

History

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Higher Level

2020-21

Documents-Based Question - Sample Answer



SECTION 1: DOCUMENTS-BASED QUESTION

Ireland: Topic 6

Government, economy and society in the Republic of Ireland, 1949-1989

Case study to which the documents relate:

The impact of RTÉ, 1962-1972

Study the documents opposite and answer the questions below:

1. (a) In document A, what topic was discussed on the television programme?
(b) In document A, what does Lemass instruct his secretary to do?
(c) What post did the writer of document B hold?
(d) According to document B, what sort of person was Michael Hilliard?
(20)
2. (a) What criticisms does Lemass make of RTÉ in these documents?
Explain your answer, referring to both documents.
(b) Do both documents suggest that Lemass thought that RTÉ should always support the government? Explain your answer, referring to both documents.
(20)
3. (a) Do both documents suggest that Lemass was a strong leader?
Give reasons for your answer, referring to both documents.
(b) Do both documents show the value of biographical material as a historical source?
Explain your answer, referring to both documents.
(20)
4. During the period 1962-1972, to what extent did RTÉ both entertain and challenge its viewers?
(40)

- Document A -

This is an edited extract of a note by Taoiseach Seán Lemass to the secretary of his Department.

Telefís Éireann had a discussion on the Second Programme for Economic Expansion last evening. During it, criticisms were expressed, some of which were misleading, not to mention being shallow and unconstructive.

I wish to have the RTÉ Authority approached, to inquire what arrangements they have in mind to enable those criticisms and misrepresentations to be corrected.

RTÉ's function in this matter should be, primarily, to support the Programme rather than to facilitate criticism; and, certainly, criticism must not be allowed to go unanswered.

If there is any resistance on the part of the Authority, please let me know and I will deal with it.

Source: Tom Garvin, *Judging Lemass* (Dublin, 2009)

- Document B -

In this edited extract from his autobiography León Ó Broin, secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs (1948-1967), comments on Lemass's approach to RTÉ.

Lemass threatened to be critical of Telefís Éireann from the start, not the programmes themselves but the RTÉ Authority's attitude to public policy.

He made this clear to Michael Hilliard, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs (1959-1965), who seemed frightened whenever Lemass called him on the phone and I happened to be in the room. I suspect Lemass 'bossed' some of his colleagues and left a quiet man like Hilliard without words when, for example, he was told that the Authority's concept of being independent of government was being pushed to an intolerable extent.

The government, Lemass insisted, had not set up the television service for the purpose of publicising criticisms of national policy, or arousing opposition to it; and it would have to be understood that national policy was what the government of the day decided it to be. Telefís Éireann would have to be entirely supportive of government policy and he would not hesitate to change the composition of the RTÉ Authority to ensure that it was.

Source: León Ó Broin, *Just Like Yesterday* (Dublin, 1986)

Leaving Cert 2018 – History

Document Based Question (100%)

Sample Answer

1.

- a) The Second Programme for Economic Expansion was discussed on the television programme.
- b) Lemass instructs his secretary to approach the RTÉ Authority and inquire what arrangements they have in mind to enable the criticisms and misrepresentations to be corrected.
- c) The writer of document B was the secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs.
- d) According to document B, Michael Hilliard was an easily frightened man who was also quiet.

2.

- a) In these documents Lemass makes a variety of criticisms of RTÉ. In document A he refers to the discussion facilitated by the station and is of the opinion that some of the criticisms aired on the programme were “misleading”. He seems to be unimpressed with RTÉ’s handling of the discussion and also refers to it as “shallow and unconstructive”. His displeasure becomes clear when he instructs his secretary to approach RTÉ and get criticisms and misrepresentations “corrected”. He is very critical of RTÉ’s handling of the matter indeed. Similarly, in document B he criticises RTÉ by saying “the authority’s concept of being independent of government was being pushed to an intolerable extent.” Furthermore, he is very unimpressed with RTÉ “publishing criticisms of national policy.” It is abundantly clear that Lemass seeks to criticise RTÉ in these two documents for the way in which they criticised the government and misrepresented their view on matters.
- b) Yes, both of these documents suggest that Lemass thought that RTÉ should always support the government. In document A Lemass blatantly states: “RTÉ’s function in this matter should be primarily to support the Programme.” As this programme is government policy, this implies that Lemass feels that RTÉ should always support the government. The fact that Lemass even wrote document A in the first place also implies that Lemass thinks RTÉ should always support the government. Lemass also seems to be unhappy with RTÉ’s decision to “facilitate criticism” of government policy. If Lemass doesn’t want RTÉ to facilitate criticism, this can only mean that he wants them to support the government. Similarly, in document B, Lemass is described as not liking the fact that RTÉ is “independent of the government.” He thinks this independence is being pushed to “an intolerable extent”. This implies that he thinks RTÉ should not be independent of the government and, by extension, should support the government. Finally, in document B Lemass refers to the fact that he thinks “Telefís Éireann (should be) entirely supportive of government policy.” This

is a blatant example of Lemass' attitude towards RTÉ and how he thought it should support the government.

3.

- a) Yes, both documents suggest that Lemass was a strong leader. In document A it states that he does not want the criticism that was broadcast on RTÉ to go "unanswered". This implies that he will force RTÉ to respond to him if needs be, thus implying that he is a strong leader. Furthermore, in document A Lemass also states that if RTÉ resist to his questioning and challenging he will "deal with it." Lemass seems to be ruthless in pursuing his beliefs and I believe this suggests that he is a strong leader. In document B, Lemass once again proves that he is a strong leader. It is stated in the document that he "bossed" some of his colleagues and that his colleagues sometimes "seemed frightened" while he was on the phone to them. This does not place Lemass in a very good light from a moral or human perspective but in my opinion, it certainly emphasises his strength as a leader (even if he had to use fear to get things done.) Finally, I think document B shows that Lemass is a very strong leader when it states that he "would not hesitate" to change RTÉ's composition in order to guarantee its support. Once again, I'm not sure if this was the 'right' decision to make but the fact that Lemass "would not hesitate" to get things done cements the idea that he was a strong leader.

- b) Yes, both documents show the value of biographical material as a historical source. Document A provides a clear insight into Lemass' anger at the time of writing. His displeasure is almost palpable, and this is certainly fascinating for historians as it provides an insight into Lemass' feelings at the time, untouched by hindsight; "I will deal with it." Similarly, in document B, Ó'Broin's opinions on the issue are certainly made clear through his use of hyperbolic language, for example: stating Lemass "threatened" and "bossed" people. This type of source material allows us to gain a greater insight into the feelings of the author, once again, untouched by hindsight. Furthermore, these two documents are primary sources which are always valuable to historians because they allow us to gain an insight into how the person themselves felt about the issue. Unlike books written at a later stage, primary autobiographical sources like documents A and B provide an insight into how things were at the time of the incident/event occurring. Therefore, both documents show the value of biographical material as they allow us to gain a first-hand insight into events and also provide us with the person's own opinion, untouched by hindsight.

4. From the foundation of RTÉ in December 1961 and throughout the 60s and 70s RTÉ would have a major impact on its viewers. Programmes such as '7 Days', 'Tolka Row' and 'The Late Late Show' played a vital role in both challenging and entertaining viewers.

'The Late Late Show' was conceived as a "summer filler" in 1962. However, it soon became much more than that and by the early 1970s it had completely revolutionised Irish society. The programme was inherently entertaining, especially for the studio audience of 120. The format of the show was, in itself, entertaining as viewers did not know beforehand what was up for discussion. Each show tended to focus on a particular theme and these themes were almost always controversial and topical. Topics such as: priests, the travelling community, the women's liberation movement and the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland were all entertaining topics but also very polemical and challenging.

In particular Gay Byrne, the show's host, had an uncanny ability to play 'devil's advocate' and discuss topics that, up until then, had not been discussed in Irish society. One example of such topic was allowing a Trinity student, Brian Trevaskis to come on the show and criticise the bishop of Galway for the "monstrous" cathedral that was being built and taking money away from urgent social reform. Trevaskis also criticised the Church's attitude toward unmarried mothers. This can only be described as RTÉ challenging their viewers.

Further incidents such as 'The Bishop and the Nightie' incident also challenged RTÉ's viewers. When Mrs Fox was asked what colour nightie she wore on her wedding night she replied that she might not have worn one at all. This caused massive outrage prompting the bishop of Clonfert, Dr Thomas Ryan, to label the show as "disgusting" and "immoral". Archbishop John McQuaid wrote to the broadcasting authority to complain. Once again RTÉ had challenged its viewers. TD Charlie Flanagan even proclaimed: "There was no sex in Ireland before The Late Late Show."

Other programmes would also challenge viewers. The news programme '7 Days' frequently reported on and investigated challenging topics such as money laundering and even the Troubles in Belfast. When Kevin O'Kelly, an RTÉ broadcaster, interviewed a well-known IRA leader he was sentenced to 6 months in prison. The money laundering programme prompted a government investigation. Such events prove that RTÉ sought to challenge and inform their viewers.

It was clear by 1972 that De Valera had been right to be wary about the potential power of RTÉ. The station both entertained its viewers with lighter programmes like Radharc and Tolka Row, but really the station sought to challenge its viewers. It did so by forcing them to consider, amongst other things, the role of women and the role of the Catholic Church in 1960s Ireland.