



History

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

02 'An era of positive social change.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view of social developments in Brezhnev's years of power in the USSR.

[25 marks]

Student response

The Brezhnev era did bring social change, much of which was positive. He wanted Soviet citizens to be as prosperous as those in the West and to produce more for consumers. However, not everyone in Russia benefitted, it differed between regions, genders and social groups. There was still less freedom for the people than in most western countries but life did get better.

During his years in charge, the minimum wage was increased and there was less of a gap between urban and rural workers. Pay on the collective farms increased so the social condition of workers there began to catch up with industrial workers. This was important as the state still directed the labour force and there had been big differences between town and country living standards. Average earnings rose by about 50% in the early part of Brezhnev's rule and continued to increase in the latter years, although not quite as much. There were more holidays for workers and shorter working hours. Workers were also allowed trade unions and working conditions improved. It was possible for skilled workers to earn more and then use those earnings to buy the latest consumer goods. There was greater job security and unemployment was almost unheard of. There was also help for the unemployed through social benefits and other subsidies.

All of this meant that the average worker did benefit from improved conditions and pay. Brezhnev also improved living standards by improving housing and by offering subsidies for food and heating. More people moved to the cities for work and this in turn led to an improvement in services. There was an increase in the availability of consumer goods and workers had the money to buy these items. Sales of cars, televisions and white goods such as fridges increased so many people benefitted with improved housing and services. There was also improved access to better quality food. There was plenty of meat, fish and vegetables due to improvements in agriculture and the increase in sales of fridges helped to keep food fresher for longer. The improved diet of the average Russian meant improvements in health and in turn this helped to improve production. Living standards were definitely much better for most Russians, especially in the major cities.

However, the changes were not all positive and many in Russia continued to live in poor conditions. There was a disparity across the regions with many rural areas remaining underdeveloped. There were shortages in many areas and food had to be rationed. Most farming was still done on collectives that were often inefficient. Poor distribution and transport meant shortages in some regions whilst crops rotted in the fields. So whilst in some regions conditions did get better, in others they stagnated or declined.

In some industries there was a shortage of labour whilst in other areas there were not enough jobs for those with professional qualifications. Education had improved but people were gaining qualifications that did not lead to a better job. There were few opportunities for many who had high expectations but were disappointed. Women still earned less than men and were more likely to be in unskilled jobs. So many professionals, rural workers and women did not benefit from Brezhnev's social reforms.

There were new problems created by the rapid growth of cities. Poor infrastructure led to pollution and damage to the environment. This led to an increase in diseases like TB and forms of cancer. These problems were made worse by the outdated health service. Brezhnev spent much of the budget on defence and foreign policy leaving very little for hospitals and other medical services. Hospitals were in a poor state and were often badly run and supplied. There was also a decline in the birth rate and more children died in infancy. The death rate for Russian adults also increased.

There were social problems caused by harsh living conditions and stress amongst many workers. Alcoholism was common and added to the pressures on health services. There was an increase in domestic violence linked to alcohol and the divorce rate increased. There was also an increase in homelessness and vagrancy.

So whilst there was positive improvements in social conditions under Brezhnev, there remained many problems and not all the Russian people benefitted from social development.

Commentary – Level 5

An effective response, focused, relevant and balanced with judgements made corroborated by reference to developments. It has considerable range and effectively considers both sides of the argument. It may be slightly undeveloped in places and may be occasionally assertive, but this is a very effective AS answer of Level 5 quality.