



History

Paper 2N (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 01 Student 1

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 2N (AS): Specimen question paper

01 With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, which of these two sources is more valuable in explaining why Trotsky failed to win the power struggle?

[25 marks]

Student response

Trotsky failed to win the power struggle for a number of reasons some that relate to Trotsky himself like his arrogance, the mistakes that he made in underestimating Stalin and his policies, while other factors include Stalin's own political power base that he cultivated, the mistakes and miscalculations of others and an element of luck. Both sources appear to suggest that Trotsky might have failed due to his personality and arrogance, but Source A is considerably more positive about Trotsky, while Source B seems to imply that neither Stalin nor Trotsky were suitable to rule alone and therefore provides a more valuable view of not only why Lenin felt Trotsky was unsuitable, but also would explain how Stalin was still able to seize power if the testament was not published.

Source A is valuable in explaining why Trotsky failed as although it demonstrates the characteristics that would make Trotsky an attractive and serious contender, when making reference to him being "authoritative and compelling" with a "consummately skilful" written style and "the superior orator of this revolution", the source also appears to suggest that Trotsky wanted the role too much as it was the role that he "desired all his life", appearing to suggest that he was power hungry. However, as Source A appears to focus on the positive aspects of Trotsky and so suggests that the main reasons why Trotsky was unsuccessful must lie with other factors because Source A suggests that Trotsky should be the natural choice to succeed Lenin. Instead, therefore, other factors such as Stalin's superior control of the party due to his positions like General Secretary that he had held since 1922 which led to Trotsky increasingly receiving a hostile reception at conferences from 1924 onwards. This allowed Stalin to defeat the United Opposition in 1926 and then expel Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1927, therefore ending any chance of Trotsky defeating Stalin, regardless of his own desirable personal qualities as referred to in Source A.

Therefore, Source B would appear to be more valuable than Source A as it helps to illustrate what the flaws of both Stalin and Trotsky were. Lenin argues that he was unsure that Stalin would be able to exercise his power "with sufficient caution" and also that Trotsky "displayed excessive self-assurance". The criticism of two of the most significant potential leaders suggests that one reason why Trotsky was unsuccessful was that Lenin did not want a single leader and instead had a desire for collective leadership. Furthermore, as Source B shows the weaknesses of Trotsky and in the other parts of the Testament the weaknesses all the main rivals it is extremely valuable evidence to show why this encouraged Trotsky and other potential challengers to Stalin to suppress the statement in May 1924. This proved to be hugely important in preventing Trotsky from being successful as it helps to explain why the party conferences remained loyal to Stalin regardless of Lenin's concerns about him, and therefore leading to Trotsky being defeated and removed from the party later on.

However, Source A is also valuable because its purpose appears to be to glorify Trotsky and to

suggest that he would have been a more effective leader than Stalin went on to be. The tone is therefore extremely flattering of Trotsky, however, this could be considered to be slightly inaccurate. This is because although he was skilful, he was considered to be aloof and arrogant, treating Bolshevik colleagues with disdain. This would have led to his lack of success as he was left without a great deal of support within the party to challenge Stalin. This would have led to his “authoritative” nature referred to in Source A as a hindrance in any attempt to win power. Therefore, as Source A appears to fail to identify these flaws in Trotsky because of its purpose, Source B appears to be the more valuable source in helping to show why Trotsky was unsuccessful.

Therefore, Source B is more valuable because Lenin had a clearer purpose. Lenin wanted to try and give an indication as to who he felt was most suitable to succeed him and the style of leadership that he preferred. This meant that the tone of Source B is more honest and balanced than the exaggerated and flattering tone of A. Source B’s purpose is also to try and ensure unity, which Lenin felt might not be possible if Trotsky or Stalin were to lead alone and so Lenin was keen to warn that a “split may come unexpectedly”. This helps to explain why Trotsky failed as it may have also encouraged Trotsky to avoid creating a split. For example, Trotsky did not like the business of political in-fighting and making alliances. This then meant that when Stalin had not acted in the same way, but had initially formed the triumvirate in 1924 to isolate Trotsky and then allied with those on the right in 1926 against the United Opposition in 1926 that Stalin was able to remove Trotsky and his supporters, therefore helping to explain why Trotsky failed to win the power struggle.

However, Source A is also valuable in regards to its perspective. The source was written by Victor Serge who supported Trotsky. This is valuable as it shows the aspects that Trotsky’s supporters found appealing about him. This is valuable as the author supported the Left Opposition who failed to defeat Stalin in 1926 and therefore, this suggests that the view held by Serge was not common, or at least not influential within the party, thus helping to explain why Trotsky was unsuccessful. Furthermore, the source is valuable as it is written in 1937 and as result this was written at the height of Yezhovshchina (1936-1938). As this was written by someone who opposed Stalin in his rise to power and was written at a time when the party was being purged, the qualities of Trotsky might be exaggerated, therefore, potentially limiting the value of Source A in comparison to Source B in explaining why Trotsky was unsuccessful.

Therefore, Source B is more valuable as it shows the judgement of the existing leader, writing in a private document about two of the most significant individuals seeking the leadership that he knew personally. Although Source A was written by someone who was close to some at the top, like Zinoviev, Lenin knew both Trotsky and Stalin well and knew both of their flaws. This therefore means that Source B gives a very valuable and honest insight into the qualities of both men and as Lenin could find fault in both, but especially in Trotsky, it helps to explain how Trotsky failed to become leader. Furthermore, as the source was written in 1922 after the Civil War, this is valuable as even though Trotsky had proved himself to be a highly effective military leader during it, and helped the Reds to defeat the Whites, this still did not remove the concern that Lenin had that Trotsky was unsuitable to lead alone, and that Lenin was prioritising unity within the party at a time when the country itself remained divided. Therefore, Source B is extremely valuable in showing that Trotsky was unsuccessful as Lenin favoured a collective leadership, rather than a single leader.

Although Source A is valuable in explaining why some felt that Trotsky was a very strong contender for the leadership and helps to illustrate the views of his supporters, Source B is considerably more valuable as it provides a more honest and balanced appraisal of Trotsky, as well as Stalin, and helps to show that Lenin feared the impact that either would have on the party and country should they lead

alone. Therefore, showing that the most important reason why Trotsky failed, was that Lenin favoured a collective leadership, but also that the failure to publish the testament allowed for Stalin to exploit the situation to Stalin's benefit and Trotsky's cost.

Commentary – Level 4

The answer has a number of strengths, in that it reviews the arguments and content of the two sources by deploying knowledge of context; it comments on tone and provenance and seeks to reach a clear conclusion throughout the answer. There are, however, issues about the structure of the response which require comment. It would have been more effective to consider provenance, tone and content of each source separately as part of a single assessment rather than review them in a less structured manner. Some of the arguments in relation to provenance, especially in relation to Serge are not fully convincing, but there is an attempt at balance. Not all relevant contextual factors are fully developed. Given the strengths, however, this is a solid Level 4 response.