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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in History (WHI02/1C)

Paper 2: Breadth Study with Source
Evaluation

Option 1C: Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin
to Yeltsin

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Examiner Report: WHI02 1C Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin to Yeltsin

Introduction

It was pleasing this January to see a number of well-informed and well-written responses from candidates on IAS Paper WHI02 1C which covers the Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin to Yeltsin. The paper is divided into two sections. Section A contains a compulsory two-part question for the option studied, each part based on one source. It assesses source analysis and evaluation skills (AO2). Section B comprises a choice of essays that assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1) by targeting five second order concepts - cause, consequence, change/ continuity, similarity/difference and significance.

Although the January entry is much smaller than the summer entry, performance had much common with previous series. Candidates continue to find Section A more challenging than Section B. Some candidates are still not clear on what is meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. Candidates do need to be aware that in addressing question 1a) 'value' means that they need to focus on the strengths of the source, in the light of their contextual knowledge, which give it value and that there are no marks available in the mark scheme for consideration of limitations, whereas in addressing question 1b they need to consider both the strengths and limitations of the source, in the light of their contextual knowledge, and then use this as the basis to attribute weight to the source. For some candidates, performance in Section A is limited by the absence of the relevant detailed knowledge base required to add contextual material to support/challenge points derived from the sources. Most candidates did use their time effectively this January and, although a few responses were quite brief, there was little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to answer questions both sections. The ability range was diverse, but the design of the paper allowed all abilities to be catered for. Furthermore, in Section B, many responses had an analytical focus and fewer responses were wholly descriptive essays that were devoid of analysis. For the most part, essay responses were soundly structured. The most common weakness in Section B essays was the lack of a sharp focus on the precise terms of the question and/or the second order concept that was targeted. This meant that some candidates wrote at length on topics that were only peripherally related to the question, or which did not cover the whole time period.

It remains important to note that Section A topics are drawn from highlighted topics on the specification whereas Section B questions may be set from any part of any Key Topic, and, as a result, full coverage of the specification is enormously important. There was little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to answer questions from Sections A and B.

The candidates' performance on individual questions is considered in the next section.

Question 1a)

Most candidates understood the question and were able to comprehend the source and comment on what it revealed about the nature of government established by Lenin. Over the years, candidates' understanding of this topic has improved considerably and there were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences that the government would be ruthless in establishing control over the lives of all citizens and that it would be securely based on Marxist principles. The best answers developed the inferences with well-selected context to establish their validity, with many using their knowledge of Lenin's beliefs in Marxism and/or the importance of the Declaration as a forerunner for the 1918 Constitution. However, some candidates did not include any contextual knowledge in their response, and this did depress their overall achievement. Some candidates wrote at length about other aspects of Lenin's rule or even Stalin's, but this was not relevant to the question set. Candidates would do well to remember that contextual knowledge does need to be used to explain and develop the inferences drawn from the source and not just to provide free-standing knowledge. Many candidates were able to use the attributes of the source effectively to develop their ideas about the value of the source from Lenin himself and the importance that could be attached to it as a source written by the very man who was to lead the government and would have a very clear idea of his own intentions and the authority to enforce it. In this way many candidates were able to access the lower marks in level 3. It is important that candidates do go beyond merely stating what is in the caption. A significant number of responses asserted that the source was valuable because it was produced by Lenin but did not follow this up with an explanation as to why that was so. In several answers, candidates merely copied out phrases from the source. This technique could not achieve more than level 1 in bullet point 1. If they had gone just a little further and provided some explanation of what was being said in the source, they could have accessed marks in level 2. Those candidates who discussed the limitations could not be rewarded for that part of their answer as it is not the focus of 1a responses.

Question 1b)

Most candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to consider the reasons for the attempted coup against Gorbachev in August 1991. Many candidates were able to draw some inferences, for example, that the coup was necessary to save the Soviet Union from collapsing as a result of the Union Treaty and/or because of Gorbachev's failures in economic policy in particular. Many were also able to expand on the source material by developing contextual knowledge of the motivations for the coup, e.g. glasnost and perestroika. In the best responses, this context was used to interrogate the evidence to consider what weight should be attached to criticisms by the very people who led the coup. Some candidates merely added knowledge to the source, some of which referred to events after the coup and therefore was of

limited relevance. Many candidates demonstrated secure evaluation skills, drawing on the provenance to reach judgements about the value and limitations of the source. However, some candidates simply accepted what was said at face value and did not attempt to consider the validity of the claims by a group that was clearly opposed to Gorbachev and his policies. A significant number treated this question as a value rather than weigh question and did not therefore consider its weaknesses in attempting to reach a judgement.

Question 2

This was the most popular essay question. Some candidates produced very effective answers, considering the five different Five-Year Plans and examining their aims in detail, looking at changes and continuities in order to reach a judgement. These candidates considered the changes from heavy industry in the first Five-Year Plan to the focus on light industry and consumer goods in the second Plan and the later switch to military production in the third Plan followed by reconstruction and the development of the economy for a military superpower in the fourth and fifth Plans. They then considered the continuities, particularly the focus on modernisation, industrialisation and the priority given to developing heavy industry in order to reach a judgement. The best responses really focused on the key word 'considerably'. The greatest problem with many responses was the inability to maintain focus on the 'aims' of the Five-year Plans. Consequently, many candidates devoted as much or more time to considering the achievements of the Five-Year Plans. This was not relevant to the question and limited achievement. It is important in planning and writing answers that candidates are clearly aware of the parameters of the question and that they keep focused. Some candidates were unable to extend beyond the third Five-Year Plan, which did not prevent them from accessing the higher levels but did mean that they did not achieve each bullet point within the level securely.

Question 3

Fifteen candidates answered this question. About a third achieved in levels 3 and 4, but for most candidates this was not a good choice of question. Whilst at level 4, candidates were successful in comparing Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's attitudes to the family, most candidates had only a hazy knowledge of those attitudes and often claimed similarities that did not exist, or instead compared Stalin and Brezhnev. In several cases, candidates merely wrote out what they knew about each leader without a focus on attitudes to the family, and some without a focus on Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The most successful responses drew out the similarities in the focus on the nuclear family, the role of women in birthing children and the need for women to engage in paid employment as well as managing the home. They contrasted this with Khrushchev's more liberal and Brezhnev's traditional views about sexuality and contraception. Candidates are reminded that it is beneficial for them to plan their answers briefly before

writing. This not only ensures focus on the question but also helps candidates to pick the question best suited to them.

Question 4

This was the least popular question on the paper with 11 responses. Although, a few achieved in level 4 and at the higher marks in level 3, a significant number were held in level 1. Some candidates were confused as to who was in charge in 1965-82 and thus wrote about Stalin and Beria, while others referred to Gorbachev. There was little to credit in these responses. At the higher levels, good knowledge about the role of dissidents in demonstrating against the government, countered by Andropov's effective crack-down, the use of surveillance and imprisonment and exile, was used effectively to assess whether the government had failed. Again, candidates would have benefited from careful planning, ensuring that they understood the focus of the question and its parameters, in order to make the best choice of essay.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A

Value of Source Question (1(a))

- Candidates must be more prepared to make valid inferences rather than to paraphrase the source
- Be prepared to back up inferences by adding additional contextual knowledge from beyond the source
- Move beyond stereotypical approaches to the nature/purpose and authorship of the source e.g. look at the specific stance and/or purpose of the writer
- Avoid writing about the deficiencies of the source when assessing its value to the enquiry.

Weight of Source Question (1(b)/2(b))

- Candidates should be prepared to assess the weight of the source for an enquiry by being aware that the author is writing for a specific audience. Be aware of the values and concerns of that audience.
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to use contextual knowledge to support/challenge statements and claims made in the source
- Try to distinguish between fact and opinion by using your contextual knowledge of the period
- Knowledge should be integrated with the source evidence, to discuss the inferences drawn and their validity in the light of the contextual understanding of the period.
- In coming to a judgement about the nature/purpose of the source, take account of the weight you may be able to give to the author's evidence in the light of his or her stance and/or purpose

- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to assess reliability by considering what has been perhaps deliberately omitted from the source. However, simply stating that a source is limited because it does not cover certain events or developments does not establish weight since no source can be comprehensive.

Section B

Essay questions

- Candidates must provide more factual details as evidence. Weaker responses lacked depth and sometimes range
- Take a few minutes to plan your answer before you begin to write your response
- Pick out three or four key themes and then provide an analysis of (for e.g.) the target significance mentioned in the question, setting its importance against other themes rather than providing a description of each
- Pay more careful attention to key phrases in the question when analysing and use them throughout the essay to prevent deviation from the central issues and concepts
- Pay careful attention to the date range in the question. Plan the answer with a focus on this range and avoid lengthy exploration of events outside of the time period set
- Try to explore links between issues to make the structure flow more logically and the arguments more integrated.

