



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2N (A-level)
Question 01 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 2N (A-level): 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 Bolshevik Revolution between 1917 and 1921.

[30 marks]

Student response

Source A is from Lenin himself and, as leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, this lends it credibility. However, it is clearly partial and that affects its value to an historian. Lenin sounds confident and determined; he recognises the difficulties facing the new government but is certain that success is just a matter of time. Lenin claims that all workers and most of the peasants are on the side of the new Soviet government. Whilst it is true that the Soviets in Petrograd and Moscow were dominated by the Bolsheviks in the days leading up to the revolution, this was partly due to falling attendance from other political groups. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks took advantage of the situation to gain power. Once in power, the Bolsheviks did struggle to survive and Lenin admits to this in Source A. He recognises that the civil war will take time to win and that the bourgeoisie will resist the new government directly in war and indirectly through acts of sabotage. The claims of wholesale support are exaggerated. The early actions of the Bolsheviks, such as the Decree on Land and the Decree on Workers' Control, authorised what had already been happening sporadically and so did not prove that all these groups supported the Bolsheviks. As time went on, many became disillusioned with the new regime as can be seen in Source C. The Kronstadt sailors might be considered one of the most important groups supporting the revolution, yet they were clearly disillusioned. There was an increase in coercion and more centralised rule as referred to in Source B. This could be seen as an inevitable result of the struggle to survive the civil war but it would be seen by many as a failure of the new government. Source A is Lenin's attempt to convince the people and the party that these problems are temporary and that the revolution will succeed. This proved to be the case, but the Communist government that emerged differed a great deal from the Bolshevik Party at the start of the revolution.

Source B is an account of events at the time from an outside observer. It is a valuable source as the author is an American journalist and we would expect a more impartial point of view. However, Beatty was supportive of the Bolsheviks and her tone is positive, highlighting the efforts made to seek out and punish saboteurs and black marketers. There was a great deal of resistance to War Communism and requisitioning, especially in the countryside. The Bolsheviks blamed food shortages and high prices on Kulaks who were hoarding grain. The Cheka was sent in to forcibly seize grain and publically execute the worst offenders. Beatty blames the excesses of this period on 'mobs' and suggests that the activity did not deserve to be called a 'Reign of Terror'. However, Lenin did give the order to execute Kulaks in order to coerce the population into compliance. The references in this source to the excesses of the French Revolution are made to downplay the Bolshevik tactics – they were not as bad! Beatty seems to suggest that the Bolsheviks were largely successful but food shortages continued as many peasants simply produced less grain so there was no surplus to seize.

Source C is from the Kronstadt rebels and is a very valuable source as they had been staunch supporters of the Bolsheviks but were disillusioned by the developing revolution. The language used is angry and emotive. The Kronstadt rebels did believe that the Bolshevik Party had lost sight of its way. Opposition from the peasants and from political enemies (in the civil war) was to be expected and could be contained. Once the Bolsheviks faced opposition from the Party and the workers, things were more dangerous. Source C highlights the problems of hunger, protest and a loss of faith in the Bolshevik government. They were accused of counterrevolution but this source argues that the Bolsheviks were 'deeply mistaken'. The Bolsheviks were scared most by this opposition as these people made up what Trotsky had called the heroes of the revolution. They did not accept that increased central authority and coercion were necessary. They wanted a return to the ideals of the revolution and were calling for the release of political prisoners and new elections to the Soviets. The demands were a threat, but more worrying was the nature of the rebels – former staunch supporters of the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless, Lenin stood firm and the Red Army was sent in to crush the rebels and their leaders were denounced as White reactionaries. Lenin did learn a lesson from this event and decided to lessen the excesses of War Communism.

All three sources are valuable as evidence of the extent of opposition and challenge faced by the Bolsheviks after the revolution of 1917. The problems caused by the civil war, War Communism and the Kronstadt Rising were a real threat to the success of the Bolshevik Revolution. All of the sources are partial to some degree but Source A is the most valuable as it focuses on a broader range of issues and gives a clear insight into Lenin's pragmatism and strength of mind. Lenin was never seriously challenged and he did ensure that the Bolshevik regime was in a stronger position by 1921.

Commentary – Level 4

There is a clear attempt to evaluate the importance of provenance, tone and content in relation to the three sources and offer a judgement as to their value to a historian. Knowledge of context is used to support judgements made. There are, however, some weaknesses which limit the mark to Level 4. The significance of the dates of the first two sources is not fully considered, especially in relation to Source B and points made lack some development. Why, for example, does the partiality of Sources A and B limit their value? This needs to be explained. Overall, this is a good, controlled response at Level 4.