evident *after* 1928.

- 06** Of the three 24-mark questions on the paper, this question produced the best response's and certainly much stronger answers than those in response to Question 04. Many candidates were very knowledgeable about the First Five-Year Plan and were able to write in detail about its achievements and those parts of the Plan that were less successful. There were, however, a number of errors: for example, several candidates wrote about the Stakhanovite movement, which took place *after* the First Plan. Some answers strayed into the Second and Third Plans; and some answers wrote good descriptions of the First Plan, but did not make much of the comparison with the situation in 1928 in order to make an overall evaluation. However, generally there were many high-scoring answers.

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