



History

Paper 2H (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 02 Student 3

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0 05/01/16

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 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 actions of the Paris Parlement were key to the calling of the Estates General. While the Paris Parlement didn't share power with Louis XVI, it still managed to force him into a position where he was more willing to accept the idea of giving power to the Estates General.

The Paris Parlement made tax reform impossible for the king, saying that only the Estates General could register taxes. On the 6th of July 1787, Brienne forwarded the 'Subvention Territoriale' and 'Edit du Timbre' for registration. The King attempted to use the lit de justice in order to force it through Parlement, however the Paris Parlement declared the order was null and void, claiming only the Estates General could register taxes.

This was a problem for Louis XVI, as it gave him very few options. He needed to reform taxation in France in order to deal with the rising debt, and the only way he could do that was if he got the Paris Parlement, or the Estates General, to register the taxes. He could give in to the demands of Parlement and call the Estates General, which is what he ended up doing, however this went against his ideas on absolute monarchy. Another option open to him was to try to persuade or even coerce the Paris Parlement into giving into his demands, which is exactly what he did.

After being exiled the Paris Parlement negotiated for the withdrawal of the Edit du Timbre, and for the general land tax to be modified to exclude the lands of people of title. In return they offered to register any further specific loans. However, when the Parlement was allowed to return on the 20th of September, Brienne proposed an 'Emprunt Successif', successive loans, which would effectively give the King a blank check. The Parlement delayed and when confronted by the King, they refused to register the successive loans.

This gave the King no other choice than to look for other routes to take to pass tax reforms, and while Brienne attempted to use the Plenary court to register his edicts, they only met once. The only other option for the king was to call the Estates General, in hope that they might pass tax reforms.

The Paris Parlement was able to push its agenda of the calling of the Estates General by effectively waging a cold war against Louis XVI, by using the very little power it had, it was able to give him little other option, by declaring orders null and void, and by delaying meetings. Showing Louis XVI that he would not get tax reform through the Paris Parlement forced him to call the Estates General in 1789.

However, perhaps not all the credit should go to the Paris Parlement, as in fact it could be said that the calling of the Estates General was a given. With France in so much debt from its involvement in

various wars, such as the American Revolution, the problem was reaching crisis point, so with this in mind I think it is important to remember that these problems with debt had been growing since the reign of Louis XIV, and that it was only a matter of time until power would have to be given to the Estates General in order to bring about tax reform, which was catalysed by the Paris Parlement's actions, pushing the King to action.

The weakness of King Louis XVI should be considered also. He sacked more competent ministers, who knew what needed to be done, but lacked the support of the King, such as Turgot, and eventually ended up with Necker, who really only worsened the situation for Louis XVI and any minister that followed after Necker, mainly due to his Comptes Rendus. Had Louis XVI supported his ministers from the start, and had done what was necessary to achieve a general land tax, institutions such as the Parlement would not have been able to seize an opportunity as they did at a time of crisis.

Also, pressure from the first estate would have been important in forcing the King to call the Estates General, as the King would have to give them a say in the matter, if he wanted to avoid clashing with the church, which was the basis of his power, as he was supposedly chosen by God to rule. If he had tried to force Land tax without consulting the church, he would have had major problems. This also goes for the second estate.

Another factor to consider is the revolting and violence that was taking place in areas such as Rennes, armed protest swept the kingdom, for instance on the Day of Tiles. The situation for many was becoming dire and the king's lack of success as well as his tyrannical portrayal, meant that he was becoming very unpopular. This would have encouraged the King to go with the wishes of the people, in fear of a revolution occurring.

All in all, it was the Paris Parlement that really forced the King into calling the Estates General, but they could only do this because of the economic pressure of the time, the attitudes of the first and second estates and the revolts taking place. Louis XVI needed to bring through reforms to taxation to fix the economic crisis, but to do so he would most likely alienate the basis of his power, the first and second estate, unless they agreed to pay the taxes. This gave him little other choice than to give in to the demands of Parlement and call for the Estates General.

Commentary – Level 4

There is a clear and well supported assessment of the role of the Parlement, if occasionally overstated or unclear. This is an important strength of the answer, although what 'waging a cold war' actually means is not developed. The arguments against the central importance of the Parlement are less effective and less well developed and not always convincing, but the answer does have range and is invariably relevant. It is a lower Level 4 response.