



History 7042
Additional Specimen Question Paper 1H (A-level)
Question 04 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 1H (A-level): Additional specimen question paper

04 'The Soviet regime's desire to create socialism in the USSR led to a social revolution between 1917 and 1941.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

Immediately after the 1917 Revolution which brought the Bolsheviks to power, the regime made laws intended to create a new society in preparation for the new socialist order which was the aim of all Communists. The bourgeoisie of the old order would lose their property and their rights. All those who desired equality would get it – as long as they supported the regime, and especially if they were workers or anyone else regarded not as parasites but as the future of a socialist Russia. There were now only two recognised classes: the workers and the peasants. The intelligentsia became the third class later. There would have to be a bureaucracy to run the country, but it would be staffed by upwardly mobile workers rather than the old 'bourgeois' administrators. The wealthy lost everything, and many left the country.

Twenty years later, on the eve of the Second World War, the social make-up of the USSR was different from what it had been in 1917, but not in the way most Communists would have anticipated at that time. Certainly the old middle class had disappeared. The social order was made up mainly of workers and peasants. But there was no real equality. Although the countryside had just about recovered from the trauma of collectivisation by 1941, the peasants were very much second class citizens. Most worked on collective farms and had little wealth except what came from their small private plots. Their lives were controlled by the Party, which established itself in rural areas after 1931. The working class or proletariat had made some gains. There was effectively no unemployment in the 1930s, as Russia was building a massive industrial base. However, some workers had more privileges and higher earnings than others. Nor was there equality in the Party. Party workers worked hard in the workplace, cajoling fellow workers and spreading the regime's propaganda. But those in the higher ranks of the Party bureaucracy were effectively a class apart, with special privileges. It was not a structure which Lenin would have recognised.

Between 1917 and 1941 there were changes in emphasis, but no coherent social policy: possibly because there was no blueprint in place showing what socialist society would look like. There were other reasons for the lack of a coherent social policy. The priority of the Bolsheviks in 1918 was survival. The regime was fighting for its life against the Whites and foreign interventionists. There were also major economic problems under War Communism. The regime had priorities more immediate than a social revolution. Also, some of the leading Bolsheviks, including Lenin, came from a different era and were not by nature radical social reformers in the way that some of the new generation of young Communists were in the 1920s.

On paper there were elements of a social revolution in the early days of the regime. Women were granted equality. Abortion was legalised and divorce made easier. Civil marriage was legalised. The divorce rate shot up, over twenty times higher than in Britain. Activists attacked the concept of traditional family life as a bourgeois relic of the old capitalist ways. In reality the changes were less radical. Women were still second class citizens. Even in the Communist Party they were underrepresented. A women's section of the Party had little impact, partly because many male members of the Party restricted its activity. Most people were too concerned in trying to scrape a living in difficult times to care much for radical social ideas. There was no socialist utopia. In the early 1920s radical proposals for the state to fund child care, kindergartens, communal kitchens and the like were dropped because the country simply could not afford the enormous cost.

With the coming of NEP, it would be hard to argue that there was a social revolution. The NEP was unpopular with ardent Communists precisely because it was a compromise with the old ways. Peasants no longer had their grain requisitioned, small-scale industry was allowed again and private trade was permitted. Any idea of a revolution such as a moneyless economy was quickly abandoned. Nepmen, making profits from other people and a good living out of trade, became a symbol of the new class structure. Even in the countryside, a new class of prosperous farmers, the kulaks, re-emerged. Some of the planned radical changes in education were abandoned due to a lack of resources. The regime indulged in propaganda about a new society, and young Communists went around the countryside attacking churches and religious practices, but this did not affect the fundamentals of society. Meanwhile the economy recovered, although less so in the state-controlled heavy industry sector. The principal debate in the Party in the 1920s, other than the issue of the leadership, was how the economy should develop in order to achieve industrialisation and socialism. Therefore during the 1920s there were some social changes, but not a radical social revolution.

There were significant changes after 1929, some planned, some which occurred as a by-product of other developments, especially in the economy. One of the most important social developments was the massive increase in the female workforce. This was not the result of a considered policy, more something born out of economic necessity. The industrialisation programme required a huge additional workforce, which could only be made up from large numbers of women. It might be argued that this was a social revolution, but it was not one which brought enormous benefits to the women. Old attitudes died hard, and women were still expected to run the family household even when holding down a full-time job. Men still had superior status. Also, while it was the case that many more women than before took up professional posts, becoming for example doctors or teachers, where women were highly represented in these professions, they tended to be less well paid and less well regarded.

After Stalin became to all intents and purposes the sole leader of the USSR at the end of the 1920s, and his position was further reinforced during the 1930s, it might be argued that some of the more radical social changes were actually reversed. Stalin personally was not a social radical, and was quite conservative in some of his views. In any case, he was more concerned with preserving his own power, completing the economic revolution and building up national security than in overseeing social revolution. The changes to the family promoted in the 1920s were now reversed, in what has been referred to as 'the Great Retreat' into traditional values. Stalin wanted stability, and he wanted an increased and better educated work force. There was a conscious policy of strengthening family life again and abortion was again banned. In order to ensure a better trained workforce, some of the 'progressive' educational experiments of the

1920s were reversed, because of concerns about increased juvenile delinquency and not enough skilled workers. There was an emphasis on discipline, school uniforms and more traditional school subjects.

Social mobility was still greater than before, because the demands of the economy led to more demand for professional white collar workers, who often came from the traditional working class. However, at the same time a new social class grew in size: the Communist Party expanded, and above a certain level, the Party elite became an additional social class, with special privileges, including the best education for their children. More social change was experienced in the outlying Republics. For example, in the Asian Republics there was a deliberate attempt to break old traditions: Muslim women were encouraged to burn their veils and join 'modern' Soviet society. This policy met with mixed success.

There was also a move in the 1930s to develop the concept of 'Soviet Man'. Soviet man (and the emphasis was on 'man') was to represent the new Soviet society. The new man would embody all the supposed values of the Soviet state, which meant abandoning any notion of individualism and sacrificing everything for the common good. Despite the best efforts of propagandists, there is little evidence that this concept meant much in practice. Beyond the books and films produced to illustrate the concept, it had little impact in rural areas and not much more in urban Russia.

It is clear that between 1918 and 1941, major changes had occurred in the Soviet Union. Although government was still autocratic, there had been major political changes during that time. There had been an economic transformation from a rural to a state-dominated industrial economy. There had even been important cultural changes, since the regime took control of all forms of cultural expression, mainly to support the political and economic changes taking place and ensuring that only the Stalinist world view was aired. Yet in comparison, social revolution was not carried through to the same extent. There were changes, and calls for more changes, but they were sometimes reversed because they could not be allowed to get in the way of increasing economic growth, political control and strengthening the defences of the country. Old attitudes died hard. Russian society had changed in some, but not all ways, and some of what were regarded as socially progressive changes in areas such as education had been firmly knocked on the head by the time war came in 1941.

Commentary – Level 5

This is a very effective answer, relevant, consistently focused, aware of change and development over time with appropriate supporting detail deployed to corroborate the arguments advanced. Assessment of the degree of social change and the Communist Party's commitment to it, is sophisticated, balanced and persuasive. The conclusion is extensive and very effective. It is clearly a top Level 5 answer and, indeed, probably exceeds what is required for a top mark.