

The Position of Trotsky

Current History (N. Y.)

WITHIN a space of twelve months Russia's two leaders, with whose names the Bolshevik revolution has become synonymous, have left the arena. Lenin died early in 1924 only to be reborn again as the god of Bolshevism. Trotsky, in the last weeks of the year just past, was hissed into obscurity by the charge that he had become the very "Antichrist" of Communism.

For dramatic interest the dethronement of Leon Trotsky by his Bolshevik confreres has not many parallels in history. In a burst of disapproval of Trotsky's "heresies" and his divergence from the accepted tenets and, more especially, policies of the Communist Party, his "brother gods" on the Bolshevik Olympus, the Kremlin, have decided upon the War Minister's pillory and exile, upon his absolute political death—if this becomes necessary. Stripped of his power and of his honors, his health broken, his nearest friends uttering no word in his defense, the builder of Russia's Red Army and its commander-in-chief during the years of revolution, counter-revolution and civil war is today, in effect, if not in name, a prisoner either in the milder climate of the Crimea, to which his doctors ordered him early in December, or still in the Kremlin, which, according to persistent rumor, Trotsky is unwilling to leave.

The wheel upon which Trotsky's career, and possibly his very life, is being broken is his latest book, "1917," a two-volume history of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, named after the year in which it took place. Trotsky is as brilliant a writer as he is a revolutionist. In fact it is his language, written and spoken, that is among his most decisive revolutionary weapons. In "1917," and more especially in its sixty-two page preface entitled "Lessons of October," Trotsky attempts a critical analysis of the revolution. It is what Trotsky the writer says about Trotsky the revolutionist, and still more what he says about the other actors in the revolution, some of them his antagonists, that has caused the War Minister's associates to chain him to the rock of pitiless publicity and to tear his reputation to tatters.

Without waiting for time to set the various events in the revolution in their proper perspective, Trotsky plunges heedlessly into a "reevaluation of values." He proceeds to regroup and reclassify parties and individuals. He gives additional credit to some of the figures in the revolution and detracts from others. He takes the measure of his contemporaries and he takes his own measure. He paints their portraits and his own. It is here, Trotsky's enemies declare, that he has laid bare the weak spot in his armor—his vanity. The most unforgivable charge against Trotsky by his associates is that he measured himself, his role as an actor in the revolution, with the utmost liberality, while his measure of others is said to be grudging and ungenerous.

This is declared to have happened especially in Trotsky's estimate of Zinoviev and Kamenev, the two claimants for the "mantle of Lenin." Zinoviev was Lenin's lifelong disciple, both in Russia and in exile. Lenin lavished upon him the affection one might upon a younger brother, persistently pushing him to the front as a leader. Kamenev, who is Trotsky's brother-in-law, was in close personal relations with Lenin before the revolution and he lived and fought side by side with him during the "October Days." Subsequently the two were closely associated in the Kremlin, Kamenev holding the important post of Chairman of the Moscow Soviet of Workmen and Peasants. In his preface to "1917" Trotsky concentrates his criticism upon Zinoviev and Kamenev as upon no other two revolutionary leaders—and in the most damaging manner. A few weeks before the Bolshevik coup d'état of Oct. 25 (Nov. 7, new style), the two, Zinoviev and Kamenev, had made a "mistake," which has since become famous. They had opposed the idea of a coup d'état. Lenin was for it. Trotsky and the other members of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party were

for it, Zinoviev and Kamenev alone were against such a step. Trotsky's presentation of this matter in his book, it is charged, is such as to belittle the revolutionary judgment and statesmanship as well as the personal courage of two of the men who now play most important parts in ruling Soviet Russia.

Thirty-five thousand copies of "1917" had left the Government Printing Office, and it was fast becoming the most widely read book of the day, when the Communist Party took notice of it and in a public statement, which appeared in Pravda on Nov. 2, 1924, officially repudiated it as a polemic rather than a work of information. The youth of Russia and Communists the world over were warned against taking Trotsky's "Lessons of October" at their face value. They were told to disregard both Trotsky's "facts" and his "conclusions." The one and the other were branded as equally "incorrect" and equally "subversive of the interests of Bolshevism." The book as a whole was declared to be a "crooked mirror" and a "caricature," violently opposed to the spirit of "true Leninism." Trotsky was charged with a premeditated effort at substituting his own ideas, or "Trotskyism," in place of the ideas of Lenin, or "Leninism," and of belittling the role of the Communist Party in the revolution. While apparently not officially suppressed, the circulation of "1917," both at home and abroad, has ceased. The repudiation published in Pravda read in part as follows:

It is a poor service that Trotsky accomplishes with this book. It is not the sort of book that will attract people to Bolshevism. It is, on the contrary, apt to make converts the other way. It is a one-sided book and at times monstrously untrue. . . Comrade Trotsky may rest assured that the party will know how to appraise his efforts in this book. What the party wants is work and not new discussions. What the Party wants is whole-hearted Bolshevik unity.

Trotsky's resurrection of the Zinoviev-Kamenev "mistake" is referred to with smoldering resentment:

These mistakes are known to the whole party. In his "History of the Russian Communist Party" and in his earlier appearance Comrade Zinoviev has spoken of the matter not once, but many times. He has spoken of it also before the Communist International. Comrade Lenin also discussed the matter. He never connected the mistakes before the October revolution with the activities of the comrades Giring and after the revolution. Lenin himself appointed Kamenev and Zinoviev to important posts immediately after the revolution and repeatedly indicated that he did not look upon their mistakes in October as anything other than a difference of opinion, which he did not justify but at the same time did not hold against them.

The fierce passions which have been set loose by the publication of Trotsky's "1917" can be understood and accounted for only in the light of Russian history during the last twenty years, the birth and growth of the Bolshevik or Communist Party and of Trotsky's relation to it, first as an amused opponent, later as an active and brilliant member, and lastly as a crusader for the party's reorganization along more democratic and flexible lines.

The control of the Communist Party in Russia rests with a committee of seven, known as the Political Bureau, of which Trotsky is a member, the others being Stalin, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov. Bykov is busy with his affairs as Premier of Russia, Bukharin edits Pravda and Tomsky is a labor leader, so that Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev are the real spokesmen of the party. They, too, are what might be termed charter members of the Bolshevik or Communist Party, which was founded in 1903 by Lenin and a group of followers. Trotsky, who is opposed to them in theory and general outlook, was not a member of the Lenin party, or group, as it was at the time. He was in disagreement with a number of its principles, notably the stress which Lenin laid on the peasants as a factor in the coming revolution in Russia. Trotsky, more of a city man, directed his revolutionary plans

and propaganda chiefly among the factory workers. The war, however, lifted the Russian peasant to a plane of revolutionary importance equal to that of the urban proletariat in Russia. Trotsky, being a realist, saw this, and in the Summer of 1917 buried his differences with Lenin, which had been deep and bitter, leading Lenin to call Trotsky the hardest of names. But from now on the two worked side by side, Trotsky becoming Lenin's right-hand man.

With the progress of Bolshevism in Russia from a war basis to that of peace, the Communist Party leadership experienced a theoretic cleavage with regard to its future methods and management. Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev thought it essential for the growth and wellbeing of the Bolshevik movement that a spirit of what has been termed hierarchy be maintained, a spirit of "Communist orthodoxy," of unquestioned compliance by the newer men in the party with decisions of the "old guard." They became the "hundred percenters" of Communism, making membership in the Communist Party prior to 1917 a sort of revolutionary patent of nobility and a passport to positions of trust in the party and notably in the Government of Russia. Trotsky represented a more democratic view. He pleaded for greater flexibility and democracy in the management of party affairs. The cleavage between the "young" and the "old" generations in the party, the War Minister urged, must be minimized. The experience of the veterans of the revolution, he said, could not be too highly valued, but the enthusiasm and strength of youth should be wedded to this revolutionary experience. Young men should be given positions of responsibility in the party. They should be given a voice in all deliberations. They should help frame policies and not merely accept such policies after they had been laid down for the rank and file by the few men at the top.

The climax of this controversy was reached during November and December, 1923, when Trotsky, in a series of articles entitled "The New Course," called for action on the question by the Thirteenth Congress of the Communist Party, which was to be held in January. The War Minister fired his last broadside in this controversy on Dec. 29, 1923. In an article in Pravda of that date he pictured the growing bureaucracy and officialism within the Communist Party as undermining its very foundations. "There are dangerous signs of officialism in our party," he wrote: "Our war bureaucracy was of childlike proportions compared with the bureaucracy that has grown up during the years of peace. Due to the stubbornness of the controlling organization at the head, our party has become a two-story affair. On the upper floor the few make the decisions for the party. On the lower floor the rank and file of the membership is handed down the decisions made." Trotsky's call received a wide response, not alone from the rank and file, but also from a considerable number of party leaders. At the thirteenth congress of the Communist Party in January, 1924, the issues raised in "The New Course" precipitated one of the bitterest debates the party had ever known. The clamor for the revision of party policies was clearly gaining in volume.

Lenin's sudden death put an end to every other demand except one—the demand for unity—which the party needed most. Trotsky, who was at the time in the Caucasus recuperating from a lingering illness, acquiesced in a temporary cessation of the controversy. When the War Minister months later returned to Moscow he found that the issue had not only been shelved but that the whole discussion had been suppressed by the Zinoviev-Stalin-Kamenev factions in the party. The adherents of democracy within the party either had been made to change their views or else they found themselves removed from positions where they could influence party policies and decisions. It is the reopening of this party controversy over democratization, Trotsky's

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