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# A-level History

2T The Crisis of Communism: The USSR and the Soviet Empire, 1953-2000  
Report on the Examination

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### **Question 1**

There were three elements to this question: an evaluation of provenance and tone, an evaluation of content and argument (both requiring some application of own knowledge) and a judgment. Although these three elements did not need to be addressed in equal measure, and it was sufficient for the judgment to emerge in the conclusion, something of each was expected in answers. Although some did provide comparative judgment, there is no requirement for this at A-level.

Evaluation of provenance and tone was reasonably effective, with most students being able to state something of worth. Weaker students often took the provenance of the three sources at face value, asserting that Sources A and B had very limited value due to being written in 1970 and 1971 respectively and that Source C had limited value due to being a newspaper article which was bound to lie/stretch the truth. Better students referred to the date of Source A, commenting that it provided useful information as to why Honecker chose the economic path that he did. With Source B, stronger students engaged well with the tone, commenting on its positivity and linked this with Honecker being new in post and the depressed state of Soviet economy under Brezhnev at this time. Such students also drew attention to the date of Source C, commenting that this limited the value of the source due to the strained relations that existed between West and East at this particular juncture.

Students managed the content of the three sources more effectively. Most were able to identify the overarching arguments in each source and most attempted to engage with and evaluate the material, although some did this more successfully than others. Whilst some evaluation was assertive, most students attempted to evaluate the content of the sources using contextual knowledge to both corroborate and criticise the material.

In Source A, better students centred their discussion upon the shortcomings of the GDR's economy and Honecker's response. With Source B, stronger students tended to focus in on the economic proposals that Honecker was making in the source and whether or not they were realised. With Source C, stronger students commented on the many limitations of the source, demonstrating that the view presented, that economic reform under Honecker failed, was problematic. Students who used precise knowledge to support comments made on the source as a whole, achieved better than those students who used patchy knowledge to address content through a sentence-by-sentence approach.

In terms of judgment, better students did as asked and commented on the 'value' of the sources as evidence, and provided evaluative summaries of how each would contribute to an understanding of the GDR's economy in the years 1970 to 1980. Better answers made judgement throughout, although there were some very good responses that dealt with judgment effectively in the conclusion. Some students are still clearly being instructed to compare sources as part of their judgment. This is often happening in the conclusion and it is not a requirement. It is far better for students to assess and judge each source separately.

### **Question 2**

This was the most popular of the three essay questions. Generally, students responded well to this question. Better answers incorporated balance and tended to argue that whilst Khrushchev did bring about social and cultural change, he did so only steadily, and in some ways the fundamental

principles of Stalinism remained. Weaker responses either failed to provide the necessary exact detail that you would expect in a response to a question on a depth paper or were too narrow, arguing that Khrushchev totally reformed the USSR. However, in the main, responses to this question were impressive.

### **Question 3**

Overall, this question was not answered quite as effectively as question 2, however there were some excellent responses that scored well into Level 5. Strong students tended to argue that whilst there were a number of factors that contributed to Yeltsin's downfall, it was in fact his failing economic policies that contributed most significantly. Better responses tended to judge that his radical economic reform had adverse knock-on effects, notably conservative unrest and political instability. Better responses also discussed the impact of the war in Chechnya, circumstance and Yeltsin's general lack of direction and indiscretions. Weaker responses tended to cite a lot of detail about Yeltsin's health, alcoholism and behaviour but demonstrated very little knowledge about much else. Some students knew very little about Yeltsin's economic policies which prevented them from moving beyond Level 2 in the main. However, responses that touched upon his economic policies and dealt with other factors effectively achieved Level 3.

### **Question 4**

This was by far the least popular of the three essay questions. Yet, there were some strong Level 4 responses to it. Some students drew on extensive knowledge to discuss at length both the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of shock therapy and the gradualist approach at restoring capitalism. Good responses tended to focus most heavily on Poland and Hungary, but would often make reference to the economic situation in a number of the other satellite states, notably Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and the GDR. Unfortunately, there were some very weak responses to this question - Level 1 and 2 answers were commonplace. Level 2 responses tended to describe the differences between shock therapy and the gradualist approach without exploring the effects of these across the satellite states. Level 1 responses tended to completely misunderstand the question and provide much that was irrelevant.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.