



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2N (A-level)
Question 03 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

03 Stalin's victory in the power struggle between 1922 and 1929 was due to the popularity of his policies.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

Stalin was perhaps the least likely contender to replace Lenin as Bolshevik leader. After a five year power struggle it was Stalin who emerged as victor, having outmanoeuvred his rivals. It was less to do with the popularity of his policies and much more to do with his exploitation of the weaknesses of his opponents and his power base within the Party.

Identifying Stalin's policies is not straightforward. He tended to adopt the policy most popular at any given time and to take over the ideas of his rivals as they fell out of the race. At the time of Lenin's death, the main dispute in policy was about NEP. The Left wanted it to be changed or abandoned, whilst the Right wanted to continue the policy. Stalin's position was unclear but he was seen as opposed to Trotsky on the Left. NEP was seen to be working. The economy was improving and it had increased support amongst the peasantry. When Lenin introduced the policy, it was always intended to be a temporary fix to enable the Bolsheviks to consolidate the revolution. Nevertheless, it was popular and when Trotsky attacked Gosplan and the excesses of the Nepmen, Stalin suggested that Trotsky was a disruptive influence. Stalin continued to support NEP until 1927, enabling him to defeat Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. He then abandoned the policy in favour of collectivisation and industrialisation. This won him the support of Party members like Kirov, who were opposed to the capitalist influence of NEP. Stalin was able to defeat Bukharin by abandoning NEP in 1927. This was less to do with 'his' policies and more to do with his strategy.

The other main debate at the time of Lenin's death was over Permanent Revolution versus Socialism in One Country. Stalin favoured forced modernisation of the Soviet Union to ensure its survival. He portrayed Trotsky's idea of revolution as a continuous process, as internationalist and a threat to the security of the nation. Trotsky would involve the Soviet Union in foreign revolution and put the country at risk of invasion. Stalin painted his policy as more patriotic and true to Lenin. This again enabled him to remove Trotsky from the race. Stalin's views on Socialism in One Country seem more genuinely held than those on the economy so this is one policy that may have won him support.

However, Stalin's victory was much more to do with his ability to exploit the weaknesses and mistakes of his rivals, his power base within the Party and the way he benefitted from Lenin's Legacy.

During Lenin's lifetime, Stalin had already built a power base. He took on posts that were seen as mundane and administrative but used them to his advantage. He became General Secretary in 1922 and this gave him an enormous influence. He had the power to appoint officials such as

Regional Secretaries and this meant he could increase his own support at Congress. He was the link between the Politburo and the government, with access to files and information. Stalin was also in control of informing Party members of events and developments and he used this power to position himself ahead of his rivals. The most noticeable example of this was when he gave the oration at Lenin's funeral.

Lenin had become aware of the power base created by Stalin and noted this in his testament. However, the testament was not made public and Stalin remained in his post as General Secretary. In addition to the power of patronage already noted by the appointments he made, Stalin benefitted from the Lenin Enrolment. Membership of the CPSU rose by over 200,000 and it was the Secretariat who appointed new members. Stalin was building up a body of voters at every level. Lenin's Ban on Factionalism was also exploited by Stalin to remove his opposition. He grouped them together (United Opposition and Right Opposition) and then accused them of acting against the wishes of Lenin in order to defeat them. Stalin further assumed Lenin's Legacy. He positioned himself as the defender of Lenin and Leninism and eventually came to be seen as Lenin's natural successor. He exploited the almost god-like reputation of Lenin to win support for himself.

Trotsky had no power base and underestimated the danger of Stalin. He had the backing of the Red Army and had been instrumental in the October Revolution. However, he was seen as an untrustworthy Menshevik and provoked jealousy within the Party. He wavered between cocky self-assurance and indecision. He failed to act against Stalin on a number of occasions, including the mishandling of the Georgian crisis and the shelving of the Testament. He failed to attend Lenin's funeral, feebly blaming Stalin for telling him the wrong date. He chose to attack NEP at a time when it was proving popular and successful. He seemed more focused on ideology rather than practicalities of rule. He had enemies within the Party and did not demonstrate the strategy he'd shown during the civil war, when it came to fighting for the leadership.

Kamenev and Zinoviev, chairman of Moscow and Leningrad, were hostile towards Trotsky and embarrassed by his reminders of their failure to support Lenin in October 1917. They formed a pro-Stalin and anti-Trotsky bloc at the 1925 Congress which led to Trotsky losing his role as Commissar for War. They perhaps thought they were using Stalin at this point, but he was clearly the one in control. Kamenev and Zinoviev were opponents of NEP and this led to the formation of what was called United Opposition. Trotsky shared their views on NEP and they joined forces in 1926. This played into the hands of Stalin. He could attack them using the Ban on Factions and exploit the Right (supporters of NEP) at the same time. Stalin took the stance of defender of NEP and was backed by Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy. Stalin could deliver the votes and the United Opposition was defeated at Congress. Kamenev and Zinoviev lost their positions and were replaced by Molotov and Kirov – both Stalin's men. Trotsky was expelled from the Politburo and subsequently exiled from the country.

Having defeated the Left, Stalin now took up their policies and began to support an economic programme of collectivisation and forced industrialisation. This placed him in opposition to the main supporters of NEP, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy. The Right lacked support and their policies were easily painted as anti-Bolshevik. Their strength lay with the peasantry and trade unions. The former were easily dismissed as opponents of the revolution and the latter were deemed unnecessary in a communist society. They were poorly organised and easily outmanoeuvred by Stalin. The Right Opposition were quashed and only allowed to remain in the Party by publically admitting the error of their ways.

Stalin's policies were not central to his victory. The various positions he held allowed him to create a power base from which he could easily outmanoeuvre his opponents. He isolated Trotsky and in doing so removed his greatest rival very early on. He exploited the debate over NEP to defeat the Left, replacing its leaders with his own men. He then turned against the Rightists who had supported him in defeating Trotsky and the Leftists. Stalin was victorious due to a combination of his power and his ability to exploit the weaknesses and mistakes of his rivals.

Commentary – Level 5

This is an excellent answer. It is controlled, analytical with clear judgements and has both range and depth. The only concern is that some points are not fully developed, especially in relation to NEP and its abandonment, but such is the control and clarity of the answer, that it is a good Level 5 response.