TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITAIN, 1914 TO THE PRESENT

HIS-5057B

Time allowed: 2 hours

Answer TWO questions.

Do not use the same material in the same way in more than one answer in this paper.

Notes are not permitted in this examination.

Do not turn over until you are told to do so by the Invigilator.
1. What has been the impact of trade unionism on British politics? Answer with respect to EITHER the period 1910-1926 OR 1972-1985.

2. ‘War is a motor for social change.’ (Marwick). Discuss with reference to EITHER the Great War OR the Second World War.

3. How deeply was Britain affected by the ‘Great Depression’ of the 1930s?

4. How did British political parties respond to the coming of mass democracy, 1918-1945?

5. To what extent did ideas about love and sex change between the 1930s and the 1960s?

6. How far were popular aspirations for new homes fulfilled in the period 1945-1975?

7. Account for the emergence and impact of EITHER post-war youth subcultures OR the ‘New Left’ in Britain.

8. What has been the impact of identity politics in post-war Britain? Answer with respect to EITHER gender AND sexuality OR race.

9. What has been the impact of the 'New Right' in British politics since the 1970s?

10. Why did Britain vote to leave the European Union?

END OF PAPER
As usual the better answers made an argument using evidence. The best answers achieved this by conveying a sense of both the historical context (what happened) and the historiography (what historians have written about what happened). Below is a summary of how candidates answered the questions.

1. What has been the impact of trade unionism on British politics? Answer with respect to either the period 1910-1926 or 1972-1985. (7 answers, all on 1972-1985)

Many of the mid-range answers displayed some understanding of the political importance of Conservative reactions to the miner’s strikes of 1972 and 1974. However, across the board there was a poor understanding industrial relations more widely, the relationship between the Labour Party and the unions and divisions within the labour movement between e.g. the TUC, different unions, shop stewards and the rank and file etc. Hay’s argument about the constructed nature of the ‘crisis’ of the Winter of Discontent were often poorly outlined. In particular candidates displayed a poor grasp of what actually happened during both the winter of discontent and the 1984/5 miners’ strike.

2. ‘War is a motor for social change.’ (Marwick) discuss with reference to either the Great War or the Second World War. (12 answers on WWI, 8 on WWII)

As usual the stronger answers gave accounts of the historiography and conveyed a sense of change over time (i.e. thought about the pre-war, wartime and post-war contexts). Candidates who answered on the Second World War were (in general) weaker on the impact of the wartime context. Most WWI answers focused on the impact of the war on the position of women, the working classes (or class relations more generally) and/or considered the enhanced role of the state and the limits of post-war reconstruction.

3. How deeply was Britain effected by the ‘Great Depression’ of the 1930s? (13 answers)

The strongest answers here thought about the impact class, region and industry had on people’s experiences of the 1930s. Some good evidence about the impact of unemployment was deployed e.g. Boyd-Orr’s studies of malnutrition, Rowntree’s surveys of poverty, the work of commentators like Orwell and Priestley. Better answers thought about internal migration and the growth of the ‘new’ industries. Some candidates successfully tied these to historiographical debates but in general the historiography of leisure and ‘new’ England was absent.

4. How did British political parties respond to the age of mass democracy, 1918-1945? (2 answers)

The stronger answers deployed evidence about the ways in which the Conservative party mobilised an anti-socialist coalition between the wars, and considered how the wartime circumstances shifted opinion to the left.

5. To what extent did ideas about love and sex change between the 1930s and the 1960s? (9 answers)
In general terms candidates were rather weaker on the 1930s and 1940s. When evidence was presented it was usually some version of Langhamer’s argument about a mid-century ‘emotional’ revolution in ideas of love and partnership. However, often this was misconstrued as an alternative to (rather than a necessary precursor for) the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The strongest answers were grounded in a good understanding of the historiography, drawing on evidence for sexual practices prior to the 1960s (e.g. from Fisher and Fisher and Szreter), survey evidence from the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Schofield, Gorer, Chesser), and making nuanced arguments about the different causes of a sexual revolution (Brown on declining religiosity, Cook on the Pill, Weeks on a permissive moment followed by real change in the 1970s with the liberation movements).

6. How far were popular aspirations for new homes fulfilled in the period 1945-1975? (7 answers)

The stronger answers got to grips with what people’s aspirations were (drawing on Mass Observation and the work of Langhamer and Giles) before discussing the extent to which they were delivered. More nuanced accounts included an analysis of contemporary debates about the degree to which suburbanisation and new housing impacted on working class political identities (the embourgeoisement debate) and experiences of ‘community life’ (looking at Young and Willmott and the work of historians like Clapson, Lawrence and Ramsden etc).

7. Account for the emergence and impact of either post-war youth subcultures or the ‘New Left’ in Britain. (9 answers, all on subcultures)

The better answers here considered the economic (affluence), demographic and wider cultural underpinnings of post-war subcultures (thinking about Americanisation, the impact of Rock n Roll etc). However, there was often a poor understanding of both pre-1950s ‘mass culture’ and what it was that made subcultures distinctive. Often candidates just described in very basic terms what Teds and/or Mods and Rockers looked like. Some candidates made use of subcultural theory (e.g. Phil or Stan Cohen) but in general discussions of the historiography were notable by their absence.

8. What has been the impact of identity politics in post-war Britain? Answer with respect to either gender and sexuality or race. (8 answers: 3 on gender and sexuality, 5 on race)

Very few answers got to grips with what identity politics was (i.e. political mobilisation on the basis of race/gender/sexuality) in relation to the sort of class politics (i.e. via the labour movement). Some very strong answers provided excellent and detailed accounts of black political organising, grounded in the secondary literature and conveying a strong account of change over time.

9. What has been the impact of the ‘New Right’ in British politics since the 1970s? (6 answers)

The strongest answers defined the ‘new right’ as a combination of neoliberal economic thinking and authoritarian populism. Here the ideas and activities of key economists (Hayek, Friedman) and the development of the ‘Neoliberal thought collective’ (via the MPS and think tanks and influential journalists) were well unpacked. Candidates were generally weaker on
1960s and 1970s populist figures (Powel and Whitehouse) and on what the Thatcher governments actually did.

10. Why did Britain vote to leave the European Union? (9 answers)

In general this question was not well answered, with a number of candidates failing to deploy any real evidence. The strongest answers attempted to historicize the UK’s relationship with the EU, the growth of English nationalism and the complex history of immigration. Surprisingly there was little on the rise of UKIP and the class basis of Labour support since the 1990s.