



History 7042
Additional Specimen Question Paper 2N (A-level)
Question 01 Student 1
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 2N (A-level): Additional specimen question paper

01 With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these three sources to an historian studying the First Five-Year Plan.

[30 marks]

Student response

All three of these sources are valuable as evidence for an historian studying varying aspects of the First Five-Year Plan under Stalin.

Source A is useful as evidence of why the Plan was introduced in 1928, because Stalin was a key figure in moving the Plan forwards, although in the late 1920s he was not yet the dominant leader he became during the 1930s. Stalin was delivering a speech to a group of industrial managers about the Plan. It is important to note that the Plan had only got under way two to three years previously and so had not been completed. Basically Stalin was saying that the Plan was absolutely crucial, because without rapid industrialisation, Russia would fall further behind the 'advanced capitalist countries', presumably meaning Germany, Britain and the USA. He frankly acknowledged Russia's weakness in industry and was telling his audience that a weak country could easily be crushed by its enemies. Power in the modern world depended on having a strong industrial base, which in turn could support a strong, modern army.

Stalin could not be trusted to always tell the truth, and he could be as devious or opportunistic as most politicians. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that he was expressing his genuine views in this widely published source, which is why it is useful evidence about the purposes of the Plan. Like all Communists, Stalin had always believed in industrialisation as the necessary pre-condition for building socialism, based on a large industrial proletariat. As well as theory, practical reasons were also at the heart of Stalin's policies. His generation was very conscious of what had happened after the revolution of 1917. Foreign powers had invaded Russia during the civil war. It was widely believed by the Communists that a major war between the Communist world and the non-Communist world was inevitable, because the Communists believed in world revolution, and in turn the West was acutely suspicious of Russia. Just a few years before this speech there had been a major war scare. It seemed imperative to Communists like Stalin, regardless of any ideological considerations, that Russia must industrialise, and do so quickly, to deter enemies or at the very least, strengthen Russia's capacity to resist any attack. It was an issue of both ideology and national security, and the speech is good evidence of this.

Source A also has limitations. Because of the date of the speech and Stalin's desire to talk up the results, it can tell us nothing about the results of the Plan. Nor does it give any indication of the processes involved, such as the targets, the allocation of resources, the confusion as well as the successes, nor the incessant propaganda. But it is a good indication of the motives.

Source B is very different. It is particularly useful to an historian, because it comes from an opponent of the Communist regime from inside Russia. Because of the regime's autocratic

nature and control of the media, published condemnations of official policy are relatively rare, at least in relation to the official propaganda which the regime unleashed in support of its policies. The article conveys a picture of a Plan which was not something coherent and well thought out but adapted as it went along, with no clear and coherent rationale. Moreover, it talks of 'exaggerated tempos', plans which only existed on paper, various flaws and disruptions.

From what historians know of the plans, there is some truth in the criticisms. The targets of the Plan were adapted as time went on. There were errors, with resources sent to the wrong places, bottlenecks in the allocation of resources, difficulties in getting the right workers, and so on. It is also true that some of the figures were exaggerated, and Western estimates of the Plan's output do vary from Soviet figures. There was a lot of propaganda. Where the source is less balanced is that it does not credit any of the successes. For all its weaknesses, the Plan did produce some big increases in output in key aspects of heavy industry such as coal and steel. The foundations were laid for some of the developments which took place under the later plans, because the beginnings of an industrial base were laid. This was despite all the inefficiencies and problems and the reliance on Soviet manpower and womanpower rather than sophisticated industrial techniques.

The one-sidedness of Source B is not surprising given the provenance of the source. We are told that the author was a member of the Trotskyist opposition. This does not mean a necessarily organised group, but Rakovsky, as a Trotskyist, would be strongly opposed to Stalin, who had decisively beaten Trotsky in the leadership struggle of the 1920s. Trotsky also supported industrialisation, but his defeat by Stalin led him and his supporters to continually criticise Stalin's objectives and methods, so it is a very subjective source. Also of, course, like Source A, the source was written in the early stages of the Plan, and can give little indication of the end results. Its value, however, is that it gives us some counterweight to the continuous stream of 'optimistic' propaganda put out by the regime.

Source C is a very different source. It comes from an 'ordinary' citizen of the USSR, and gives us a perspective from someone who was who was caught up in the events. The writer is clearly in favour of the regime's policies. Possibly she has been won over by the regime's propaganda and is genuinely enthusiastic and not just saying something that the regime would want her to say. The letter was written from Magnitogorsk, which as a new industrial town, was held up as one of the show pieces of what was possible under the First Five-Year Plan. It gives an interesting insight, because the letter clearly highlights some of the difficulties of the Plan: it highlights faults such as 'stoppages' and 'breakdowns', which on the surface supports Source B. However, the writer does not suggest that it is the fault of the Plan itself, but rather that people like the writer's friend, or at any rate her husband, are not doing enough to make the Plan work. The writer implies that if everyone pulled their weight, everything would come good. She appears to have accepted totally the regime's insistence that although times were hard, the sacrifices were necessary and worthwhile because they were right ideologically and the end result would benefit everybody.

Source C is also a good indication of how the Five Year Plan was officially presented. The use of phrases like 'heroism', 'honour' and 'fight' were part of deliberate propaganda by the regime to present industrialisation as a something akin to a life or death struggle, reinforcing the message of Source A. Yet source C not only conveys the successful impact of the regime's propaganda, but indicates that there might well have also been some ordinary people who were less than enthusiastic about the hardships and demands on them made by the regime.

In conclusion, all three sources are useful to an historian. Together they give a good idea of the motives behind the Plan, different attitudes towards it, and some of its successes and failures. Therefore to some extent they balance each other and give a wider picture. What they cannot do, because of the dates of the sources, is tell us much about the overall impact of the Plan by 1932, when the regime declared that the Plan had been fulfilled ahead of schedule!

Commentary – Level 5

The answer demonstrates secure understanding of the content and views of the sources. The assessment of value is good with appropriate and persuasive deployment of knowledge on context and issues. The assessment of the value of each source is also balanced, identifying strengths and weaknesses. The only significant weakness is the comment on tone is undeveloped, but this is a Level 5 answer.