



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 1L (A-level)
Question 02 Student 2
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

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 1L (A-level): Specimen question paper

02 'Working class Germans did not benefit from the economic transformation of Germany in the years 1871 to 1914.'

Assess the validity of this view

[25 marks]

Student response

Between 1871 and 1914, the German economy experienced rapid transformation. This followed the political unification of 1871 and despite a slight slow-down, during the world-wide Great Depression of the 1880s, Germany's industrial production tripled between 1890 and 1914 so that, by 1914, Germany ranked alongside Britain and the USA, as one of the world's leading industrial nations. The social results of such change were enormous and Germany's working class, in particular was much affected. Whilst it is untrue to suggest that this group did not benefit from the huge economic transformation which increased the wealth of the country and provided its population with better amenities and higher wages, it is valid to argue that they did not benefit as much as those above them because of predominantly conservative political structure of Germany and the influence of the wealthy in society. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between different groups within the working class whose experiences differed.

The industrialisation of Germany in the years 1871 to 1914 certainly brought some benefits to the working people. Employment rates were generally high and real wages increased by 25% between 1895 and 1913, enabling those with jobs to enjoy a better standard of living. There was also a growth in state welfare provision, beginning with Bismarck's 'State socialism' in the 1880s and extended over the next 30 years with provisions which helped workers in times of sickness, offered compensation and support if they suffered accidents and provided them with pensions in their old age. By 1914, over 15 million Germans were covered by sickness insurance, 28 million were insured against accidents and 1 million received annual pensions.

During the chancellorships of Caprivi and Bulow, legislation was passed to recognise trade unions and provide industrial tribunals for the settling of wage claims. These gave the workers a voice and enabled them to lobby their masters for benefits -particularly higher wages. These ministries also passed legislation to restrict child employment, reduce excessive working hours for women and prevent employment on Sundays, counteracting some of the abuses of the early years of industrialisation. The introduction of progressive income tax whereby the more a person earned, the more he paid was also much fairer for working people. Thus the workers benefited from increased state support and protection during these years of economic transformation.

Working people also gained new opportunities as a result of the spread of education and the demand for more skilled workers in the expanding factories. As well as the 'blue-collar' factory floor jobs which needed manual skills, there were new white-collar positions such as book-keeping and reception work which even offered the aspiring worker an opportunity to rise from

the lower ranks and join the lower middle classes. Whilst many were held back by monetary constraints (particularly preventing any more than a basic standard of education) and low aspirations, some of the barriers of the past were gradually eroded.

The years between 1871 and 1890 also saw medical improvements, inoculations and developments in hygiene which enabled people to live healthier and longer lives. The spread of transport - mainly trains, bicycles and the electric tram network made it easier for workers to get around and perhaps make more of their leisure time in the cafes and beer-halls. By the early 20th century, German cities had cinemas which showed foreign (silent) films that were popular among working people. However, 'leisure' was a luxury largely reserved for the 'upper working classes' - the foremen and highly-skilled workers, who formed the working class elite. Semi-skilled workers, such as coal miners who were, on the whole, better paid were also able to reap some of the benefits that industrialisation provided, even if this was only to enjoy life in the local tavern and participate in works' festivities, where brass bands and choirs lead proceedings.

It was the 'lower working class' of unskilled workers that gained the least from the economic transformation. The 'lumpenproletariat' was at the bottom end of the working class scale and vulnerable to economic fluctuations and lay-offs. For this group, living conditions were often very poor. Many were forced to live in apartments in cramped inner city streets and most cities had squalid areas of acute poverty. The average German worked nearly 2 hours a day longer than the average British worker in the 1890s and even by 1912, the average working day was longer than the British one of the 1870s and the German worker's wages nearly a third less.

Discontent was shown in the growing support received by the SPD, a political party committed to improving the workers' lot. The SPD and trade unions encouraged protest. c. 200,000 workers per year went on strike between 1905 and 1913. The actions of successive governments, beginning with Bismarck in 1879 to crush the SPD with anti-socialist measures, reduced the ability of the working class to force change and thus left unable to ensure that they gained fair benefit from the economic transformation. It was probably the lack of change within the political system, that became increasingly dominated by the Junker elites and military under Kaiser Wilhelm II, that gives the most important indication of the failure of the working class to benefit from the economic change.

Conditions for the 'working class' of peasants in the countryside could also be harsh. Their status also varied between the better-off peasant proprietors who employed others and the landless labourers whose life was extremely precarious; travelling from one farm to another, seeking seasonal employment. The peasant proprietors were relatively content and quite conservative in outlook. For these, the development of more scientific farming and the spread of communications and education meant that life improved. Conditions became less harsh and rural families less isolated, thanks to better communications.

However, although new opportunities arose to provide foodstuffs for the growing industrial centres, estates that were more remote fared less well. The growing population and the practice of dividing estates between sons forced increasing numbers of peasants to leave the land altogether and 'drift to the towns' where they joined the lower ranks of the working class. The industrial Rhineland and Westphalia absorbed over a million internal immigrants in the early years of the 20th century, many of them young male peasants. Large factories, like that of Krupp in Essen, attracted thousands of peasants and the gradual drift from country to town was well underway by 1914

Overall, the 40% growth in population together with the rapid economic transformation brought significant social change to Germany in the years 1871-1914. Whilst the majority of German workers, both in the towns and countryside, were better off materially by 1914, their working and living conditions could be poor and for those at the bottom of the social ladder, very poor indeed. Life in the cities changed faster than life in the countryside and Germany remained a class-divided society in which the workers, at all levels carried more of the burdens of change than those above them. Working class Germans did benefit from the economic transformation of society but not as much as they should have done.

Commentary – Level 4

This is a thoughtful response, recognising the need to differentiate amongst the ‘working class’. It is strong in its arguments as to how some members of the working class did benefit from industrialisation; it is less developed in the assessment of those who did not benefit, although it suggests, clearly, why this was the case. It is debatable as to how far the assessment of ‘working class peasants’ is actually valid: agricultural workers are not normally seen as ‘working class’. Overall, there are strengths to the answer, but points need further development and it is a low Level 4 answer.