



History 7042
Additional Specimen Question Paper 2S (A-level)
Question 03 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 2S (A-level): Specimen question paper

01 'Without the Falklands War, Margaret Thatcher would have lost the 1983 General Election.'
Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

The statement that Margaret Thatcher would have lost the 1983 General Election without the Falklands War seems, on the surface, a plausible one. By 1982 social unrest and economic problems had damaged the Conservative government. Mrs Thatcher's personal popularity as well as that of her government had declined, leading to growing doubts that the Conservatives could win the next election. However, the Falklands crisis turned everything on its head, sweeping Mrs Thatcher to victory. Nevertheless, significant as it was, other factors, notably Labour weaknesses, suggest that the Conservatives would have been successful even without 'the Falklands factor'.

There is no doubt that the Falklands War was instrumental in determining the scale of the Conservatives' 1983 victory. Mrs Thatcher's personal popularity soared; she was decisive, took quick action and overcame the strategic problems of fighting a war against a well-equipped enemy many thousands of miles away. The victory increased national pride and the war was short. A long war would have led to greater casualties and probably increased taxation. The fact that this was a limited war greatly benefited the Conservatives.

There was a lot of evidence before the war that the Conservatives were losing votes but victory brought enormous public support, fuelled by a nationalistic popular press. However, 'the Falklands factor' has been exaggerated. A closer analysis shows that electoral and economic factors favoured the Conservatives and, most importantly, the Labour Party performed abysmally.

The First Past the Post electoral system traditionally favoured the Conservatives. Despite only acquiring 42.4 per cent of the votes the Conservatives had a majority of 161 seats. Moreover, before the war there were already signs of economic recovery. Interest rates, for example, were falling and some opinion polls indicated a return of support for the Conservatives.

The most important element in the 1983 election, however, was the weakness of the Labour Party. The party was divided under the leadership of Michael Foot and its campaign and manifesto proved too left-wing for the British public. A number of Labour MPs left the party in 1981 to form the Social Democratic Party. This split the Labour vote in 1983. In addition, despite supporting the Falklands War Labour seemed pacifist in outlook and lost votes because of its commitment to abandon Britain's independent nuclear deterrent.

Overall, the Falklands War was important but victory in war does not always guarantee electoral success as Winston Churchill found out after the Second World War. The Labour Party manifesto has been called 'the longest suicide note in history'. It was this that proved the most important factor in securing the overwhelming electoral victory for the Conservative Party.

Commentary – Level 3/4 borderline

The answer demonstrates clear understanding of the key issues around the 1983 election and of the importance of the Falklands' War to its result. The introduction is balanced and analytical and there is a clear conclusion. The actual assessment of the importance of the war itself is well analysed with some supporting information. There is then, much that is strong to this answer, but there are also some serious weaknesses, primarily, the lack of development to the points made. For example, there is reference in the introduction to 'social unrest and economic problems' but no further, developed references to these are made. It claims that there is evidence of lost support before the war, but none is provided which makes the claim assertive rather than convincing. There is no explanation of the first past the post system, no developed explanation of the reasons for the divisions in the Labour Party and no evidence offered in detail of the disastrous manifesto.

Such answers are difficult to assess. They are perceptive, relevant and analytical but largely lacking in supporting, developed information and developed assessment. On balance, this would be a borderline L3/L4