



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2K (A-level)
Question 04 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 2K (A-level): Specimen question paper

04 'The western democracies failed to avoid the outbreak of a general war in Europe in 1939 because of their fear of Communism.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

It is an understandable statement that the western fear of Communism brought about a general war in Europe; many leaders willingly backed right-wing extremism in an attempt to ensure that the 'Russian disease' did not spread to the west and it would be failed relations with the USSR that would bring about the Nazi-Soviet pact and enable the German invasion of Poland in 1939. Although it can be seen that the causes of such a conflict run far deeper than a fear of Communism, the role of appeasement is one of great significance and Hitler's actions throughout the 1930s would lead Europe into a situation where war would become inevitable. The western democracies treatment of Nazi aggression caused a general war in Europe in 1939, not a fear of Communism.

Hitler's rise to power and consolidation of his dictatorship in Germany was very much based upon a fear of communism. Having been seen as the 'lesser of two evils' at a time when Nazism and Communism was rising in popularity, Hitler was able to take Germany under his command and steer the nation towards war. His crushing of the left within Germany portrayed him as a stalwart against the spread of communism and gave him the backing of military leaders and a large portion of the German populace who would support his preparations for war. This allowed for the rearmament and remilitarisation campaign through the Four Year Plans (including the Guns vs Butter debate) and developments in the Rhineland in 1935. A fear of Communism amongst the western democracies would see them initially pay little explicit attention to what was happening in Germany and Hitler was able to ready himself for the conflict that would come in 1939 with little opposition both at home and abroad.

The rising strength of Germany by this time began to worry others in Europe and Stalin in particular was concerned about the threat posed by the ideologically polar opposite nation, believing (rightly) that Hitler had plans to attack Russia directly. Stalin sought allies against Germany, but the suspicions and ultimately reluctance of the west to work alongside the world's first communist nation saw talks collapse in 1939 and Stalin's pleas for a conference to discuss collective action against an aggressive Germany fell on deaf ears. Spotting an opportunity, Germany offered an alliance to Stalin, proposing to share the spoils of Poland; knowing it would buy time Stalin agreed and the Nazi-Soviet Pact was born. This gave Hitler the opportunity to launch his invasion of Poland as the threat of the Soviet Union defending the Polish against Germany was removed. The fear of Communism allowed for this pact and therefore had paved the way for the Polish invasion which would lead to the declarations of war in September 1939.

However, appeasement is of course a factor than cannot be ignored when looking at the outbreak of war in 1939. Supporters of Chamberlain's actions see his continued sympathy for Hitler as a master ploy to buy time to rearm in the aftermath of the Great Depression for what would be an inevitable 'second' world war. Others argue that appeasement was serving to achieve what the British public desired, avoiding a war at all costs; the pacifist feeling in Britain and France had remained strong in the aftermath of the devastating Great War. It could be said that the motives for appeasement also came from a fear of Communism; a lack of action against Mussolini in Abyssinia had set a precedent that the west were less likely to act against right-wing leaders in Europe and there was certainly a belief that Hitler and Mussolini had been, and continued to act as, a strong barrier against Communism given their harsh treatment of the left in their respective nations. However to suggest that the willingness to appease Hitler reflects only a fear of Communism is incorrect; leaders within Britain had long seen the treatment of Germany in the Treaty of Versailles as harsh, with a perception that Hitler was only 'righting wrongs' and helping Germany to recover from turbulent times. Hitler could have believed that appeasement may even allow for the expansion into Poland without the outbreak of a general war (Britain and France had already allowed many transgressions) but Germany, along with Britain and France, was prepared to fight over Poland, as proven in September 1939.

The short-sightedness of the western democracies in 1939 could therefore be seen as the cause of the war. Believing that the Munich agreement was 'Peace in Our Time' despite the on-going aggression of Germany was ultimately incorrect, appeasement failed and war would come. It was concerns that Nazi Germany may go on to turn its attentions to the west that led to the Polish Guarantee, an attempt to show strength, but even then the British and French hoped that the Poles would give in to Hitler's demands over Danzig and a conflict could be avoided. In fact the guarantee simply strengthened the Polish resolve to hold out against Hitler, believing that they were to be defended by the west. It was these circumstances which saw Hitler denounce the Anglo-Germany Naval Treaty and his Non-Aggression Pact with Poland, followed by the Nazi invasion of Poland on 1st Sept 1939 and the subsequent Anglo-French ultimatum that was ignored.

Whilst a fear of communism by the western democracies initially allowed for the rise of Nazi Germany and its preparations for war, it would be the actions of appeasement and the overall response to German aggression that saw the outbreak of a general war in Europe in 1939. The inevitability of the conflict was reflected in Stalin's worries about an attack on the Soviet Union, as would come in 1941, and although a fear of communism went some way to preventing an alliance against Germany, it was likely that war was going to come to Europe anyway given Hitler's determination to see through the recovery and widespread expansion of Germany.

Commentary – Level 4

The answer advances a clear argument, that factors other than fear of communism were responsible for the outbreak of war in 1939. It assesses the importance of the fear of communism and has appropriate comments on appeasement and the reaction to Versailles. The demands of the question are understood, but the analysis lacks depth and, to some extent, range. There needed to be a more sophisticated understanding of attitudes to the Soviet Union (references to its perceived weakness and the role of the Comintern), some reference to other fascist regimes and greater detail on French politics and attitudes. It is a low Level 4 answer.