



History 7042
Additional Specimen Question Paper 2T (A-level)
Question 01 Student 1
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

Specimen answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 2T (A-level): Specimen question paper

01 With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these sources to an historian studying Gorbachev's reforms within the USSR

[30 marks]

Student response

With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these sources to an historian studying Gorbachev's reforms within the USSR

Source A is of value to a historian studying Gorbachev's reforms within the USSR as it comes from Gorbachev himself. Not only this, it was also printed in 1987 at the time when he was beginning his reform programme (having come to power in 1985) and is published in a prestigious party newspaper, *Izvestia*. The fact that it is a published source could limit the honesty of Gorbachev's words (despite the comment that 'we are saying this honestly'), since it would be trying to convince its audience, which would be the population of the Soviet Union who, because of censorship, would have little choice but to read official party papers. It would also need to be written in a way not to offend other party members and with a view to political advantage. However, for a first hand account of the situation at a crucial time of change in the USSR, its value would be hard to match.

The tone adopted in the source is defensive. Gorbachev wants to 'put an end to rumours and speculations' and this would corroborate what is known of the turmoil created by Gorbachev's ideas of 'Glasnost' -allowing discussion and criticism and 'perestroika' -seeking reconstruction of the state and its economy. It is also argumentative but intended to be reassuring to the party faithful, as in 'those who hope that we shall move away from our socialist path will be greatly disappointed'. Gorbachev is clear and assertive about what communism stands for and the future -as in 'it's my conviction that the human race.....' and 'it means promoting universal human values'. The overall emphasis here is on the maintenance of communism -generally referred to as 'socialism' and this is stressed to combat all suggestions, such as spreading in the West, to the contrary.

The content of the source is valuable for the historian in appreciating the context in which Gorbachev was trying to carry through change and in understanding his own convictions. He sees communism as fully compatible with 'more democracy' and 'promoting human values' (which would be contrary to western ideas) and, perhaps naively thinks that it is possible to carry through a programme of perestroika and establish such principles 'within socialism'. In view of the break-up of the USSR in 1991 - just 4 years later, a historian can assess how Gorbachev proved unable to handle his own reforms and actually failed in his declared ambitions. This, however, is to take his words at face-value. If they were merely meant to lull the fears of his opponents, then they would be subject to a rather different interpretation. This could only be assessed through the study of further source material.

Source B also comes directly from Gorbachev and has consequent value as a speech from the Soviet leader whose reforms are being studied. Since it was given at the opening of the Soviet party Conference, however, it is likely to have been much influenced by the need to both reassure and convince the audience of important party members, which must have included those with traditionalist

views - whose attention may have been jolted by the reference to 'outdated notions and formulas'. The date, in the middle of 1988 helps the historian to see how far Gorbachev's confidence and ideas have progressed since 1987 (represented by Source A) and, coming 3 years before the collapse of the USSR it shows just how much change perestroika was bringing at this stage.

The tone is confident and determined. Gorbachev is not afraid to speak out and challenge his audience. He talks of 'radical solutions' and 'vigorous and imaginative action'. Past practices are described as a 'vicious circle' and he ends with a direct call to action - 'we have no right to permit perestroika to flounder'. The emphasis in this speech is on action to bring about the type of reforms Gorbachev believes in. He is both exhorting his comrades to support him and making veiled threats about the future if they do not. As such it conveys the mood of the leader at the time very clearly.

The historian would learn from this source of Gorbachev's commitment to more democracy within the USSR - through the representation of workers in the highest level of government. He sees this as essential to enable economic restructuring to take place. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of these words. Gorbachev failed to take his party with him in his economic reforms and knew the only way to bring about change from the centralised planned economy was to get the workers on-side in central government.

Source C is rather different from the previous two sources in that this is an outsider's view. Whilst it is clearly the work of an 'expert' (Chair of the political science department at Kearney State College USA) who would, no doubt, have gone to some lengths to examine what was happening in the USSR under Gorbachev, it is not of the same direct value as the words of Gorbachev himself. No doubt Magstadt wrote to inform the American public - and it is likely, most particularly aimed his work at US academics and the American government, all of whom, at the end of 40 years of 'Cold War' were most concerned about developments in the USSR. However, this is in itself a limitation. The American writer and audience have learnt to be distrustful of the USSR - as seen in 'democratisation has been superficial up to this point' and the reference to 'whether Gorbachev is serious'. This is therefore not a truly balanced account.

The tone of the source is guarded when it comes to an assessment of Gorbachev's reforms. Whilst the author is prepared to admit 'Gorbachev is no doubt sincere', it is also sceptical about his ability to achieve change and, rather gloomily suggests 'glasnost could end as abruptly as it began'. The author has his own opinions and is prepared to state them quite unconditionally, as in 'Gorbachev must get the Soviet workers behind perestroika'. As an American academic he is in no doubt as to the value of democracy but the overall emphasis of the source is on the difficulties still ahead if Gorbachev is to effect his reform programme and there is an underlying feeling that this might well all prove too much.

In terms of the content, the source provides the historian with additional evidence of the failure of democratisation and perestroika before the 1989 elections, although it does offer a glimmer of hope in mentioning that 'occasional dissenting voices' have been cast in the Supreme Soviet. The source would be of particular value when compared with the picture post-elections, which would indeed confirm Gorbachev's commitment and 'honesty' although it offers limited material for an 'understanding of Gorbachev's reforms' as such.

Commentary - Level 4

The answer is very strong in its assessment of the provenance and tone of each source and how these link to the value of the sources. Comments are generally perceptive and thoughtful. It is much less convincing an answer when assessing the content of each source and how this affects value and there is limited deployment of contextual knowledge to challenge or corroborate the content. It is, then, an

unbalanced answer, strong in two areas but lacking in the third which limits the response to Level 4.