



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

October 2020

Pearson Edexcel GCE

In Politics (9PL0)

Paper 1 : UK Politics and Core Political Ideas

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Principal Examiner Report

Autumn 2020

Pearson Edexcel Advanced Level in Politics (9PL0/01) Paper 1: UK Politics and Core Political Ideas

Introduction

This exam series was unique in many ways. It was sat outside the normal examination window, during the on-going concerns of the Covid-19 pandemic which still continues to disrupt daily lives and the established educational framework to which we are accustomed. It came after Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) were delivered and the issues which followed. The summation of these circumstances produced a cohort which was far smaller than in any past series of exams – both the new specification and its legacy peers.

Taking all these difficulties on board the exam was approached by the vast majority with dedication and preparation. We saw some excellent up-to-date responses which reflected on the contemporary political environment. Many made use of recent events to display their knowledge and understanding of the subject.

However after every examination series we look back and reflect on what went well and garner evidence of sound learning but we also consider areas where candidates appeared to struggle and un-pick and understand their difficulties. We look back on the wider experience in the hope that we approach future series with greater confidence and clarity.

Planning in both essay and source questions plays a huge role in raising the profile of an answer. Where a candidate with insight maps out their planned journey it serves to focus the response and when this is combined with the need to appreciate both sides of an argument it is impressive how this improves the quality of the answer.

Question 1(a)

This was by far the most popular of the two source questions. It was very rare that candidates had little to comment on the topic of voting behaviour and this is a credit to both themselves and the Centres who have covered this new area on the specification. Few candidates wandered off the set source and the vast majority adhered to the groundwork established in the source. All made relevant comments about the impact of age on voting behaviour – however it was the minority which drilled down on this and fully drew out AO2 and AO3 points that age is a good predictor at its extremes but not in the centre, few also made the connection that the voting behaviour in age varies in impact when combined with turnout – younger voters often don't vote whereas the older voters are far more reliable voters. Likewise many had a solid understanding of the impact of the media: high performing candidates linked not only newspapers but the growing importance of other forms of media such as social media.

The issue of class and region was well appreciated by the vast majority of candidates. Region was especially well covered. Interesting and relevant material surrounding the

2019 General Election was employed to discuss both region and class with the breaching of the so-called 'Red Wall' which defied regional and class patterns. It is worth stressing that AO3 can emerge from ranking and discussing the salience of the factors of age, media region and class

Age and Media have become huge parts of determining voting behaviour. These factors have had a jump in importance due to the major participation in eDemocracy and the major effect the information age has had on how the general public receive this news. For this reason, social class and region are simply less accurate because it doesn't take into account the news and information people are receiving.

Examiner Comment:

This is an example of a clear introduction, which establishes the nature of the debate, and lays out clearly the argument that it will put forward throughout the essay.

~~Answer~~ The Source indicates that the older a person is, the more likely they would be to vote for the Conservative Party while the younger they are, the more likely they'll vote for Labour. During the 2017 election, under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, Labour party made use of the media to attract young voters. Examples of this include 'memes' used online and ~~the~~ also celebrity support from artists such as Stormzy. Labour also targetted young voters by including the scrapping of tuition fees on their mandate. The problem, however, with ~~a~~ trying to appeal to young voters is that they are less

Examiner Comment

Here the student has taken an issue from the source and developed it using examples from their own knowledge.

~~concern~~ This, ~~the~~ argument about social class influencing voting behaviour must be rejected. Instead, ^{some states} he ~~idea~~ that 'Age' has become a significant ~~element~~ element, in predicting voting behaviour, and this is more ^{of a} convincing argument. Younger people tend to vote Labour as shown in the source, people ages 18 - 20 are more than 60% likely to vote Labour ~~now~~ and some aged 70-72 are 60% likely to vote Conservatives. This is ~~is~~ Age being a determinant of voting behaviour is a convincing argument and a ~~strong~~ ~~argument~~ strong argument as well. Younger people are ~~socialised~~

Examiner comment

This paragraph above follows a section considering an argument that social class is important. In this excerpt the student is rejecting the argument that class is significant, arguing instead that age is the most significant. It is clear which side they are arguing.

Overall, it's safe to say that due to ~~advancement~~ ~~of social media~~, and the idea of social mobility, it has lead to people dealing with their class and perhaps over so those factors don't influence voting behaviour anymore, instead it's due to the ~~advancement~~ ~~of the~~ media and other factors such as age, so voting behaviour can be predicted to an extent, so overall I agree with the view.

Examiner Comment

In their overall conclusion the student addresses both sides but concludes agreeing with the statement in the title.

Question 1b

This proved to be the less popular of the two source questions and it introduced a topic again new to the current specification, the condition of how political parties are funded in the UK and its equity.

The better responses made diligent use of the data provided in the question. Such as the vast imbalance of funds held by the two main parties compared to the scarce resources held by minor parties. In terms of membership numbers, how low some parties are in paid up members. For instance, the low numbers in the current Conservative Party when set aside other parties such as the SNP. At the core of this question was the remit of does this imbalance of funding matter? Furthermore, we required both a case for the status quo or change. Weaker responses failed to effectively connect and see the issues which the data exposed in funding and its impact on both electoral success and democracy.

The source discusses "how a party can 'buy' an election" and that the Conservative party continues to rely heavily on private donors. An example of this was in 2019, during the election campaign, John Gore, donated £1.5 million to Boris Johnson's Conservative party campaign. This is problematic as in a true democracy, it is important that elections are free and fair. In allowing certain rich individuals to have a considerable advantage in influence on the election outcome than other individuals, this questions how fair the election truly are.

Examiner comment

Here the student is referencing a point in the source and then using it to add their own knowledge with good development of the point.

The source does show that perhaps it is right the financial advantage held by major two parties is in place, compared to that of minority parties like the Greens, Plaid Cymru and UKIP. The Green's have a meagre 39,400 members compared to the Labour parties 540,000, thus the drastic difference in membership income could be argued to be fair and democratic. It would be wrong for state funding to be introduced to limit party and enhance the campaign of a minority party, when it is clear that there are far more supporters of the major party within society. The current system in place ensures that the financial privilege and size of membership of the two major parties prevents dangerous 3rd parties from UKIP getting near parliamentary influence, which almost happened in 2015 when they gained 12.6% of the vote. State funding would have significantly improved their 1.7 million income, irrespective of their 23,600 members, purely based on the protest votes of many citizen's in relation with growing distaste towards the European Union.

Examiner Comment

Here the student is engaging with the source and considering the essay question in a highly thoughtful way, probing deeply into the heart of the debate.

require more support from the state, particularly in these times of pandemic. Yet, the inequalities in the table of the source cannot be ignored, and show how undemocratic the funding of parties is, with 'the fear that a rich party can buy an election' being firmly true. The Conservatives are the richest party, with 151/191 of the top UK donors donating to the party. The majority of the others go to Labour, who already have substantially more generated from trade unions and membership fees than third parties. This ensures the domination of the two major parties at the top of the political system, even when in recent years it has been electorally expressed their is a desire for further third party representation. This will never happen without state funding, as the current system in place favours two party domination and an ability for the major parties to pass legislation limiting 3rd parties in relation to short money, as well as an unrivalled financial ability to steal their ideas in relation to immigration and the environment. Thus, the source shows 'big differences between the incomes of different political parties', could be solved via a more democratic and fair system of state funding, limiting the advantage of unfair donations and membership fees held by the major two parties.

Examiner Comment

Here the student is critiquing the opposing argument, concluding that state funding is a fairer way,

While state funding may be highly preferable to the current method, especially for minor parties, the question is not nearly so simple, as a good source of funding, and method of distribution must not only be found but agreed to by Parliament. Even then it would be costly and unpopular with tax payers and free speech purists. In conclusion, it would be preferable, but a struggle. Especially in our modern political climate and turmoil. It could happen in the future, but as the funding status quo is a way of maintaining the dominant party structure, it is very unlikely to change anytime soon.

Examiner Comment

Here the student has expressed a view that state funding is preferable. However, they are still recognising some problems with state funding. This is a good example of a nuanced conclusion.

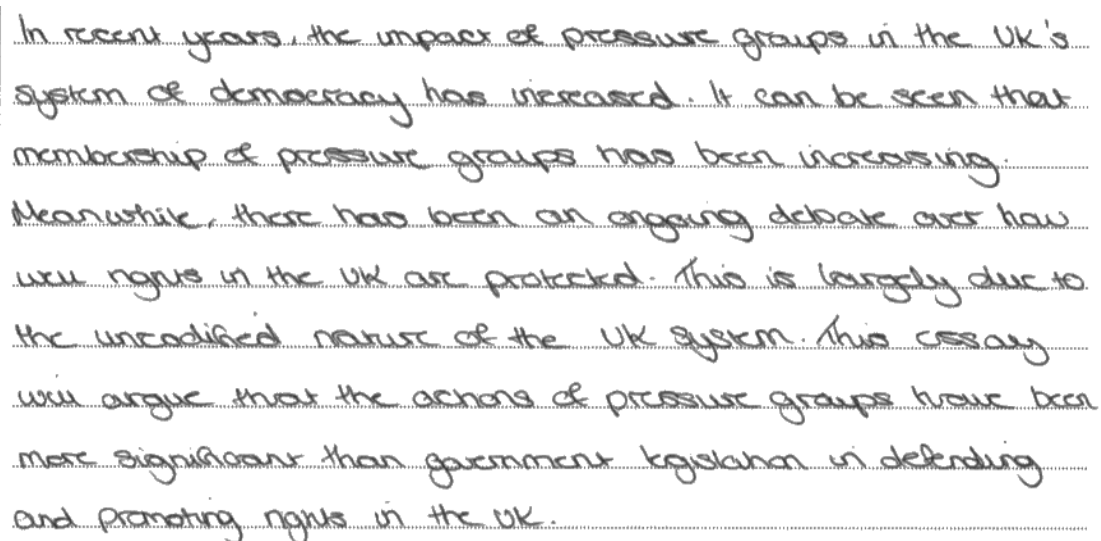
Question 2a

The essays enjoyed equal take up from candidates.

In the summer exam of 2019, the scope of pressure groups and the connection with 'other collective organisations' was highlighted. In this series the connection was probed between Section 1.3 and 1.4 – both are connected to a joint topic and serve to illustrate how pressure groups are integrated in the new specification.

In this first essay many candidates were able to reach out to combine the breadth of the new specification with regard to the position of pressure groups and the advancement of rights. They were aware of a range of examples where pressure groups have been at the forefront in delivering the force to enable an advancement of rights. Many saw pressure groups as integral to the work of government departments when new legislation is being designed – and they cited many good examples – such as Children's rights and the drive for the minimum wage. Many also used their knowledge of two appropriate pressure groups linked to civil liberties from Section 1.4. Good citation of the role of pressure groups in advancing rights through Private Members Bills was illustrated – such as the legislation on abortion, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the abolition of the death penalty, the free vote on same sex marriage was also widely noted.

However, a significant minority were still fossilised on the traits of the legacy specification and spent a huge amount of time in classifying pressure groups, and while this has some synergy it cannot deliver the wider response required. A notable minority could not cite contemporary civil liberties pressure groups nor link any relevant legislation noted on the specification such as the Human Rights Act or the Equality Act.



In recent years, the impact of pressure groups in the UK's system of democracy has increased. It can be seen that membership of pressure groups has been increasing. Meanwhile, there has been an ongoing debate over how well rights in the UK are protected. This is largely due to the uncodified nature of the UK system. This essay will argue that the actions of pressure groups have been more significant than government legislation in defending and promoting rights in the UK.

Examiner Comment

Here the introduction defines the nature of the debate, which provides a framework for the essay that follows and ends with a clear idea of 'direction of travel'

To a limited extent it could be argued that the actions of pressure groups have been more significant than government legislation in defending and promoting rights. This is showcased through the fact that pressure groups such as Extinction Rebellion have been able to utilise social media as a means to promote the rights of British citizens to a world with clean, effective air and low emissions. Furthermore, pressure groups are able to effectively mobilise support as shown with the 2020 BLM protests in which millions took to the streets of the UK to call out racial injustice within the UK. The UK BLM movement can be seen as an example of a pressure group both defending and promoting rights within the UK. This clearly indicates that pressure groups have been more significant than government legislation in defending and promoting rights within the UK because of their ability to mobilise support without the restraints of parliament as well as the fact that membership within pressure groups has risen whilst party membership was declining, indicating a lack of trust within parties and their policies* as well as a showcase of pluralist democracy. However, a counterargument for this is

Examiner comment

Above the student does a very effective job of outlining how pressure groups have been more significant than government legislation in promoting rights. There is a good use of contemporary examples which are evidenced to probe the point in depth

However, a counterargument for this is the understanding that whilst ~~direct forms of democracy~~ pressure groups do a good job of promoting rights, showcasing their increased awareness that is provided by pressure groups, ultimately, they fail to adequately defend rights as they don't have the political means to do so, shown through the rejection of Black Lives Matter petition that was submitted into the government website in June 2020.

To a large extent, it could be argued that pressure groups have not been more significant than government legislation in promoting and defending rights in the UK. This is due to the fact that since 1998 with Tony Blair's majority government, there have been significant legislation that has both promoted and defended rights in the UK. The 1998 Human Rights Act can be seen as an example of such a legislation dedicated to the entrenchment of rights within the UK, as this it was adopted from the ECHR. This showcases that government legislation has been more significant in defending and promoting human rights as it has the long-term means to do so, through Parliament. Furthermore, legislation such as the Equality Act (2010) seek to further provide and protect rights within the UK. It can also be seen that the 2013 Same Sex Marriage Act was an example of ~~defending~~ and promoting rights, as it afforded equal marriage status to same sex couples.

Examiner Comment

...here the same student as above then goes on to argue that in fact Government legislation does a better job than pressure groups in promoting and defending rights. Throughout this section the student is arguing against their earlier point above.

To conclude, to a limited extent it could be argued that pressure groups have been more significant than government legislation in defending and promoting rights. This is shown through their ability to utilise social media to exert pressure as well as spread awareness ~~to~~ via social media. However, to a larger extent it can be seen that pressure groups have not been more significant than government legislation in defending and promoting rights as the government has enacted more tangible methods of support as well as created political and legal institutions to defend and promote rights.

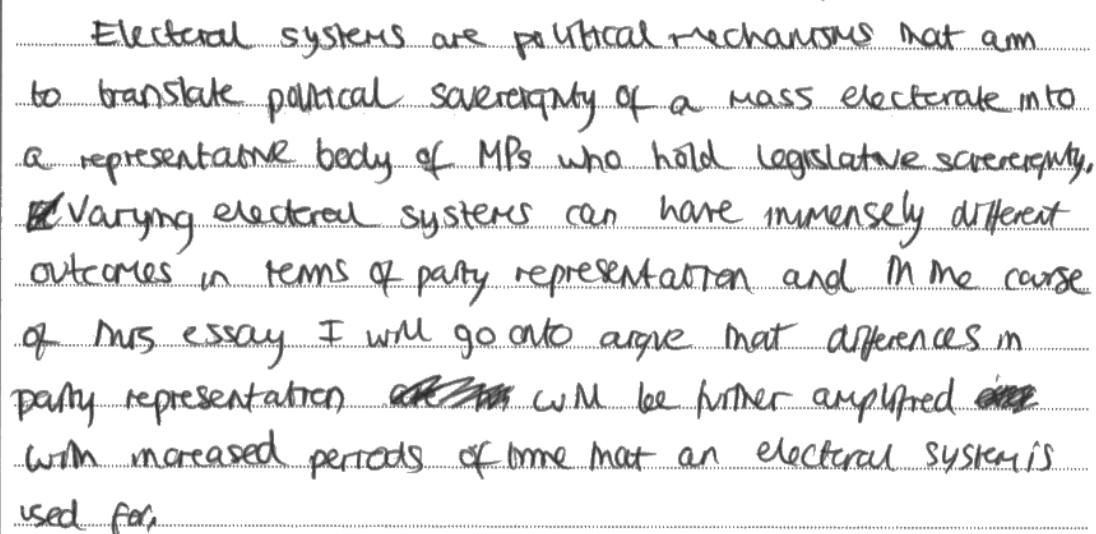
Examiner Comment

In their final conclusion, the student comes down on the side of government legislation, arguing that to a greater extent government legislation was more significant, while still recognising that pressure groups still play a key role. This is a good example of a nuanced conclusion.

Question 2b

At the core of this essay was the question do electoral systems make a difference to the representation and hence the success or otherwise of political parties? The essay required competency in two key areas on the specification – how various electoral systems in the UK operate and then the outcomes of those elections in terms of results. Many were well furnished with clear operative details and could label and identify various electoral systems and then link this to their consequences. It was good to see candidates had come prepared and was able to use their knowledge of at least one devolved parliament/assembly as required on the specification. A comparison often used was the SNP in Scotland – and outcomes under first past the post for general elections and then AMS as used in Holyrood.

However, where faults emerged it was invariably linked to insufficient or incorrect knowledge to back up points and set out the issues which arise. It was common to see incorrect labelling and understanding of electoral systems – and although this is not a major hurdle – problems tended to cascade when outcomes were in addition not well mastered. This gave a weak AO1 base on which to build meaningful AO2 and AO3. Often students answered this question as “how representative are different electoral systems”, rather than debating whether having different electoral systems makes significant differences to party representation.



Electoral systems are political mechanisms that aim to translate political sovereignty of a mass electorate into a representative body of MPs who hold legislative sovereignty. Varying electoral systems can have immensely different outcomes in terms of party representation and in the course of this essay I will go on to argue that differences in party representation ~~will~~ will be further amplified ~~and~~ with increased periods of time that an electoral system is used for.

Examiner Comment

This introduction sets out the way the student is going to answer the question as well as the conclusion they are going to come to.

In addition to the aforementioned debate, the ~~effect~~^{effect} of majoritarian systems on party representation should also be considered. ~~Here the~~ ~~was~~ ~~interest~~ In Belfast south 2015 the social democratic and labour party MP Anasur McDonnell won the seat with just 24.5% of the vote share. This was under the FPTP system. However if the election was held under AV, the same MP would ^{most likely} have been returned because ~~votes~~^{votes} ^{under FPTP} have been statistically observed to be the most common winners under AV where second votes are considered. As a result of this, it is fair to argue that electoral systems which are similar do not result in substantial differences to party representation. This argument is compounded by the observation that ideological support is balanced out under most majoritarian systems. For example, whilst UKIP were fervently underrepresented in the 2015 election (3,891,129 votes for one seat) the other party who had Brexit as a manifesto commitment (conservatives) were overrepresented. As a result, party representation was broadly represented at the secondary level of policy representation despite the appearance of significant divergence.

Examiner Comment

This student is addressing the issue of how significant the differences are that electoral systems make, making a number of interesting observations along the way.

Section B

Overall – as with candidate responses in summer 2019 – knowledge of core political ideas was impressive. There were many well informed and articulate responses. Compared to 2019, there was evidence of more comparative paragraphs with different strands being included in single paragraphs. This could be improved by improving the comparisons within the paragraphs. AO3 evaluation was still problematic. It is important to remember that in Ideas essays, the judgement made is whether the disagreements are greater than the similarities or vice versa, NOT simply whether differences exist.

Question 3a

This question was by far the more popular of the two questions on core political ideas. It was handled really well. Many produced a good and contextualised debate as to whether modern liberalism was still heavily influenced by classical liberal ideas. It was good to see how well the thinkers were employed to take the argument to the reader – Rawls was well understood and the 'Veil of ignorance' featured prominently. Also, there was effective citation of Locke in the continuity of classical and modern liberal. What was really impressive was the quality of the debate and the ease in which candidates took to the topic. Many candidates scored their highest mark on this section of the paper. Weaker examples were constrained simply by a lack of detail and depth – but it was rare to see such responses.

The extent to which modern liberals accept the ideas of classical liberals is dependant on their views of the state, the economy and individualism. Overall, it can be said that most modern liberals don't accept the ideas of classical liberals. Ideas such as individualism which is the primacy of the individual over any group in society is at the heart of classical liberal thinking. Whereas, modern liberals like Rawls believe that individuals should not only have obligations to themselves but also the less fortunate. However, it is important to state the Rawls doesn't believe in collectivism and socialism he still agrees largely that the individual is the centre of ~~liberal~~ all thinking but needs to enable to realise its potentials. Ultimately, modern liberals don't ~~accept~~ accept the ideas of classical liberals.

Examiner Comment

While this introduction is quite long, it is effective in outlining what the student is going to argue in the rest of their essay.

Modern and classical liberals agree that society and state are based on the granting of freedoms, as was the view of John Stuart Mill. Liberalism is all about freedom, and all liberals prefer a limited government in order to facilitate this. John Locke argued social contract theory, which states that the government 'rules' with the consent of the people, as Locke believed that no monarch had a 'divine right' to rule. All liberals agree with social contract theory; the government should be 'of the people, by the people, for the people'. Liberals ^{are} also, monolithic in their view of the state as a 'necessary evil', present to prevent anarchy, ~~and~~, maintain property rights and protect the public from outside forces.

Examiner Comment

This is a good paragraph which outlines effectively areas of agreement between Modern & Classical Liberals. It also uses the Key Thinker, John Locke, effectively to illustrate the point.

Classical and modern liberals do differ in their views on these subjects though.

Classical liberals are in favour of egoistical individualism (every person is free to follow their own selfish interests), negative freedom ('freedom from' the chains of the state), and laissez-faire economics.

They are staunch individualists who wish for the government to stay out of almost everything.

Modern liberals are less vociferous on this subject, advocating for developmental individualism (big-up from the state for those who are struggling) and Keynesian economics (government stimulation of the economy to reduce unemployment). They prefer positive freedom ('freedom to') and reject the idea of liberty as being able to do whatever you like. They prefer an enabling state, with some degree of interventionism and individualism with a little state help. Rawls' theory of justice informs the views of the modern liberal here, as they

Examiner Comment

Here we have a 'disagree' paragraph. While it is excellent that the student has outlined clear differences, it would be even better if they employed more comparative language and tried to make more direct comparisons between modern & classical liberals.

Overall, I think that the modern liberals did not accept some of the most fundamental ideas of the classical liberals especially on the role of the state and the economy, although, there is an acceptance of the democracy and individual rights related thoughts which are at the heart of liberalism. But in my opinion the disagreement is still greater since it applies and unacceptance is greater since it contradicts to the fundamental principles on how the state + soc are run.

Examiner Comment

This conclusion argues very effectively that on balance the differences are greater than the similarities as differences are on fundamental issues. This is the key to AO3 in Ideas questions.

Question 3b

In summer 2019 socialism proved the more popular choice to conservatism but here we do really see the 'triumph of liberalism', and socialism took second place. Lots of sound answers explained Revolutionary Socialists like Marx and Engels and their view of class and this was contrasted with the view of social democrats and the Third Way. Many understood the view of society driven by conflict as indicated by Revolutionary Socialists like Marx & Engels and were able to contrast it with a less conflict driven view which was heralded by Social Democrats like Crosland and further endorsed by the Third Way and Giddens. Weaker answers focussed too much on their view of society without linking it to class.

It is clear to see that Socialists view of society does not only stand on the one pillar of class but also its view of human nature. Socialists carry the view that humans are inherently fraternal (brotherly) and co-operative. This means that humans ~~are~~ in theory, humans are naturally perfected towards a communist society, this is the view that many Utopian Socialists take for example Oscar Wilde's books on socialism portray a fraternal and cooperative society. However, Marx denounced the utopian socialists' ideas as unrealistic. ~~It is clear both human nature and class is~~ Socialists such as ~~he~~ also argue that human nature is can be ~~not~~ dictated by the state of society. In the case of one where there is a capitalist mode of production, it promotes greed and selfishness, this is the idea of a false consciousness. The idea of class and its effect on human nature is ~~not a~~ non-existent, this means that the nature of the system and its effect on human nature don't depend on class. This is because ~~Antonio~~ ~~Marxist~~ argue, ~~Antonio~~ democratic socialists such as Beatrice Webb argue that the selfishness promoted in the capitalist system is exported to both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This is why she argued that the average working class voter is self interested and therefore, vote in socialism.

Examiner Comment

Here a student is outlining the view of some socialists towards class while also showing disagreements between them. There is also effective use of Key Thinker Webb. However, please note it is important to focus on the strands of socialism that are identified in the specification.

The Third way argues for society to be socially inclusive where the different classes ~~will~~ stay together in 'social harmony' as expressed by Anthony Giddens. Giddens advocates a 'Synergy between the public and private sectors' ~~so that welfare is not~~ suggesting that both sectors work together in a more 'hand-up' version of society and state, not 'hand-out'. This is in stark contrast to revolutionist socialism. As this strand of socialism believes that the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) are exploiting the working class, the proletariat. Hence, ~~disproving Giddens's~~ rebutting Giddens's theory of social harmony. Revolutionary socialists like Karl Marx and Engels believe that the

Examiner Comment

Here a student is effectively explaining different attitudes towards class from Third Way socialism and Revolutionary socialism.

Key points paper summary

- Candidates and Centres have to take credit for preparation outside the normal examination window and with a disrupted pattern of teaching in the previous academic year.
- In the new specification, planning is as important as ever. It really does benefit an answer if a candidate sets out their journey before writing – to give a route plan of the approach taken.
- Marks are derived from three Assessment Objectives – invariably, stronger responses tapped into all of these objectives which carry equal weight.
- The devil can be in the detail – scant knowledge of electoral systems and outcomes did limit candidates and this requirement is boldly set out in the specification. Examples which are clear and contemporary lift a response and invariably show insight.

- Building on the above when the specification requires knowledge of elections in devolved assemblies and evidence of contemporary civil liberty pressure groups their omission can limit answers.
- It is clear that candidates enjoy and engage with voting behaviour and prove their insight and effective teaching taking place in Centres.
- Any concern that candidates or perhaps Centres had about handling the core political ideas were put at ease again here in 2020. This area new to many has been handled really well.

