

Paper 2: A Level sample answers with comments

Section A

You will need to read and analyse the two sources and use them in tandem to assess how useful they are in investigating an issue. For these questions, remember to:

- spend time, up to 10 minutes, reading and identifying the arguments and evidence presented in the sources, then make a plan to ensure that your response will be rooted in these sources
- use specific references from the sources
- deploy own knowledge to develop points made in the sources and establish appropriate context
- come to a substantiated judgement.

Study Sources 5 and 6 (page 367) before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 5 and 6 together to investigate the impact of the policy of War Communism in Russia in 1918–21?

Explain your answer, using both sources, the information given about them and your knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Strong answer

The historian could make considerable use of these sources to investigate the impact of War Communism. Both sources are written from a distinctive and valuable perspective, and both contain important points of information. They do, however, have their limitations.

The authors of the two sources were not White Russian opponents of the regime, determined to present the grimmest possible picture of the impact of Bolshevik policies, but nor were they totally committed supporters of the regime who were blind to its faults. It can be inferred that both authors were what might be called critical friends of the Bolsheviks. In the case of 'New Life', the fact that it was eventually shut down by the Bolsheviks suggests that before July 1918 it had spoken out against the regime but the fact that it continued to be published after the November 1917 Bolshevik Decree on the Press, which suppressed Kadet newspapers, suggests that the Bolsheviks' view of it was not entirely unsympathetic. As for Victor Serge, he was an outsider, in 1919 new to both Russia and Bolshevism. His confession that he traded on the 'black market' – behaviour which Lenin's government condemned as economic sabotage, and which the Cheka used brutal methods to prevent – suggests that he was not among the most committed and inflexible of Bolsheviks. He makes no attempt to hide the fact that conditions in Bolshevik-run Petrograd in 1920–21 were appalling. Although his account seems to have been written long after the era of War Communism, there is no reason to doubt the truth of it. It would have been impossible for him to publish an honest account of conditions under War Communism at the time. Perhaps it became easier later on. The authors of the two sources, then, were to some degree independent-minded. Because of this, their evidence, which focuses on the harmful consequences of War Communism, has a high degree of credibility.

Both sources contain valuable information about the impact of War Communism. 'New Life' reports how brutally government forces implemented the policy of grain requisitioning, which was an integral part of War Communism. It also indicates, by listing the provinces in the grip of 'the bread war', just how widespread peasant resistance to forcible requisitioning was. And it reveals something of the intensity of peasant resistance, noting the frequency of violent clashes between peasants and the authorities. Admittedly, we have no means of knowing where the journalist who wrote the 'New Life' article got his or her information from. But there is plenty

This paragraph gives a helpful brief overview of the lines of argument that are to be developed in the main body of the answer.

This is a closely argued paragraph that focuses on the issue of the reliability of the two sources in the light of their origins and content. Valid inferences are made from information given about the origins of the sources, and these inferences are supported by detailed own knowledge.

The strength of this paragraph is that it does not simply summarise, paraphrase or recycle the content of the source, but instead makes reasoned inferences from it – about, for example, the extent and intensity of peasant resistance to government forces trying to requisition grain.

of other evidence which corroborates the 'New Life' account. In Tambov province in 1920–21, for example, Alexander Antonov's 40,000-strong peasant army fought a guerrilla war against the Red Army. The Red Army used vicious methods to overcome Antonov's guerrillas, using poison gas against them and taking their wives and children hostage.

Victor Serge's memoirs are informative about the working of the rationing system and the kinds of food people received. They also indicate that under War Communism trading on the 'black market' became universal. Less obvious, but important, is what Serge implies about the impact of War Communism on industrial production. Workers, it seems, did not produce what they were supposed to be producing. In addition, though this is not mentioned in the source, we know that many workers left the cities in 1918–21 and returned to their home villages in search of food. The result was 'dead factories', in other words, a slump in industrial output. It is true that Serge only had first-hand knowledge of conditions in Petrograd, but things were no different in Moscow (which lost half of its population in the War Communist era) or other major cities.

Taken together, the two sources could be used by the historian to support the claim that War Communism had an extremely damaging impact on the lives of ordinary Russians. The two sources, moreover, complement each other: 'New Life' describes the impact of War Communism on peasant lives in rural areas, while Victor Serge gives an account of its impact on industrial workers in the big cities. In addition, the descriptions given in the two sources are reliable. However, there are, unsurprisingly, aspects of the impact of War Communism that they do not cover. They focus on its social impact and have little to say about its economic consequences (for example, the drop in industrial and agricultural output and the return to 'one-man management' in industry) or its political consequences (the growing importance of the Cheka, for instance). On the matters they do describe, though, the two sources are exceptionally useful to the historian.

This paragraph contains well-founded comments on both the usefulness to the historian of the two sources in combination and on the limitations of the sources. The comments on the limitations of the sources might, however, have been developed more fully through the deployment of own knowledge.

Once again, there is reasoned inference from the content of the source – this time about the impact of War Communism on factory output. Own knowledge is then deployed to offer a further reason for the decline in industrial production. More might have been said, however, about the rationing system and 'black market' trading.

Verdict

This is a strong response because:

- it focuses tightly throughout on the issue of the sources' usefulness to the historian for the specified purpose
- it is well-balanced, not concentrating excessively on one source at the expense of the other
- it displays a highly developed capacity for making reasoned inferences from the content of the sources and from the information given about their origins and nature

- it deploys detailed own knowledge in support of the arguments and explanations it offers
- it makes well-founded comments on the usefulness to the historian of the two sources in combination
- it makes clear the limitations of the two sources in relation to the purpose specified.