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History

Paper 1H (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 01 Student 2

Specimen Answer and Commentary

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## **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 1H (AS): Specimen question paper**

**01** With reference to these extracts and your understanding of the historical context, which of these two extracts provides the more convincing interpretation of the reforms of Alexander II between 1855 and 1881?

**[25 marks]**

#### **Student response**

Extract A suggests that Alexander II's reforms were some of the greatest changes Russia had ever seen and were life changing for the majority, however his change in policy was much more dangerous than he could have ever known. I agree with the extract and believe it gives a convincing interpretation for it highlights the importance of the emancipation ukase. This enabled over 20 million serfs their freedom and welcomed the birth of an almost middle class, the kulaks, which boosted the Russian economy and led to agricultural advancements. Serfdom had been abolished in the rest of Europe in the Middle Ages and had Alex II not abolished it in Russia, they would never have been accepted on the world stage by the liberal west. Secondly, the extract recognises the changes made to the government and justice system. In 1864, Alex introduced the Zemstva which was a local council chosen through electoral colleges that controlled welfare systems and this meant that the priorities of each individual area could be considered rather than considering the empire as one big area where everyone was the same. The members were elected which meant that the peasants could also have more control over who would control their villages, a much more liberal way of control. In 1864 there were also many judicial reforms such as the formation of local councils for minor offences and district courts for major offences, both with properly trained lawyers and much less corruption. The accused were also allowed to see a judge and employ a defence team. Finally, the extract is convincing because it mentions the change in Alex II's attitude to his reforms and I know from my own knowledge that towards the end of his reign, he became much more reactionary and this was a dangerous move. After the assassination attempt in 1866-1880, Alex II replaced all his ministers with staunch reactionists with strong conservative views who wanted to purge the ideas from the west and foreign influences. The church regained control of education from the zemstva and censorship was tightened. Shuvalov, head of the 3rd section, increased the spread of the department to suppress those who rejected these new policies. This brought about uprisings and opposition as well as more assassination attempts.

However, I also disagree that this extract gives a convincing interpretation of the reforms of Alex II because it fails to comment on the limits of the reforms. I know from my own knowledge that despite the local government reforms (the introduction of the zemstva and the Duma), the nobility still dominated and they didn't want to help the peasants at all and despite the judicial reforms, the police were still amended to fines and bribery and there were still secret 'special' / corrupt courts for political crimes. Secondly, the extract fails to comment on the limitations of emancipation, such as the redemption payments which were imposed on the peasants- 49 annual payments at 6% interest. None of the peasants were allowed to leave the Mir until they and paid off their redemption payments and due to the fact that these payments were unaffordable for most, there were very few peasants who actually received their full freedom.

Overall, the source is convincing as it highlights the drastic changes Alex did make however it fails to comment on the limitations of some of these changes.

Extract B suggests that Alex II's reforms were of little importance and had little effect on Russia, leading only to the Russian revolution as they were nothing more than empty promises. I agree with the source and believe it is convincing as it suggests that it was the defeat in the Crimean War that triggered Alex to want to reform Russia. I know from my own knowledge that this is true because Russia suffered 4 times the number of casualties as the Turkish army did due to the fact that their army was a conscripted serf army and many of the soldiers didn't want to fight for Russia. They didn't have the right equipment and adopted a backward thinking approach. There had been an industrial revolution in the west meaning the birth of new weaponry and Russia hadn't modernised at the same pace. Alex knew change was needed if Russia were to become a world power. Secondly, the source highlights how autocracy never really change under Alex's reforms. I know this is true from my own knowledge as there was no social mobility and the tsar still had total control. No proper middle class was formed and the nobles remained loyal to the tsar and the peasants loyal to the nobles. Finally, I agree with the sources comment that the reforms didn't live up to expectations. The government still relied on heavy indirect taxation of the peasants as it made up 66% of government revenue, the army was still unprofessional and only just managed a victory in the Russo-Turkish war against the sick man of Europe and the tsar couldn't fully commit to the reforms and gave up in 1866. He wanted to preserve social ruling but also wanted to westernise, two contrasting ideals.

However, I think the extract is limited as it fails to mention how the reforms did allow new upper low class to be formed, a sign of social mobility. The kulaks made up of the 2 million peasants that had been granted freedom from the Mir and were able to move across the empire were entrepreneurial and encouraged foreign investment, boosting the economy. The intelligentsia expanded and they formed a sort of 'middle class' which showed that the autocratic regime was weakening as there were people who were educated and willing to question the tsar. Secondly, the extract doesn't comment on how the emancipation ukase was a great achievement for the peasant population. They gained their legal rights, their marriage bans were cut along with their land bonds and they were free to travel. The peasants became independent after years of being slaves to the empire.

Overall, the source is convincing as it highlights how the reforms of Alex II were not as revolutionary as some may expect, however it does have several limitations as it fails to comment on the achievements he did have such as the emancipation of the serfs and it also fails to identify how the traditional autocratic regime was beginning to change.

In conclusion, extract B is much more critical of Alex II and his reforms than extract A. I believe that it is a mixture of both extracts that give the most convincing interpretation of the reforms in Russia during this time as extract A highlights the importance of the emancipation ukase and the importance of Alex's liberal ideas and westernised thinking and extract b comments on his inability to make these reforms effective and ultimately, the fact that it led to the later Russian revolution. Whilst Alex did try and modernise the Russian empire for the greater good with undeniably some success, his lack of confidence in this bold move led him to back out at the last minute and cause a growing opposition to the tsarist regime of Russia.

### **Commentary – Level 3**

This is not a strong answer. Its assessment of Extract A tends to be exaggerated, assertive and not always accurately corroborated and its assessment of Extract B is not wholly appropriate in identifying what the overall interpretation of the Extract actually is. Overall, the answer is too assertive

with appropriate supporting knowledge and, very importantly, does not reach a clear conclusion as to which is the more convincing interpretation.

There are a number of stylistic features in this answer which need to be avoided: phrases such as 'I know from my own knowledge that this is true' lack objectivity and balance, and also the use of 'Alex' rather than Alexander, which is minor, but not unimportant.