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History

Paper 1H (A-level) Specimen Question Paper

Question 04 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.1 20/08/15

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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 1H (A-level): Specimen question paper**

#### **04 'The lives of the Russian peasants were transformed in the years 1928 to 1964.'**

**Assess the validity of this view.**

(25 marks)

#### **Student Response**

The lives of Russian peasants were transformed in the years 1928-1964 most notably due to rural alterations. Collectivisation was the trigger for a gigantic change in the peasants' lifestyles as it meant they were working as one large body provided for by the state in order to generate industrial benefits. However, economic changes, such as the Five Year Plans, plus the new ideals which arose when Stalin assumed power in the late 1920s, served to construct a culture for the peasants unlike any situation they had experienced before.

Rural changes to the peasants' lives can be seen as the most significant evidence of a transformation in their existence. Stalin's collectivisation programme altered the countryside drastically, forcing peasants to work as large groups in order to generate grain and free up rural workers for industrial purposes. This upset peasants' traditional values of farming independently, by introducing modern methods such as tractors; by the end of 1933 there were 25,000 tractors in Russia. Equally, the peasants' wages were paid by the state and their produce bought at fixed prices; a marked change from their isolated lives before. On a negative side, from December 1929 the Kulaks were 'deprived of the means to exist', with 150,000 Kulak families sent to Siberia in that year alone. This moulded a very different society to the one before, in which there was a profound divide between the richer and poorer peasants. However, collectivisation failed to deliver absolute changes to peasant lives. Stalin had to legalise private plots in 1935, which produced over half of some of the nation's necessities and there was still a spate of poor harvests; occurring in 1928, 1929 and 1930. Furthermore, by 1934, only 30% of Russia's farms would be collectivised, so it cannot be seen as a fully impactful change, meaning peasants' lives cannot be seen as totally transformed rurally.

Economic alterations can also be seen as having transformed peasants' lives. In 1928, the first Five Year Plan was implemented, which focused chiefly on the foundation industries, the 'basic, decisive branches of industry' and so required an abundance of rural workers. They would be able to manage the unskilled jobs and so would advance industry. The urban population trebled; between 1922 and 1940 there were 22 million in the cities, rising to 63 million. The majority of the recent settlers were former peasants who had to cope with a new life in the already overpopulated and dirty city rather than the fresh countryside. But, for the rural peasants, the reliance on wages from collectivisation kept them poor, whilst the wages of the new industrial workers rose. The wages on collective farms were only 20% of industrial wages. Furthermore, many peasants perished with their unqualified use of machinery or uneducated séjours down the mines. This was complicated as many peasants changed jobs, meaning their new lives were changing continuously in a perhaps instable routine, which means many of the transformations to their lives at this time were negative. Some have argued, however, that despite the rise in peasants moving to the cities, the everlasting high taxes from the time of the Tsar which 'squeezed' out the peasants to aid the industrialising economy

meant there were no true transformations to peasant lives.

Ideologically, peasants' lives transformed substantially between 1928 and 1964. During collectivisation, there was a central aim of turning the peasants away from their traditional capitalist values to socialism, aided by the commencing of the collective farms. This meant peasants would produce for the good of the community and all would be equal in Russia, due to an organised economy to suit people's needs. To orchestrate this, farms would be owned by the state (Sovkhoz) with wages from the state, like those for factory workers. This helped instil the Socialist values Stalin prized. To help this, ethnic minority groups were deported, especially in the war years as they were accused of collaborating with the Nazis. 460,000 Chechen and 130,000 Kalmyks were deported to Siberia in 1944. Of the latter, by 1953 only 53,000 were alive. However, the extent of transformations of the peasants' principles can be debated. During the start of the collectivisation drive of February 1930, there was a massive revolt and in the first year of the policy, there were 30,000 arson attacks as peasants resisted changes to their traditional values. Coupled with the lack of incentives from the Socialist government, peasants' lives cannot be seen as fully transformed ideologically either.

Culturally, there were major changes to the peasant's lives. Education of primary-age children increased to 18 million by 1933; although the peasants remained the least educated class of Russian society. There was a major stamp down on religion, with 80% of village churches closed by the end of 1930, although peasants maintained their religious values and festivals. Propaganda was used effectively to project the image of Stalin as a 'leader, teacher and friend' and the 'Lenin of today', which aimed to indoctrinate peasants into believing Socialist values over traditional ones. Although this imagery was widespread, it is possible to debate the true impact as many timeless values of the peasants failed to change. Women and children still worked on the land alongside the men, rather than working in the home and being in education respectively, as the propaganda tried to persuade. Hence, a cultural transformation of peasants' is debatable.

The lives of Russian peasants were transformed in the years 1928 to 1964 as their traditional values, such as framing for themselves, were contested. However, some peasants battled these changes, so a widespread transformation may not be viewed as valid.

### **Commentary – Level 3**

There are a number of weaknesses in this response. The most glaring is that it fails to consider the whole period and the changes which came in after Stalin's death. Essentially, the response is one which has references primarily to the 1930s only. Additionally, it lacks some accuracy, confusing, for example, state and collective farms. It also fails to clarify just what the life of peasants was like at the beginning and end of the period. There is much material here and there is an attempt to make it relevant, but it is fundamentally lacking in breadth of understanding and analysis. It is, at best, a low Level 3 response.