

SECTION C

Study Extracts 1 and 2 in the Extracts Booklet before you answer this question.

- 5 Historians have different views about the reasons for the fall of the Soviet Union. Analyse and evaluate the extracts and use your own knowledge of the issues to explain your answer to the following question.

How far do you agree with the view that the Soviet Union collapsed because of Gorbachev's failure to deal with the challenge of nationalism?

(20)

Westwood

Failure to
deal with
nationalism

Reservations about free-
end of Brezhnev doctrine
Glasnost released nationalist
feelings

There is much debate between historians as to whether the Soviet Union collapsed because of Gorbachev's failure to deal with the challenge of nationalism? There is no doubt that nationalism must have played a significant role in the collapse of the USSR as the republics would not have declared their independence without good reason but the extent to which this caused the collapse is arguable. In extract 1, Westwood focuses on the role of Gorbachev in exacerbating the feeling of nationalist sentiments by introducing glasnost which allowed such movements to thrive and by his reluctance to impose the will of the USSR on its republics. In contrast to this,



(Section C continued) McLanley in extract 2 focuses on the effect that Gorbachev's excessive desire for economic reform had and how it contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In Extract 1, Westwood talks of Gorbachev's 'insistence on glasnost' and the how this reduced the government's ability to 'keep nationalist feelings under tight control'. Gorbachev had introduced glasnost to make the party more transparent to the people so that they were not kept in the dark about the realities of the Soviet Union ~~and its broad character~~. Although this was achieved, it opened up the party to a wave of criticisms and enabled people to openly talk about the issues of the Soviet government without the fear of being attacked as a dissident. Within a few months, 60,000 informal groups had formed organising demonstrations and holding meetings as they complained about issues such as housing and environmental issues. An example of how glasnost contributed to the rise of nationalist sentiments is that it allowed Popular fronts to emerge in the Baltic republics. These republics had been annexed by the USSR as part of the Nazi-Soviet pact and felt the USSR were an invading force. The general population were also worried about the environmental impact of the USSR's industry. Therefore, as Westwood puts it, game plan - up



(Section C continued) national feeling an opportunity of expression. Westwood argues that the Bolsheviks and so the government of the USSR could only maintain their control over the republics as long as such nationalist feelings were kept under 'tight control'.

~~to extract 2~~, McCauley looks at the collapse of the USSR in terms of the effect of Gorbachev's economic reform on the Soviet economy. He states outright that 'Gorbachev's ~~reform~~ attempts at economic reform provoked a collapse' due largely to Gorbachev's impatience and desire to introduce more and more radical reform. This can be seen in the way that Gorbachev quickly moved from his policy of acceleration under the Twelfth Five Year Plan to economic perestroika in 1987. Gorbachev initially aimed at essentially tinkering with the system by improving the efficiency of the extremely inflexible command economy. However, he quickly moved to introduce market mechanisms through the ~~encouragement~~ ^{introduction} of joint ventures in 1987 and the legalisation of cooperatives in 1988. McCauley explains that 'none of these economists had ever worked in a market economy' which goes some way to suggest why economic perestroika failed, however it was also largely down to the system inherited by Gorbachev. Local state bureaucrats were reluctant



(Section C continued) to implement Gorbachev's policies because it threatened to weaken their position. However an argument which backs up McLanley's point is that by 1990 there were only 3,000 joint foreign ventures which contributed little to the Soviet economy.

There is much evidence to suggest that it was nationalist sentiments which led to the collapse of the USSR. Due to Gorbachev's reluctance to use force, he ~~not~~ ended the Brezhnev doctrine, thus allowing countries of the Eastern Bloc to declare independence one by one in 1989 and give hope to other nationalist groups within the USSR.

However, there was a limit to this nationalism, as despite nationalist feelings, many republics benefited from the Soviet Union's economy and in a referendum in 1991, 11 out of 15 of the Republics declared they wished to remain within the USSR. Rather it was the role that Glasnost and ~~the~~ played in Russia itself that allowed reformers such as Yeltsin to lead undermine the Soviet Government so that it was left without any real power. In terms of the economy and the point that McLanley makes about the 'living standards of the people' dropping, this was not a major contributor to the collapse of the USSR. As historian Orlando Figes argues, many nations had suffered much worse economic circumstances and ~~still~~ their government's survived. There are further limits



(Section C continued) to McLanley's interpretation as he claims Gorbachev listened to more and 'more radical economists' as they promised him success. However, to counter this argument, in 1989 one of Gorbachev's economic advisors Shatalin proposed the 500 days programme which would launch a market-based economy, however the Soviet Government and Gorbachev dismissed it.

In conclusion, ~~it~~ Gorbachev's failure to deal with nationalism resulted in the Soviet government being undermined by the Democratic Movement in Russia which rather than the economy led to the collapse of the USSR.

