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| **QUESTION: How accurate is it to say that the Great Leap Forward in Industry (1958–62) was a failure?** | |
| **INTRODUCTION** | Set the scene: Encouraged by the successes of the first five year plan, Mao launched his second five year plan, the so called Great Leap Forwards in 1958. This was a highly ambitious attempt to stimulate agricultural production and industrial production simultaneously. |
| Attack the question: The Great Leap Forwards was Mao’s attempt to attempt to harness the energies of the masses and transform China into an industrial superpower almost over-night. |
| Outline your argument: Despite some eye catching successes such as the building of vast construction projects, overall the plan was a failure which reversed many of the successes in industry which had occurred during the first five year plan. |
| **PARAGRAPH 1** | The output of industrially produced goods fell significantly during the GLF. |
| Despite some early success in the first two years of the GLF with increases in coal and steel production. By 1962 the plan had failed as China was only producing ½ the amount of heavy industrial goods and ¾ the amount of light industrial goods that were being made in 1958 at the start of the plan. |
| Although China had huge reserves of manpower China lacked many of the key essentials necessary to build a modern economy including technical skills; managerial know how; efficiently run factories and an adequate transport system Without these China could not achieve the industrial successes Mao had promised. |
| However it can still be argued that some of the figures were still impressive especially given China’s starting point. |
| Nevertheless the plan as a whole did not reach its objective of laying the basis of a modern industrial economy. |
| **PARAGRAPH 2** | Point: Mao’s reluctance to hand over industrial planning to experts limited industry’s ability to meet the ambitious targets Mao expected of it during the GLF. |
| Evidence: Mao’s understanding of the industrial process was limited. He simply believed that by a massive deployment of manpower China could achieve the advanced industrialisation it needed. He was afraid that if he allowed the creation of a class of experts he would lose control of the revolution. Furthermore previous Anti-rightist campaigns meant there were no experts left to offer advice. This lack of expertise was exacerbated half way through the GLF with the withdrawal of Soviet experts following the Sino Soviet split. |
| Explanation:  Major industrial development needed capital investment, technology and planning; Mao rejected all of these as revisionist. |
| However: |
| Link: As a result Chinese industry was unable to build on the relatively impressive progress it had made during the first five year plan. |
| **PARAGRAPH 3** | Point: The plan to use Communes to drive industrial growth in the countryside was a failure which also had a devastating impact on agriculture. |
| Evidence: The CCP encouraged peasants to set up small-scale industries in the countryside. The most notable example being the launch of campaign to produce steel through the backyard furnace scheme begun at the beginning of the Great leap Forward. |
| Explanation: In order to work on the scheme it is estimated that a quarter of the peasants gave up farming to take part. The campaign failed to produce steel of usable quality and put an unsustainable strain on food production. Furthermore not only was the campaign economically damaging it also had negative ecological consequences in the countryside since it led to the destruction of vast swathes of woodland to supply fuel for the furnaces. This, in turn, led to faster soil erosion and worse flooding, increasing the need for huge labour intensive water conservancy schemes. |
| However despite the failure of this mass campaign it could be argued that it was of huge propaganda value to Mao in his attempt to get the Chinese economy ‘walking on two legs’. |
| Link: Despite the undoubted propaganda value of the campaign, the backyard furnace scheme was a contributing factor to the devastating famine of 1958 to 1962 and therefore represents a key failure of industry during the GLF. |

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| **PARAGRAPH 4** | Point: The placing of industry under government control through the creation of state owned industries (SOEs) failed to improve industrial efficiency. |
| Evidence: In theory, the SOEs fulfilled the Communist notion of centrally controlled industry. However in reality they performed less well than anticipated. SOEs were inefficient largely as a result of abandoning any incentives. It did not matter whether an SOE was efficiently managed or not since any surplus when directly to the state. |
| Explanation:  This destroyed any motive for the managers or the workers to show initiative. No matter how conscientious or idle a worker was, he or she still received the same pay. |
| However the SOEs did provide workers with accommodation and medical and educational benefits for their families. Furthermore Workers now had ‘an iron rice bowl’, the Chinese term for a secure job for life. |
| Link: Despite these social benefits for workers, the creation of SOEs during the GLF failed to improve industrial efficiency. |
| **PARAGRAPH 5** | Point: However despite these significant failures a number of industrial projects did bring prestige to the regime during the years of the GLF. |
| Evidence: In Beijing, a 100 acre side was cleared to make way for the construction of Tiananmen Square. A vast industrial project which was completed within two years and served as an impressive showpiece monument to the grandeur of the new China. In addition China began a nuclear programme during the GLF which culminated in the successful explosion of a Chinese atomic bomb in 1964. |
| Explanation:  Both of these industrial projects were symbolic of China’s efforts to demonstrate its growing industrial prowess. |
| However they were ultimately little more than vanity projects which failed to overshadow the fact that Industrially the GLF had been a huge failure for China and her leaders. |
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| **CONCLUSION** | Signpost your conclusion: In conclusion the GLF in Industry represented a huge failure for Mao. The plan was scheduled to run until 1963, but most historians accept it had fizzled out by 1961. |
| Summarise your argument: Despite some initial expansion up to 1960, industrial production fell sharply between1960-61. Moreover the lack of an integrated plan for turning what had been produced into sellable manufactured goods was a significant barrier to China becoming the modern industrial economy Mao wished for. Mao failed to understand that advanced industrialisation could not be achieved by the massive deployment of manpower alone. |
| Consider significance: Overall the Great leap forwards in Industry was both a huge personal failure for Mao as well as being very damaging to the Chinese economy. It would take the more pragmatic approach taken by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping during the Third Five year Plan 1962-65 for China to begin a process of recovery. |
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