



History

Paper 2T (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 03 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

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

03 'Gorbachev' s domestic policies were a failure.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

Gorbachev tried to reform the communist system in the USSR whilst keeping the nation together. However, the Soviet Union collapsed under his rule so his domestic policies failed. On the other hand, he faced major opposition and financial problems due to spending on the Cold War. With more support, money and time his policies might have worked. His two main domestic policies were Glasnost and Perestroika. He wanted a more open society (Glasnost) and to restructure and modernise the economy (Perestroika).

Glasnost was popular but in many ways it backfired against Gorbachev. He hoped that the Soviet people would support his ideas and that by being open about them he would get more support against his opponents. However, it encouraged criticism of the regime and gave the press greater freedom and many used this freedom to criticise the whole structure of the communist state. It led to the release of many political prisoners and dissidents, some of whom began to call for greater human rights in the USSR. People wanted change more quickly than he had anticipated. Men like Sakharov became more influential and well known and they were able to reach a wider audience.

The disaster at Chernobyl was an influence on Glasnost that led to more criticism of the state. As more news about the background to the disaster spread, people became disillusioned with their government. The people had been told for years that communism was the best system and they had the greatest leaders but this disaster showed that the government was incompetent and not to be trusted. Stories about radiation terrified the people and they began to question everything about their government. The most serious failure of Glasnost was that it led to calls for independence by the regions of the USSR and eventually the collapse of the Soviet Union. As ethnic groups demanded their freedom, Gorbachev lost control and was faced with demands for more freedom by liberals alongside opposition from traditionalists within the Party. This led to the coup in 1991.

Perestroika was also a failure in many ways. Gorbachev wanted to end central control of the economy but it led to problems in production and this in turn led to increased prices and shortages. There was a return to rationing in some regions. There were strikes and demonstrations that spread more quickly due to the increased freedom of the press, so Glasnost limited the success of Perestroika. Living standards failed to improve as promised and again news of this was more readily available.

The plan to instil more discipline in the workforce by reducing alcohol consumption failed too. He tried to control production of alcohol but succeeded in driving it underground. This led to a rise in

organised criminal gangs like it had done in America in the 1920s. Gorbachev's other ideas such as allowing private business and selling farm land to private owners seemed rushed and badly planned. The policy was messy and uncoordinated and every failure was reported more due to the policy of Glasnost.

However, in the longer term, many of Gorbachev's reforms were carried out so were not a failure. Yeltsin became the new leader and many of his reforms were based on Gorbachev's policies. Gorbachev had laid the foundations for the transformation of the economy and the state. He had made some changes that would open the USSR to a market economy (such as private business and allowing McDonalds into Russia). Gorbachev had also encouraged the development of technology and science to help modernise the economy.

He had reformed the Communist Party and created a new role for the president which continued under Yeltsin. Gorbachev had made the government more efficient and his policy of Glasnost made it more open to criticism. This led to less corruption and restored some public support.

It was Gorbachev that started the process of modernising the Soviet Union and though many of his policies failed during his leadership, in the end many of his reforms are still evident in Russia to this day so he cannot have failed entirely.

Commentary – Level 4

This is a focused and relevant response with clear judgements. It is limited in the development of some key points, especially in relation to economic policies where the assessment becomes assertive. What were, for examples, the problems in production which led to increased prices and shortages? The lack of development is a feature of the answer, other than in relation to Chernobyl. This would have been a strong answer with further development and support of points made, but is balanced and controlled enough for Level 4.