

# Skills Supplement

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## Answering Source-based Questions

### The Soviet Union after Lenin. Collectivisation

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THE SYNOPTIC UNIT in Edexcel History requires students to use all the skills they have developed in the A-Level course: the ability to work with sources, the knowledge they have acquired and the ability to handle different interpretations. Above all, answers must be source led but with the students' knowledge fully integrated.

Question (a) requires understanding of the key features of a historical movement or development to be demonstrated. It will involve primary sources and a judgement is required cross-referencing the sources and testing them against their own knowledge.

Question (b) asks students to make a judgement about an historical interpretation of an issue of legitimate historical debate. There will be evidence which both supports and challenges the interpretation and students must absorb and analyse this as well as using their own knowledge in answering the question.

Below are a series of questions which can be used as a checklist by students as they work and for self assessment of how they have performed when they have finished. The teacher uses it as a cover sheet in the marking process. The aim is to clarify in students' minds what they need to do.

Check list	Student self assessment	Tutor assessment
Have you allocated your time sensibly? • on reading and planning? • twice as much on (b) as (a)		
Have you identified what you have to make judgements on in both (a) and (b), and engaged with the interpretation in (b) in your answer?		
Have you analysed the sources and used them fully in your answers?		
Have you integrated your knowledge with the sources in your answer?		
Do your answers focus on the question throughout and come to a conclusion?		

Overall comment, possible areas for improvement and targets for next assignment

In the exam the question will cover a broader issue than collectivisation alone, this example uses the same format and is designed to give some practice on a topic covered near the beginning of the unit.

**Source 1.** Extracts from the Smolensk archive. Peasants' letters to *Our Village*, a peasant newspaper concerning the first collectivisation drive, 1929-30. These letters were not actually published in the newspaper.

Ivan Trofimovitch. I am a poor peasant. I have one hut, one barn, one horse, three dessyatins of land. ... Isn't it true that all poor peasants and middle peasants do not want to go into the kolkhoz at all, but you drive them in by force? ... (In my village) poor peasants came out against it ... they did not want serfdom.

**Source 2.** Lev Kopelev was an activist who later went into exile, quoted in R. Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow* (1986) p 233.

With the rest of my generation, I firmly believed that the ends justified the means. Our great goal was the universal triumph of Communism ...

I saw what 'total collectivisation meant - how they mercilessly stripped the peasants in the winter of 1932-33. I took part in it myself, scouring the countryside ... testing the earth with an iron rod for loose spots that might lead to buried grain. With others, I emptied out the old folks' storage chests, stopped my ears to the children's crying and the women's wails. For I was convinced that I was accomplishing the great and necessary transformation of the countryside; that in the days to come the people who lived there would be better off ...

In the terrible spring of 1933 I saw people dying of hunger. I saw women and children with distended bellies, turning blue, still breathing but with vacant lifeless eyes. And corpses - corpses in ragged sheepskin coats and cheap felt boots; corpses in peasant huts ... I saw all this and did not go out of my mind or commit suicide. ... Nor did I lose my faith. As before, I believed because I wanted to believe.

**Source 3.** R. Service, *A History of Twentieth-century Russia* (1997) pp 181-2.

With the exception of 1930, mass collectivisation meant that not until the mid-1950s did agriculture regain the level of output achieved in the last years before the Great



ensure that the spring sowing took place.

You might conclude by putting peasant and activist reactions to collectivisation in a wider context of competing aspirations. The *smychka* (the link between the working class and the peasantry), never strong but dear to Bukharin, had been broken. The 25,000ers and Komsomols believed in the cause and in Stalin when he claimed that there was no fortress a Bolshevik could not storm. However, in spite of their work the Bolsheviks remained, in Viola's view, an urban party of fortress stormers who were ultimately unable to penetrate the fortress of agrarian Russia with the idea of socialism. Some activists in time, as Source 2 shows, began to have their own doubts. After collectivisation had been established, apart from a few who benefited as tractor drivers, farm managers or Stakhanovites, the peasants continued to resist by lavishing attention on their private plots and working on the fields of the kolkhozy as little as possible. When Kirov was murdered the NKVD reported that the only note of regret among the Smolensk peasantry was that it had not been Stalin. One rhyme ended:

When Stalin is killed  
They will disband all the kolkhozy

- (b) 'Forced collectivisation may have been an economic failure and a human disaster but it was the only acceptable way forward politically for the Communist party.' Using your own knowledge, and the evidence of all five sources, explain how far you agree with this interpretation. (40 marks)

You are being asked for a judgement on the interpretation of collectivisation expressed in the quotation. Sources 4 and 5 are particularly useful here and open up the debate on whether there were genuine alternatives to Stalin's policy. Viola in Source 5 and Hunter in Source 4 are clearly on opposite sides of the argument.

Hunter and others argue that the NEP did provide a viable system of successful industrialisation. Further, the view in Source 4, using counterfactual analysis, is that Stalin's policies were so wasteful that almost any alternative would have been better economically. Ward in Source 5 concedes that the evidence allows that the NEP would have produced respectable rates of economic growth but that this was 'a direction in which the party never intended to go'. Stalin wanted to build up heavy industry and armaments very fast. Factors like the war scare and ideology, as well as the recurrent grain crises mentioned in Source 3, meant that by 1929 Stalin was determined to bring grain procurements and the peasants under control so that he could launch 'the great

turn'. The NEP had always been regarded as a retreat by party activists, like the young Kopelev (Source 2), who welcomed a return to the heroic atmosphere of the revolution and the civil war.

Both Sources 3 and 4 raise the issue of whether forced collectivisation failed to provide resources for industry. Recent research confirms that in the critical years 1928-32 there was no net transfer of resources from agriculture to industry. More tractors were needed but still did not make up for the slaughter of horses and, as Source 3 states, police and troops were sent to control the peasantry. This is crucial in the discussion of whether collectivisation was an economic failure. The wastefulness of collectivisation and the inefficiency of the kolkhozy, referred to in Sources 3 and 4, will need amplifying from your own knowledge. However, the second paragraph of Source 3 argues that Stalin could draw up a favourable balance sheet. It looks both at the political and economic impact of collectivisation. Raising state grain procurements was more important to Stalin than making agriculture more productive. Control over the peasants would allow Stalin to increase the pace of industrialisation, defeat the Right and bring the party fully behind him. Some historians have argued that he needed the 'Stalin Revolution' (the Five Year Plans, collectivisation and the terror) psychologically to put himself on a par with Lenin.

The sources agree that collectivisation was a human disaster: you should mention the number of deaths. Conquest argued that the Ukrainian famine 1932-3 was deliberate genocide but other historians reply that these deaths were due to collectivisation and poor weather which squeezed the peasants. Stalin refused to ask for outside help as Lenin had done in 1921. The primary sources are less central to part (b) but the scale of the disaster should be explored with reference to Source 2. From your own knowledge you should bring in the loss of the most effective farmers, the kulaks, and the prolonged impact on peasant morale - the word 'serfdom' in Source 1 is deliberately chosen.

To sum up, you need to develop your own answer to the question by selecting appropriate material from the sources and your own knowledge. An awareness of debate among historians is helpful but don't be distracted by this. You should not recount the Nove/Millar debate on whether Stalin was necessary, but you must have a view on whether there were alternative paths to collectivisation available to the communists and what its impact was in economic and human terms.

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