

HISTORY: WORLD AFFAIRS, 1917 – 1991

Paper 2158/01

Paper 1

General comments

The November 2007 paper was the second to incorporate the revised syllabus, and the favourable impression formed in the summer of the performance of that syllabus in an operational paper was confirmed. Questions such as 12, 17 and 22, which had specific reference to the opening year of the revised syllabus, were attempted by a good proportion of the candidates and in a fair number of cases with success in the 1917 references. The same cannot quite be said of those questions that led towards the closing year of 1991, but under the old syllabus little work was done by candidates in the ever advancing closing years. While the last part of **Question 21** received a number of informed attempts, few took the opportunity to explore the later potential of such Questions as 4, 6, 16. In general, it would appear that the new syllabus has established itself well in presenting a viable field of history for candidates to study.

Achievement by candidates was, as ever, widely spread. Some work of excellence was presented, with answers that were focused, informed and suggestive of good understanding. But there was also poorly informed work that failed to engage with the themes of the chosen questions and, at worst, gave general surveys of an area of history rather than a precise response to question demands. Those who seek the best reward in the examination need to ensure, from a careful reading of the words and dates in the questions, that their answer is appropriately focused and purposefully supported by historical information.

As commented before in this report, it is practically helpful for both the candidate and the Examiner if in questions that are sub-divided into lettered parts, each specific part is appropriately entered into the answer; similarly, it is helpful if candidates make clear - by perhaps the omission of a line and appropriate wording - where their work on the last part commences. It is encouraging to note that the vast majority of candidates do present their work in this way.

Comments on specific questions

There were very few attempts at **Questions 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 31**.

Question 1

This was not a particularly popular question and it was unfortunate that most candidates tended to approach it on the rather narrow field of League of Nations activity alone, itself often adequately but not comprehensively approached. The question involved more than that, but there was neglect by most candidates of such treaties as Trianon, Sèvres, Rapallo, Locarno and the Kellogg Pact. Most argued a fair case on the significance of Manchuria in the last part, though the argument could have gone further in most cases by some judicious glancing backwards and forwards.

Question 2

This was the most popular question in the section, if not in the paper. Many answers were focused and informed throughout and consequently scored well. But too many betrayed uncertainty over the diplomatic moves that underlay Hitler's success. In (a) there was often a neglect of the diplomatic and military moves of 1938 and sometimes a concentration on the abortive attempt of 1934, which was merely background here. **Part (b)** was the best attempted, with most candidates seeing their way through the play of events quite ably. In (c) there tended to be too much emphasis on the British declaration of war rather than the moves before September 1st that led to the success of the Polish invasion. Many attempted the last part by good focus on events seen on a broad canvas, but it was unfortunate that too many candidates neglected to consider appeasement in this, surely, very obvious connection.

Question 3

Descriptions of the term 'Cold War' were usually competent and at times sharp and perceptive. But the development of it during the ten years after the war was rarely well balanced. The immediate post-war scenario was usually (though not always) alluded to and attention then focused on Berlin and Eastern Europe. But there was a distinct lack of attention to the early 1950s, with few incorporating into their answers references to the Korean War or the Warsaw Pact or the changed climate after Stalin's death. There was very variable response in the last part, though a number did get beyond the issue of armaments (itself crucial) to consider ideological divides and the play of personalities.

Question 4

In many respects the best part of this not particularly popular question tended to the last part, which elicited some perceptive comparisons, well focused and well informed. Earlier, (a) tended to be the more successfully attempted part, though UNO did not always receive the attention the question required and was sometimes lost in general surveys of the Korean War. **Part (b)** was in almost all cases very poorly attempted, suggesting that the subject is just not known.

Question 5

In (a) the characteristic problem arose - more so here than in **Question 3** - of confusion between the Blockade of 1948 and the Wall of 1961. Such confusion is capable of devastating a candidate's attempt at questions involving post-war Germany, as the answer sets off in a totally unviable direction. In dealing with the Wall here, there tended to be minimal diplomatic background in the circumstances of the early sixties. While there is plenty to go for in the last part, attempts here were generally weak and poorly informed.

Question 6

There were few attempts at this question and not one of any adequacy; some candidates referred to events in the first rather than the second half of the century and material presented failed to engage with the question's demands. The question is included in this report as it seems important to highlight the danger of attempting questions in this socio-economic mode unless a candidate is able to interpret what is required and present adequately precise material in the answer.

Question 7

A popular question, often quite well attempted in all its parts. But there were shortcomings in all areas by some candidates. The focus in (a) was often not well held. While the origin of fascist power and events up to the March on Rome had relevance, the question probed further than that, into the developing structure of fascist control and it was here that material sometimes lacked adequate focus. **Part (b)** was usually recognised, but supportive detail could have been stronger. **Part (c)** was often disappointing in its restriction to Abyssinia, vital though that is, and by its diversion into other areas of diplomatic concern unconnected with 'overseas empire'. The last part was often quite well attempted, with some usefully perceptive material, well argued, from the better candidates.

Question 9

This was a modestly popular question in which too often knowledge of the war itself was absent. Some candidates virtually ignored the question's three-fold initial structure and narrated Spanish history from the fall of the monarchy to the outbreak of war, a narration that could at best be regarded as modest background. Few focused on Franco's wartime leadership in (a); while in (b) the main thrust of Axis intervention was understood, little practical detail was given (Guernica rarely appeared; Guadalajara never); there was surprisingly, total ignorance in many cases of the international brigades in (c). Given such poor knowledge of the war earlier, it is unsurprising that the last part was usually quite inadequately attempted.

Question 12

Most candidates were able to make viable attempts at all parts of this question, yet few responded fully to the potential they offered. Attempts at (a) were often partial and in need of firmer diplomatic background. **Part (b)** was sometimes confused for the ultimate decisions at Paris; others were able to detect the main purport of the points and to group them purposefully. In connection with the Fourteen Points, it has to be said that Examiners are humbled by those candidates who reproduce accurately all Fourteen Points, but hasten to add that this is not really necessary; the main aim should be to understand what the Points were seeking to achieve and to provide salient examples. Wilson's role in both (c) and the last part was often accurately alluded to, but not well supported in practical references.

Question 13

While somewhat less popular than **Question 12** in this section, **Question 13** tended to elicit the better informed answers. **Parts (a), (b) and (c)** were almost equally well informed and well exemplified, with a minority betraying total ignorance of the Ku Klux Klan and prohibition. Many found (c) a useful stepping stone to the last part, often well argued and developed.

Question 17

Answers to this popular question were of very mixed quality. There is, of course, plenty to go for in all three parts here, but candidates seem more prone in this than in some other salient areas to get the time sequence of events confused. They need to be clear that February saw the unseating of the tsarist government and the establishment of the provisional government; that October saw the unseating of the provisional government and the establishment of a Bolshevik government; that thereafter over a four year period the Bolsheviks fought to consolidate their control. If these vital sequences are confused - as too often they were this time - then the answer declines in quality.

Question 18

This was the most popular question in the section and one of the most popular in the paper. It was also very often distinctly well done, with a number of candidates scoring the maximum or near it. Most candidates recognised all three initial components. More supportive detail would have been welcome in some attempts at the second and third parts. For example, the nature of control and direction of the plans in (b) and the authoritarian structures that administered the purges in (c). As with the comparable last part of the Mussolini question earlier (**Question 7**) there were some thoughtful and perceptive attempts at the last part, often well rooted in practical instances.

Question 19

Part (b) tended to be the least well attempted of the three initial parts in this question. Practical detail of the siege was seriously lacking, even from candidates who showed good knowledge elsewhere; some treated it briefly as if it were in the same category as (c). The last part was often not fully addressed; some reference to the declining fortunes of their foes was needed for a well rounded response here.

Question 21

A Gorbachev question is usually, as this time, a modestly popular option. Candidates usually - as again this time - have little difficulty with the policy terms and often not with the circumstances of his fall in 1991. But there needs to be a sharper approach and a more extended coverage of the practical ways in which he established his policies in the Soviet Union. This involves some acquaintance with basic economic concepts in order to detect the difference between his approaches and those of his predecessors.

Question 22

While of the three initial parts of the question, (a) was the one that might be expected to attract the shortest answer, it was disappointing that too often so salient a feature in Middle Eastern history was left loose and vague and undeveloped. More might have been expected on (b) (covering two decades) and on (c), but these parts also received in the main rather restricted responses. Most were able to get at the basic Arab-Israeli tension in the last part, but were unable to proceed from there into a closer view of the diplomacy of the late 1940s.

Question 27

While there were many well focused and well balanced answers to this popular question, too many failed to develop the specific Communist party theme which it contained. Hence there were too many blanket accounts of major events in China during these years, in which the roles of the Guomindang and the Japanese were given equal treatment with the Communist party rather than being seen as a means by which the party's power increased. In such accounts also, more was needed on the crucial years of the late 1940s. Response to the final part was disappointing in its general neglect of changes in rural China in the early 1950s and other changes that were specifically 'social'.

Question 28

While this was noticeably less popular than **Question 27**, it attracted a number of responses. Few of them, however, developed any of its themes with assurance and selected items randomly, not appreciating the span of more than a quarter of a century which the question covered. Given the comparatively sparse treatment of (a) and (b), it is not surprising that the last part received only rather vague responses.

Question 29

A more popular question and one which received very mixed responses. The best - and there were quite a few of them - provided excellent knowledge of significant events in (a) and (b) and at the end a well balanced assessment of the use of atomic weapons that suggested close engagement with that issue. Many of these answers scored highly, the maximum being obtained in some cases. But there were others that were both shallow - presenting little more than Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima - and inaccurate in their placing of material in (a) and (b).

Question 30

This also secured very mixed results. Some were replete with balanced information on the first part, while others were thin on the course of events, but often focused excessively on the issue of partition for good balance of presentation. The last part appeared to be well known and while there was inevitable variation in quality of response many did perceive the essential reasons for the events of 1971.