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History

Paper 2N (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 01 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 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

Source B is more valuable than Source A in explaining why Trotsky failed to win the power struggle as it focuses on the power Stalin's role as Secretary-General of the party gave to him. In contrast, Source A emphasises Trotsky's great strengths as a leader, giving little indication as to why he ultimately failed.

The content of Source B, an excerpt from Lenin's Last Testament which provides an analysis of the characters of Stalin and Trotsky, increases the value of the source. Both men are praised as "outstanding leaders," but with considerable faults. Stalin's role as Secretary-General of the Party is emphasised as Lenin says this role gave him "unlimited authority," but worries that Stalin might abuse this power. Indeed, Stalin did use his role to manipulate others in the power struggle from the very beginning, when he tricked Trotsky into not showing up to Lenin's funeral in 1924. He also used his role as Secretary to ensure that the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Party Congresses were packed with his supporters, meaning that Trotsky lost on key policy debates about the end of the NEP and Socialism in One Country. Source B furthermore describes Trotsky as having "outstanding ability" but also as having "excessive self-assurance." Indeed, many Bolsheviks saw Trotsky as arrogant and even questioned his loyalty to the party because of the rude way he treated other high-ranking party members. In 1924, despite agreeing on many points of policy, Zinoviev and Kamenev attacked Trotsky for his Menshevik past. Trotsky in turn published an essay called Lessons of October, in which he accused them of disloyalty to Lenin during the October Revolution. This was exactly the sort of "split" that Lenin worried about Trotsky's character causing in Source B. Therefore, Source B is valuable for explaining why Trotsky failed because Lenin's assessment of Stalin and Trotsky's characters accurately predicts many of the events of the power struggle of 1924-1929.

The tone of Source B further supports its value, as it is very even in its assessment of Stalin and Trotsky resulting in an accurate evaluation of the two contenders. Both are given praise for their qualities and criticised for their weaknesses. The provenance of the source also supports its value as by the time Lenin wrote his Testament in 1922 he had worked closely with both men for many years and observed how they acted in their respective positions of authority. That said, Lenin wrote his testament after suffering a series of strokes, hoping to control the kind of government that would take over after he died. In his testament, he praised and criticised each of the potential new leaders, not just Trotsky and Stalin, but also Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Bukharin. Lenin wanted there to be a collective government through the Central Committee, not a dictatorship by a single individual, and therefore took great pains to point out everyone's potential failings. Nevertheless, despite this aim, overall, because of Lenin's knowledge of Lenin and Trotsky and the tone of the source, this is a valuable source.

Source B is therefore more valuable than Source A in explaining why Trotsky failed to win the power struggle as it correctly identifies the fact that Trotsky's arrogance often alienated other Bolsheviks and that Stalin was likely to abuse the power his position as Secretary-General gave him. Although Lenin over-emphasises the danger of a split in the party, writing only a year after passing the Ban on Factions, his assessment of the two men was proved correct by the events that followed his death.

Source A, in contrast, focuses on Trotsky's great strengths in comparison to Lenin, limiting its value in explaining why he lost the power struggle. Trotsky is described as "authoritative and compelling" and praised as "the superior orator of this revolution." This is particularly striking as Lenin, the great leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, is described as "unassuming." Indeed, Trotsky's main supporters were the soldiers of the Red Army, which he had led during the Civil War, and the younger members of the party, particularly students, who were impressed with his passionate speeches and writings on communism. However, these traits also served to alienate a large portion of Bolsheviks, who saw Trotsky as arrogant and dismissive. His opponents gave Trotsky the nickname "the Red Napoleon," implying that his unwillingness to work with others was going to lead to him becoming a dictator, like Napoleon had during the French Revolution, instead of ruling collectively like Lenin had wanted. Furthermore, Trotsky's brilliant speeches did little to help him in the Party Congresses of 1924 and 1925, when the audience was packed with Stalin supporters and delegates. Therefore, source A's excessive focus on Trotsky's strengths limits the value of the source.

The tone of Source A further limits its value, as it is highly flattering of Trotsky. He is described as "superior" and "consummately skilful." This uncritical view of Trotsky gives little indication as to why he ultimately failed to win the power struggle. Indeed, Trotsky saw himself as superior and above the political intrigues that Stalin was so good at. Trotsky failed to criticise the suppression of Lenin's Testament and also failed to appeal to his supporters in the wider party after losing the vote at the Thirteenth Party Congress, which undermined his position from the beginning of the power struggle. Source A therefore presents an unbalanced view of Trotsky, praising him without acknowledging his weaknesses and mistakes.

Source A was written by Victor Serge, who had aligned himself with Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev's Left Opposition in 1926. As a highly ranked member of the Bolsheviks, as well as a colleague of Zinoviev's during the war, Serge was able to speak authoritatively about the characters involved in the power struggle. The source was furthermore written in 1937, long after Stalin won the power struggle (Stalin's power was secured by December 1929) and Trotsky was exiled from Russia. Despite this, Serge writes in the source that the time had been right for Trotsky to seize power – "the hour he had awaited, foreseen and desired all his life." This view, perhaps typical of one of Trotsky's supporters, is undermined by the fact that Trotsky had, by the time the source was written, entirely failed.

Source A is therefore less valuable than Source B for explaining why Trotsky failed to win the power struggle due to the fact that it is overly flattering of Trotsky's abilities and fails to acknowledge how those abilities were matched by an arrogance that ultimately led to Trotsky's failure.

Overall, therefore Source B is more valuable than Source A for explaining why Trotsky failed to win the power struggle as Source B's analysis of Stalin's strengths and Trotsky's weaknesses, despite being written before the power struggle began, is almost entirely supported by the events of 1924 to 1929. Trotsky's ultimate failure in the power struggle was largely due to his view of himself as above dirty political fighting, while Stalin repeatedly abused his power as the Secretary-General of the party to manipulate and eliminate his opponents.

### **Commentary – Level 5**

This is a very good answer. It assesses provenance, tone and content clearly and deploys accurate and relevant knowledge of context to challenge and corroborate the sources. There is a clear judgement throughout which is supported by the assessment of the two sources. Although it may be possible to raise some concerns about the judgements made about provenance, especially in relation to A (value does not necessarily follow from the fact that Lenin knew both men), the answer is persuasive and clear and is a Level 5 answer.