



History

Paper 2N (AS) Additional Specimen Question
Paper

Question 02 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): Additional Specimen question paper

02 'The fall of the Provisional Government in October 1917 was entirely due to its own failings.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

The Provisional Government that took power on the 27 February 1917 was an unelected, illegitimate government of middle to upper class men; of professors, freemasons and millionaires. Their collective experience of governing was limited, and faced the challenge of 'dual authority' – sharing the Tauride Palace with the 'Petrograd Soviet'. The Prime Minister; Prince Lvov, had no connection with the starving, democracy-hungry masses of Russia and the lack of opposition groups in the government to the largely liberal majority undermined the Provisional Government's claim to represent Russia.

One factor in the fall of the Provisional Government was the hypocritical and dangerous programme it set out for itself, that included immediate amnesty for all political prisoners; immediate abolition of religious, national or social privilege and more. This allowed such extremists as Lenin back into Petrograd, who were given rapturous public receptions and who helped to increase the political temperature of the city. The introduction of extremist party leaders into the city of urban discontent, also changed the atmosphere of the city, and politized the citizens of Petrograd. The government attempted to appease workers through the grant of an eight-hour day, but the shadow of more conscription for the war hung over its every action. Henceforth, there were storms of protest in Petrograd; armed soldiers and workers fought the supporters of the war on the streets. The Soviet Order Number One also contributed to a lack of legitimacy in the government's decisions- the Soviet's strict instructions to the masses held an assumed dominance over the Provisional Government's instructions. This disenchantment with the government was entirely due to the inexperience of the ministers – and therefore we can observe that this lack of trust in the Government was entirely due to its own failings.

Moreover, following the coalition with the Soviet and plenty of other compromises to prevent an uprising, came a stream of events that contributed to the lack of respect for the Provisional Government. In April 1917, in order to maintain food supplies from the allies – Russia was forced to open the Eastern Front and try to attack Austria; furthermore, splitting and defeating the Germany Army. However, this attack failed and as a result: desertion increased heavily, with women having to be used, in some cases, to defend Russia. The Government was so preoccupied with the War Effort, that it failed to deal with the multitude of social and economic issues. Such social and economic issues were the 'Land Question'; in which the peasants needed land but the Government delayed inquiries and told citizens to wait for the Constituent Assembly. Moreover, the peasants seized the land, and were politized in a yearning for political change. This began the peasants and workers' demands for a revolution, due to the failings of the Provisional Government to effectively run Russia.

Such following events as the public riots of July Days had a large effect on the Provisional Government, as even though the Government used it to illustrate the riotous nature of the Bolsheviks and their supporters, it showed the public hatred of the Provisional Government. However, the Kornilov Affair had a more significant part to play in the downfall of the Provisional Government. In August 1917, the Government could not stop Russian General Kornilov, when he tried to seize Petrograd – and therefore called in the Bolsheviks (those which they had previously imprisoned), armed them and called on them to defend Petrograd. Not only did this show the absolute indecision and lack of power of the Provisional Government – but it also showed the dominance of the opposition parties such as the Bolsheviks. This dominance was shown in the Soviet (in which the Bolsheviks had a majority) also, so that the Bolsheviks had a tight control over the Provisional Government. Trotsky and his control over the Military Revolutionary Committee effectively gave the Bolsheviks complete control over Petrograd, both mentally and physically. The Provisional Government was not a factor to consider in obtaining this control because it was so weak, indecisive and reliant on the Soviet at this point. This was not all the Provisional Government's fault that their dominance had slipped but, at the same time, it was not the solely the Bolsheviks who contributed to the public hatred of the Provisional Government.

In conclusion, I agree with the claim that the fall of the provisional government of October 1917 was entirely due to its own failing, because we can observe from the historical evidence that if the Government had made better decisions and represented the public – there would not have been such disenchantment with the actions of the Government, and thus there would not have been a revolution. It is also worth considering that the Provisional Government was only meant to serve the purpose of holding government, provisionally and therefore, realistically, was not designed to hold government as well as legitimacy for years and years. However, it was expected to guard Petrograd responsibly, and make representative decisions in the mean time between governments – and it failed absolutely in that respect.

Commentary – Level 3

This is a forcefully argued answer, but has a number of weaknesses. Most importantly, it lacks balance, not developing any assessment of the extent to which other factors were important to the fall of the Provisional Government. A balanced assessment is of central importance in answer to these questions. The argument is also over stated and contentions: what, for example, was 'hypocritical' about the early decisions of the Government and were the people so 'democracy-hungry'? The answer does not develop, at all, the critical assessment of the impact of dual power and becomes inaccurate towards the end.

The answer, given the critical lack of balance, is low Level 3.