



History

Paper 1H (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 01 Student 3

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0 26/02/16

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 has been written in favour of Alexander II and his reforms. "And put an end to a thousand years of Russian slavery" This is a very strong opinion and shows that the author of the extract strongly believes that the reforms worked perfectly and made the Tsars authority well known and made the Tsarist regime stronger. However I know from my contextual knowledge that this definitely wasn't the case. The emancipation reform was one of the worst reforms Alexander II actually brought into action. It technically meant that "Russian slavery" was brought to an end as the emancipation meant that all peasants achieved their freedom. It meant that they could marry without the acceptance of the courts and it meant they could move whenever and wherever they wanted. However this was only on paper and in reality most of the peasants were actually worse off. All peasants now had a 49 year debt which in most cases meant that the debt would be passed onto their kin as Russian peasants life expectancy was less than 49 years. They also lost their common land and their whole way of life was changed, they couldn't hunt and take fruit and vegetables off the land they lived on anymore. And ultimately they were upset they were promised freedom and given hope which never actually fell through successfully, which meant there was more chances of peasant revolts. This makes the article less convincing as in the article it talks as if the emancipation reform worked perfectly and was completely successful, however I know that this wasn't the case. "He reformed Russian life by changing the justice system" this again wasn't the case whatsoever. There were some good things about the judicial reforms however this reform simply didn't work, along with the local government reforms. The local government reforms were a complete disaster, the zemstvo that was introduced did work in some towns however they were only introduced in a very fair few. And the towns they were introduced in hated it. The peasants hated the fact that nobles had more control over them and the peasants also didn't trust the nobles which ruined the idea of the zemstvo. The judicial reforms didn't work because there was still so much corruption due to the fact that there were still separate courts for the nobles and the peasants. This again makes the article a less convincing interpretation of the reforms as I know that these reforms didn't work how they were supposed to and in some ways are completely irrelevant as they simply were not successful. Also the article is less convincing as it is very bias, the author of it clearly is pro-alexander II "he was the greatest Tsar" this isn't a fact, it is a complete opinion meaning the article is less convincing as it is not all facts.

Extract B has been written against Alexander II and his reforms. "No plan behind the reforms" even though this isn't entirely true it does have a point. The reforms were quite sudden and instead of introducing them slowly to make more of an effect instead they happened very suddenly which caused more corruption and is a route reason for the reforms being failures. "Alexanders reforms satisfied no one" this does make the article less convincing as it shows bias, it did satisfy some of the

nobles however this is mainly true. No peasant was happy with the reforms, they were given hope and their hope was crushed by Alexander shortly after. Even many of the nobles, which gave the Tsar most of his power were badly affected by the reforms. As well as the peasants the noble's livelihood was taken away, they no longer had to care for their land and sell the produce they were given money which meant that many nobles wasted their money away as they had no responsibilities. The reforms were a disaster none of them worked apart from the military reform however this reform didn't help peasants and didn't help rid of autocracy towards a more equal country it only benefitted the Tsar and his regime.

Overall Extract B is more convincing. This extract is more truthful and although biased just like extract A it does show the more honest version of what happened. The reforms were not a success like extract A claims, none of them worked other than the military reform and they all ultimately were an important reason for revolutionary groups, revolts and eventually Alexander II's assassination. Extract B is mostly correct in what it says, they were "conceived, enacted and administered" in a bad way and they didn't help anyone other than the Tsar himself, however in many ways they made it worse for himself too because it meant he had more to worry about. More revolutionary groups began plotting against him as they wanted full reform, there were more threats of revolts and people actually did have more freedom due to education reforms and the removal of censorship meaning it was easier to disagree with Alexander. Therefore extract B is more convincing as ultimately it is the more honest article.

Commentary – Level 3

Overall, this is not an effective response, even though there is relevant deployment of knowledge of context to challenge the interpretations. First, it does not entirely understand the interpretations that are advanced in the extracts, especially the balance that actually exists in Extract A in its last sentence, which the answer ignores. Careful reading of the extracts is required. Secondly, there is rather too much exaggeration in the challenge that is made and some distortion of the historical context as a result. It was not the case that the reforms 'were quite sudden' or that local government reforms were 'a complete disaster'. Thirdly comments about bias and 'truthfulness' distort the nature of this exercise, which is to comment on interpretation without these assumptions, especially of 'bias'. Given that the response is relevant and that knowledge has been deployed, this would be a low Level 3 response.