



History

Paper 1H (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 02 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

02 'Tsarist authority remained strong in Russia between 1881 and 1904.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

The Russian tsarist dynasty of the Romanovs had endured for over two hundred years, but there were signs of discontent in the latter part of the 1800s; revolutionary activity was occurring in more places than ever before and there were more outright attacks on lords and people in power than there had ever been in the Russian police state (where there no political freedoms and the police could rule over the people). The fear that the Tsars had used to control their people was beginning to crumble. However, the new Tsar, Alexander III had begun to crack down on the populace with more reactionary (meaning looking back and removing liberal ideals) policies. Despite this, Russian Tsarist authority was weakening between 1881 and 1904, ultimately culminating in the 1905 Revolution.

In agreement with the statement, Russian tsarist authority could be said to have remained strong due to the violent acts that dominated the policy of Alexander III. He was a traditional Tsar who believed he had been specially selected by God to lead Russia through this difficult phase in her history. He wanted to ensure that he upheld the beliefs of his forefathers, in as much as the attitude that peasants (they had been emancipated from serfdom under his father's reign) were subclass citizens whose only goal should be to serve their Tsar. His Orthodoxy (the state-sponsored religion of Russia) also encouraged him to belief in Russian supremacy and spurred on his vicious anti-Semitism; he organised a series of pogroms against the Jewish minority in Russia from 1881-1885. The Jews had already been confined to a singular area (The Pale of Settlement) and were now being rounded up and killed with a state-organised series of attack, with the Holy League being responsible for the majority of it. This group of thugs was a militia with state and court support, allowing them to go unpunished for their crimes. This show of power by the Tsar helped him prove to the people who still controlled Russia and made them fear and respect the awesome power at his disposal. Alternatively, it could be said this weakened the tsar, as his horrendous treatment of the Jews made many of them turn against them and towards revolutionary groups, with Marxist groups being the most popular. The increase in revolutionary activity meant that despite his violence, this measure had weakened the tsarist authority.

Furthermore, the tsarist authority remained strong due to the Russification Alexander III practised. He believed in a specific 'Russian race' and did not accept the minority groups which had always been a part of the Russian Empire since they were annexed by Catherine the Great. Countries like Finland were prevented from using their own language and had to begin to circulate roubles instead of their native currencies, in order to conform to the wishes of the state. There were also similar decrees made in the Baltic German region in the south-west corner of the Empire. These people had always had preferential treatment by the Romanovs, and to suddenly have their national identity taken from them in favour of Alexander's (Napoleon inspired) "national ideology" caused a great deal of

discomfort amongst the people. The show of power and forced belief in Orthodoxy and Russian tradition kept the tsarist authority strong as there was only one unified ideal allowed, and it conformed to the Tsar's personal opinion. However, the removal of local customs amongst the fairly well-off people of Germany and Finland led to anger, and many of the richer people became part of the ever-growing intelligentsia (a class of educated people who wished for political reform) and were planning for a revolution, so overall the authority was weakened.

In disagreement with the statement, proof of the weakness of tsarist authority in 1881 was proven by the assassination of Alexander II in 1881; the ultimate sign that authority had been lost. The Tsar had been the target of a number of attempts on his life during his reign for his lack of reform (despite his label as the 'reformist tsar') in the eyes of his people, and in 1879, a radical revolutionary faction called The People's Will declared that he either abdicate, or they would condemn him to death. Alexander ignored the threat, but The People's Will followed through and in 1881 the Tsar's carriage was on its way towards the Winter Palace when it was attacked by four revolutionaries who threw bombs at the Tsar and his escort, killing a number of Cossacks (the Tsar's personal guard) and ultimately the Tsar himself. This kind of outright and clear revolution would not have been possible unless there had been a weakening of authority; if it had been earlier in the period they would not have got close to such an important person, but by 1881 tsarist authority had weakened so much that he was lucky to have lasted as long as he did.

In further disagreement, tsarist authority was on the decline due to the increasing size of revolutionary groups. There were a number of growing factions all united by their hatred of the tsarist autocratic system (whereby the tsar was the unrestricted ruler with no limit to his power). One such group were the Narodniks, or Populists, who believed that revolution lay in the hands of the people and that the peasant commune was the only way Russia would develop into the nation of the future. They organised the 'Go to the People' campaign, where intelligentsia would go to the villages and attempt to incite revolution amongst the peasants. This failed, as they were still blinded by propaganda and their religious faith in Alexander, but the fact there were thousands taking part in a unified anti-tsarist movement proved how significantly the tsarist authority had weakened.

Overall, tsarist authority weakened between 1881-1904, with assassination and increasing opposition size being the main causes. The people, despite subjugation, were making their anger heard and even when they were attacked specifically (as the Jews were) they fought back and hit out against the tsarist authority that they were taught to adore. This lack of respect for the Tsar increased exponentially and ultimately led to revolution in 1905, which was very near to deposing the Romanovs.

Commentary – Level 3

The answer begins with generalisations that lack balance, but then does attempt a relevant analysis. This, however, lacks range. The assessment of Alexander III is good, if somewhat narrow, but it does illustrate the power of the Tsar. There is no assessment of the post 1894 period and whilst there are references to the growth of opposition, the examples cited pre-date 1881. The lengthy paragraph on the assassination of Alexander II is overly descriptive. This is a low Level 3 answer.