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History

Paper 2H (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 2H (AS): Specimen question paper

**02** 'It was the actions of the Paris Parlement that forced Louis XVI to agree to call an Estates-General.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

### Student response

The Estates-General was called in May 1789 because many people were facing hardships due to financial problems in France. Paris Parlement and many others demanded that an Estates-General should be called in order to solve the financial crisis, food prices were soaring due to poor harvests, manufacturers had outdated machines which meant that they lagged behind their European rivals, and also, fighting in many wars in the 18th century meant that war debts were extremely high too.

Paris Parlement forced Louis to call an Estates-General because they made the situation worse by not accepting tax reforms by finance ministers like Turgot and Calonne. These finance ministers both wanted to introduce tax reforms by taxing the first and second estates as well as the third; however because Paris Parlement is filled with mostly nobles who lived in the past and believed in the three estates system and an absolute monarchy when these ideas were proposed Paris Parlement was extremely unhappy. This caused the king to dismiss these finance ministers and replace them which led people to believe that the king was indecisive and incompetent, especially when he dismissed Jacques Necker who was seen as a national hero throughout France due to the *compte rendu*, which they eventually discovered was a fake document that made people believe that France's economy was doing well. Many people who were part of the Paris Parlement were Assembly of Notables, when Calonne called them to meet they weren't convinced that the financial situation was bad enough to need reform, due to the *compte rendu*, therefore they didn't support the ideas of tax reform. Later, when Brienne published the government accounts to highlight the situation they felt that the government was incompetent and protested against reforms, as a result they called for an Estates-General which showed a breakdown in trust of the government, Brienne faced the same opposition when he turned to Paris Parlement who stated that they were an assembly of citizens who would speak for the nation and stood as a guardian of rights against tyranny. When Brienne forced his legislation through by using a *lit de justice*, Parlement declared the session null and void, declaring only an Estates-General could approve tax changes, this meant that the king was under a lot of pressure from important groups in, therefore I would agree with the view that they forced Louis XVI to call for an Estates-General, by refusing to endorse tax reforms, it made the financial situation worse until the king had no choice but to call for an Estates-General.

The views and actions of Paris Parlement also encouraged similar activity within provinces. The Day of the Tiles was a revolt in Grenoble on 7th June 1788 and can be viewed as one of the first signs of civil unrest before the revolution began. This was sparked by Brienne's attempt to abolish Paris Parlement in order to create new taxes to deal with the financial crisis, this meant that the third estate would have to pay more tax, coupled with high food prices and the fact that the first and second

estate were exempt from tax, this encouraged people to hold a meeting to discuss the situation, to which the government responded by sending troops to the area to stop them. This shows that the actions of Paris Parlement have encouraged more people to become politically active, and due to enlightened beliefs, they wanted parliamentary and societal reform to move France forward. This shows that the different estates are working together to stand up to the king, increasing the pressure on him to call for an Estates-General because the situation was worsening for the third estate and they were becoming desperate for change, shown by the day of the tiles. It is also the first time divisions in society are clearly shown which clearly shows that different estates are asking for reform for different reasons, something which I know to be true as the cahiers written for the Estates-General in the lead up to May 1789, had differing grievances shown by different estates, and also one of the first times that people want to stand up against royal authority. This shows that it was the actions of Paris Parlement that forced Louis XVI to call an Estates-General because they encouraged other people to stand up for their rights and call for reform.

However, the king couldn't be forced to do anything as he is able to undermine any actions that Paris Parlement want to take by using a lit de justice. It can be argued that Paris Parlement played no role in forcing Louis XVI to call an Estates-General. His decision stemmed from the fact that his finance ministers had failed to gain any support from the people of France due to the ideas they proposed to the Assembly of Notables and Paris Parlement were opposed because it would mean that the first and second estates would lose their privilege. He is also able to dissolve Paris Parlement and pass laws without a vote, which is what he tried to do to raise new loans for France's increasing debt. He also made the decision to call for an Estates-General because of war debts that had accumulated since France's involvement in the American War of Independence which was putting a further economic strain on France which would mean that taxes would need to be raised which would make the third estate more desperate to reform and may lead to revolt, which was true because they did this on the Day of the Tiles. This would encourage the king to call for an Estates-General because he would want to keep the peace however he would also want to sort out France's finance and the obvious way to do this is to tax the first and second estate. Therefore the king would be more inclined to call for an Estates-General to meet with everyone and sort out France's finance. The king would also be more likely to call for an Estates-General because Louis was an indecisive king who always tried to keep everyone happy, this would mean that when people wanted reform he would be more likely to comply and call for an Estates-General.

The reason the Estates-General was called by Louis was because of the need to reform the tax system, this was because only the third estate was taxed which created tension between the estates when the financial situation worsened and the third estate were struggling to afford supplies because they paid at one point 88% of their wages on a loaf of bread. The need for tax reform was also because the intendants and tax farmers were often corrupt and took lots of the money they collected for themselves rather than handing it all over to the government, this meant that the government weren't receiving the money they needed to make the financial situation better. The Estates-General was also needed because in the 1780s France's economy had fallen behind its European rivals, the agricultural industry stagnated leading to famine, and the mechanical industries lagged behind its European rivals with France having 8 cotton mills compared to Britain's 200. The calling of the Estates-General can be argued as the only way to solve the tax reform issues, regardless of what Paris Parlement wanted to do.

To conclude, I believe that the reluctance of Paris Parlement to cooperate with finance ministers and encouraging people to demonstrate for reform was a factor as to why Louis XVI called for an Estates-

General in 1789 however I also think that doing this was the only way to sort out France's financial problems, and the declaration of bankruptcy that ultimately forced Louis XVI to call for an Estates-General.

### **Commentary – Level 3**

This has the potential of a good response, in that there is some range to the answer and there is a generally effective conclusion. The answer does not meet the potential for a number of reasons. The introduction is weak: the Estates General was not called because 'many people were facing hardships'. The assessment of the Paris Parlement is conflicting: the answer seems to suggest that it was both reactionary and progressive and this is a weak aspect of the response. It is not clear also, whether the view is that the three Estates worked together or not. In places the answer assertive and it is not good practice to move from past to present tenses. It is a Level 3 response.