

Leon Trotsky and the post-Soviet school of historical falsification

# A review of two Trotsky biographies by Geoffrey Swain and Ian Thatcher

## Part 3: The method of Ian Thatcher

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*Today we publish the third part of a four-part review of two biographies of Trotsky written by Professors Geoffrey Swain and Ian D. Thatcher. The first, second and final parts can be accessed here. Click here to download the entire review in PDF.*

*Trotsky*, by Geoffrey Swain. 237 pages, Longman, 2006.

*Trotsky*, by Ian D. Thatcher. 240 pages, Routledge, 2003.

I have already made brief reference to the method of Ian Thatcher. Let us return to this subject by reviewing three paragraphs that appear in the introduction to Thatcher's biography of Trotsky.

"From Trotsky's account of 1917 only he emerges with honor. If in 1924 one accepted the arguments of 'Lessons of October,' then only one man could replace the now dead Lenin, namely Leon Trotsky. It is perfectly understandable, then, that having been accused of the sins of Menshevism in 1917, Trotsky's colleagues sought to refute his 'Lessons of October.' This they did in a series of speeches and articles, which were then gathered together and published in Russian and in translation in book form.

"Leading Bolsheviks (including Kamenev, Stalin, Zinoviev and Bukharin) and key representatives from the Communist International (the Comintern) and the Communist Youth League (the Komsomol) argued that Trotsky's essay was not a genuine history of the October Revolution. If one consulted the key documents of the time and a growing supply of memoir literature, for example, Trotsky's detractors claimed one would discover how far his memory had painted a distorted picture. Most notably, Trotsky had minimized the roles played by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party and had exaggerated his own contribution. It was, for example, wrong to claim that in 1917 there was a long and sustained battle between a Lenin seeking to rearm the party with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and a right-Menshevik faction within Bolshevik ranks. In actual fact Lenin's analysis of the events of 1917 grew out of a long-held theory of the Russian Revolution. Once Lenin had convinced colleagues of the correctness of his developing strategy, neither Lenin nor the party was in any way influenced by Trotsky or Trotskyism.

"Indeed, the anti-Trotsky case continues, the whole history of Leninism and Bolshevism before and after 1917 was one of opposition to Trotskyism. Unfortunately, Trotsky had failed to realize that he was only effective in 1917 because he acted under the guidance of the Bolshevik Party. He had not made a full commitment to becoming a Bolshevik. If he had, then he would have produced a very different history. Trotsky would, for example, have admitted his past and recent theoretical, as well as organizational, errors. Only in this way would youth understand the proper relationship between Leninism and Trotskyism, and how to avoid

the sins of the latter. 'Lessons of October' was an attempt by Trotsky to replace Leninism with Trotskyism. This, however, the Bolshevik Party would not allow him to achieve. The leadership understood the dangers of Trotskyism, revealed in Trotsky's underestimation of the peasantry, and in his mistaken policies during the peace negotiations with Germany, in the debate over trade unions and on the issue of currency reform." [50]

The significance of these paragraphs is that they exemplify a highly-contrived stylistic technique repeatedly employed by Thatcher in order to mask his falsification of history — that is, his construction of a seemingly objective historical narrative out of the factional statements of Trotsky's mortal political enemies. Virtually everything written in the above-cited three paragraphs is a lie. The "criticisms" of Trotsky have been drawn together by Thatcher from a series of mendacious attacks written by Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev in November and December 1924 in order to discredit Trotsky's brilliant analysis of the political differences and struggles within the Bolshevik Party during the critical year of the Revolution.

Trotsky's *Lessons of October* explored events and controversies that Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin — whose right-wing and conciliatory policies had placed them in opposition to Lenin at various points in 1917 — did not wish to have aired. Stalin and Kamenev had allied themselves with the Mensheviks in March 1917, prior to Lenin's return to Russia. In October 1917, Kamenev and Zinoviev had opposed the insurrection. Furthermore, the role of Trotsky in securing the victory of the Bolsheviks in October 1917 was rivaled only by that played by Lenin himself. The arguments presented in the above-cited paragraphs were fabricated in order to deflect the impact of Trotsky's criticisms in *Lessons of October* as well as to destroy his reputation as a revolutionary leader. As the historian Robert V. Daniels has written, the charges made against Trotsky in response to *Lessons of October* "were either entirely fabricated or exaggerated beyond all measure — it was the man that the offended leaders were bent on destroying, not doctrinal error." [51]

Thatcher, however, neither explains the context of the attack on Trotsky nor challenges its factual validity. He adopts a pose of studied even-handedness in his presentation of lies and fabrications. The "anti-Trotsky case" — Thatcher's euphemism for the bureaucracy's gigantic slander campaign — is endowed with reasonableness, dignity and legitimacy. In effect, Thatcher offers the pages of his biography as a dumping ground for the political and historical falsifications upon which the emerging Soviet bureaucracy built its struggle against Trotsky. This insidious and dishonest technique, in which old lies are repackaged as objective historical narrative, is employed repeatedly by Thatcher.

## The “myth” of 1905

Like Swain, Thatcher promises to expose “key myths” about Trotsky’s life, such as his role in the 1905 Revolution. Let us examine how Professor Thatcher goes about his work. Given the fact that Trotsky’s crucial role in the 1905 Revolution has been universally accepted by scholars throughout the world, one would imagine that Thatcher would recognize that a challenge to this scholarly consensus required a careful marshalling of new facts and arguments. As it turns out, despite the attention called to this very issue by the publisher’s introduction (which is also cited on the back cover of the volume), Thatcher’s “demythologizing” of Trotsky’s role in 1905 takes up no more than one relatively brief *paragraph*.

He begins by writing that “It is difficult to gauge the exact influence that Trotsky had upon the course of the 1905 Revolution.” Yes, it may be difficult to determine the exact influence, but there exists a substantial body of information that permits certain informed judgments about the degree and scale of his influence. Numerous memoirs from the period testify to his commanding political presence. Trotsky became the chairman of the St. Petersburg Soviet, and edited two newspapers, *Russkaya Gazeta* and *Nachalo*, which enjoyed large circulations. As if anticipating the latter objection, Thatcher claims that “We have no way of knowing how many people were affected by his journalism.”[52] Again, this is not true. In an article that appeared under his by-line in *History Review* in September 2005, Thatcher himself acknowledges that the circulation of these two newspapers may have been as high as 100,000, which was at least 20,000 higher than those of their rivals.[53] Then, Thatcher abruptly introduces a new line of argument, which is irrelevant to the issue of Trotsky’s political influence in the 1905 Revolution. “It is unlikely,” writes Thatcher, “that his words reached many peasants. He simply lacked connections with the villages, and there was not a mass distribution of his appeals to the peasantry.”[54]

This is really beside the point. The influence of Trotsky and the Russian Social Democratic movement as a whole in 1905 arose on the basis of the mass urban proletarian constituency. The St. Petersburg Soviet was a political organ of the working class. It arose on a wave of revolutionary working class activity that included the mass general strike of October 1905. The peasantry joined the unrest en masse only in 1906, in the aftermath of the physical suppression of the socialist-led working class movement.

Thatcher continues: “Even in the capital, his main stomping ground, he did not create or found any specific institute or faction. He was not, for example, the guiding force behind the emergence of the Soviet of Workers Deputies, *even though he may subsequently have been, as one participant records, ‘the unchallenged leader of the Mensheviks in the Petersburg Soviet’* [emphasis DN].”[55] Like the issue of the peasantry, the question of Trotsky’s factional affiliations is tossed in by Thatcher for no other reason than to try to build a case against the established historical record. At that point in the history of the Russian Social-Democratic movement, factional identities were far more fluid than they were to become by 1917. Indeed, Trotsky’s political position was actually strengthened by his relative independence from the main political factions. Let us note Thatcher’s awkward formulation: Trotsky “may subsequently have been” the unchallenged leader of the Mensheviks in the Soviet. Only “may have been?” Thatcher presents no evidence to the contrary, even though one can safely assume he would have trumpeted it had he been able to find it. However, he proceeds to make a novel argument. “In the memoirs of the prime minister of the day, Count Witte, Trotsky does not merit a mention ... this only confirms the limited impression Trotsky made at the time on the popular consciousness.”[56]

This is the argument of a sly trickster, not of a conscientious scholar. Count Witte, the tsar’s prime minister, failed to mention Trotsky in his

memoirs. This single detail is endowed by Thatcher with extraordinary historical significance. From the failure of Witte to mention Trotsky, Thatcher claims we can draw far-ranging conclusions about Trotsky’s place in popular consciousness in the autumn of 1905. One must ask, why has Thatcher made no reference to other memoirs, written by individuals who were more familiar than Count Witte, an aged aristocrat who was most at home in palaces and vast leafy estates, with what was happening in the workers’ districts of St. Petersburg? It is characteristic of unscrupulous and bad scholarship to conceal or disregard historical evidence that runs counter to one’s argument. But this is precisely what Thatcher has done. For example, he should have brought to the attention of his student readers the recollections of Anatoly Lunacharsky, who was a participant in the 1905 Revolution as a member of the Bolshevik faction. In his renowned *Revolutionary Silhouettes*, Lunacharsky provided this estimate of Trotsky’s role in 1905:

“His popularity among the Petersburg proletariat at the time of his arrest was tremendous and increased still more as a result of his picturesque and heroic behavior in court. I must say that of all the social-democratic leaders of 1905-06 Trotsky undoubtedly showed himself, despite his youth, to be the best prepared. Less than any of them did he bear the stamp of a certain kind of émigré narrowness of outlook which, as I have said, even affected Lenin at that time. Trotsky understood better than all the others what it meant to conduct the political struggle on a broad, national scale. He emerged from the revolution having acquired an enormous degree of popularity, whereas neither Lenin nor Martov had effectively gained any at all. Plekhanov had lost a great deal, thanks to his display of quasi-Kadet tendencies. Trotsky stood then in the very front rank.”[57]

Lunacharsky also recalled an incident during which Trotsky was praised, in the presence of Lenin, as the strong man of the St. Petersburg Soviet. This was a time of factional conflict between Lenin and Trotsky, and so the former did not necessarily enjoy hearing of his rival’s political triumph. According to Lunacharsky, “Lenin’s face darkened for a moment, then he said: ‘Well, Trotsky has earned it by his brilliant and unflagging work.’”[58]

Thatcher also chose not to mention another contemporary memoir — that of the Menshevik leader Theodore Dan — which leaves no question about the immense political influence of Leon Trotsky in 1905. The political perspective with which Trotsky was now associated — the recognition of the proletarian and socialist character of the revolution — captured the imagination of substantial forces among both the Bolshevik and Menshevik tendencies.

Dan recalled “that practically speaking both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks were pushed toward ‘Trotskyism.’ For a short time ‘Trotskyism’ (which at that time, to be sure, still lacked a name), for the first and last time in the history of Russian Social-Democracy, became its unifying platform. Hence it was no accident also that after the arrest (in November) of Khrustalyov, the chairman of the Petersburg Soviet of Workers’ Deputies, it was precisely Trotsky ... who became his natural heir, challenged by no one — for the few short days the Soviet itself still had to live.”[59]

Thatcher’s failure to cite important eyewitness sources that contradict and disprove his attempt to call into question Trotsky’s role in the 1905 Revolution, discredits not only his biography but places his integrity as a historian under a shadow. I must stress that his improper handling of this particular issue, i.e., Trotsky’s role in 1905, is not an isolated episode. It is emblematic of the method he employs throughout his biography to discredit Trotsky.

## Thatcher’s falsification of the inner-party struggle

Thatcher’s treatment of the political struggle that arose within the Russian Communist Party in the early 1920s is a travesty of scholarly

writing. As in the introduction, Thatcher incorporates the arguments of Trotsky's factional opponents into what he attempts to palm off as an objective presentation of historical events. For example, in a crucial section of the biography that deals with the eruption of the inner-party struggle in October 1923, Thatcher writes that Trotsky "took up his anti-bureaucracy program with his usual urgency and passion, believing that the party was entering a new epoch through which *only his methods* would ensure a safe passage [emphasis DN]."[60]

Thatcher continues, "His colleagues on the party's leading bodies were, however, not convinced. They doubted whether matters were really as bad as Trotsky depicted. Yes, there were economic problems, but these were quite expected. In any case there was no imminent danger of collapse. The party anticipated several years of hard and steady work before it could claim to have fully rectified the economy. Looking at the party, Trotsky's comrades claimed that they could congratulate themselves on educating a new generation of cadres. The influx of this fresh blood would no doubt expedite the resolution of important tasks. Having rejected Trotsky's analysis of imagined ills besetting the regime, a majority of the old Bolsheviks wondered whether he could be trusted to develop sound and sensible policies. If Trotsky was prone to exaggeration of difficulties, he was, they argued, remarkably vague in his solutions. For a majority of the Politburo, Trotsky was part of a problem, not an answer. For example, if he was concerned by an absence of systematic leadership why did he not attend important meetings of the Council of Labour and Defense and of the Cabinet? There was little evidence of conscientiousness in Trotsky's work habits. Furthermore, there was a marked absence of concrete proposals from Trotsky. This was hardly surprising, since his policy record was far from promising. In recent times Trotsky had suffered a series of defeats as he opposed Lenin over, amongst other matters, the Brest-Litovsk peace and the trade unions. For his colleagues, Trotsky's discontents were not rooted in reality, but in a hurt sense of pride stemming from personal disappointments. Thus, Trotsky could not have been pleased when, in April 1923, the Twelfth Congress shelved his more militant approach to religious affairs. In September 1923, Trotsky was certainly upset by personnel changes to the Military-Revolutionary Committee. Finally, and most annoying of all for Trotsky, came the Central Committee's refusal to grant him dictatorial powers. Trotsky was warned that his unfounded criticisms were encouraging anti-party platforms, sowing unnecessary disruption to important party work, and threatening a war between older and younger generations."[61]

This passage, as written by Thatcher, creates the impression that the majority on the Politburo — euphemistically referred to as "Trotsky's comrades" — was responding to Trotsky's criticism in a manner that was both restrained and reasonable. It was confronted, in the person of Trotsky, with something of a loose cannon, with whom it was hard, if not impossible, to work. He pestered his "colleagues" with exaggerated warnings and unreasonable demands, while failing to carry out the assignments for which he was responsible. Moreover, Trotsky had a poor grasp of reality and a history of stirring up trouble, even with Lenin; was motivated by subjective bitterness, and, worst of all, was demanding dictatorial powers. Thatcher's presentation clearly invites his students to form a negative opinion of Trotsky and his political work.

What Thatcher has not communicated to his readers is that the above-quoted passage is his own tendentious rephrasing of an unscrupulous and dishonest factional document produced by Trotsky's bitter political opponents — soporifically referred to by Thatcher as "comrades" and "colleagues" — on October 19, 1923, in response to Trotsky's important letter of October 8, 1923 and the famous oppositional Letter of the 46 of October 15, 1923. There are no quotation marks and no footnotes. There is no clear indication given by Thatcher that the arguments he so benignly summarizes were, in fact, a pack of factionally-motivated lies and half-truths.[62]

Nor does Thatcher inform his readers that Trotsky prepared a withering response to this letter, dispatched on October 23, 1923, in which the accusations of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin (who had formed an unprincipled anti-Trotsky faction known as the Triumvirs) were refuted.

One has only to consult E. H. Carr's *The Interregnum*, in which this material is reviewed (or at least that part of it that had come to light by the early 1950s), to recognize the deliberately misleading character of Thatcher's approach. Carr cites passages from Trotsky's "stinging retort" to the Triumvirs, and leaves no doubt as to where truth lay in this exchange.[63]

### **Trotsky's speech at the 13th Congress**

One of Deutscher's great achievements as a biographer was his portrayal of the heroism and pathos of Trotsky's struggle, under increasingly difficult circumstances, against the immense and reactionary bureaucracy arrayed against him. Thatcher, determined to erase the historical record, employs rhetorical tricks, incompatible with serious scholarship, to belittle Trotsky's struggle and portray it in a demeaning and unflattering light. Once again I must call attention to his deceptive use of citations. Thatcher refers to Trotsky's main speech at the Thirteenth Party Congress in May 1924, and writes, "It was, it has been argued, 'the most inept speech of his career.'"[64]

Who, one wonders, was the original author of this damning judgment? Was it written, perhaps, by a participant at the Congress, either an opponent or supporter of Trotsky? As it turns out, the source is to be found in a volume, published by the University of Toronto Press in 1974, of *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. This volume includes a set of documents from the Thirteenth Congress, which is briefly introduced by Professor Richard Gregor, the volume's editor. Gregor writes that Trotsky "made what may well be the most inept speech of his career." [65] He offers no argument in support of this appraisal, and the speech itself is not reproduced. Furthermore, Gregor is hardly a historian to whom one turns for a well-considered and unbiased judgment of Soviet politics.[66] Other than serving the utilitarian purpose of belittling Trotsky, there is no compelling reason why Gregor's passing remark about the speech to the Thirteenth Congress should have been cited as if it were an authoritative judgment.

Let us further examine Thatcher's use of Trotsky's Thirteenth Congress speech, which concluded with the well-known and oft-cited phrase, "Right or wrong this is my party, and I will take responsibility for its decision to the end." Thatcher himself quotes several sentences from Trotsky's speech, including the sentence cited above. He then writes, "Trotsky could thus have no grounds for complaint when the Thirteenth Congress affirmed the anti-Trotsky resolution of the Thirteenth Conference." [67] It all seems rather straightforward. Trotsky said, my party right or wrong, so how could he object when it passes a resolution directed against him? But Thatcher has withheld from his readers those passages that show Trotsky's speech to be far more subtle and combative than the citation, as provided in Thatcher's text, indicates. Trotsky states emphatically his disagreement with the resolution, and asserts his responsibility to argue against those policies he considers incorrect.[68] By presenting a bowdlerized citation, Thatcher misrepresents Trotsky's position and legitimizes the actions taken against him by his opponents.

### **Thatcher falsifies the Lenin-Trotsky relationship**

Thatcher asserts that "Lenin's relationship with Trotsky was highly problematic." He contends that in Lenin's political Testament of December 1922 "Trotsky was not given a recommendation higher than any other comrade." This is not true. While expressing reservations over Trotsky's "excessive self-assurance" and "excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of work," Lenin said he was "distinguished by his outstanding ability" and "personally perhaps the most capable man

in the present C.C. [Central Committee]...”[69] The warned against Stalin’s accumulation of “unlimited authority concentrated in his hands...”[70] Lenin’s famous addendum to his Testament, which Thatcher fails to mention, urged the Central Committee to remove Stalin from the position of general secretary.[71] Thatcher then writes: “Lenin was unlikely to have given his seal of approval to Trotsky for the post of leader because, even in 1922-23 when he relied upon the Commissar of War to present some of his views, he remained suspicious of him. *Lenin’s biographer has emphasized that he would have dropped Trotsky at the next available opportunity* [emphasis DN].”[72]

This is a deliberately misleading and false presentation. Numerous historical studies have established, based on a well-documented record, that the last months of Lenin’s life were dominated by his growing suspicion of and hostility to Stalin. Lenin’s increasing distrust of Stalin was expressed in several documents that he wrote in the months and weeks before his career-ending stroke in March 1923. During the same period, Lenin drew ever closer to Trotsky, whom he viewed as his most important ally in the developing struggle against Stalin. But let us concede that the political developments in the critical period between December 1922 and March 1923 allow for varied interpretations. That still leaves us with Thatcher’s reference to the alleged finding of “Lenin’s biographer” that Lenin, had he lived, “would have dropped Trotsky at the next available opportunity.”

The biographer cited in the relevant footnote is Robert Service, author of a three-volume study of Lenin. This is not the place for an evaluation of the qualities of Mr. Service’s biography, of which I do not have a high opinion. But the issue here concerns Thatcher’s use of citations. Turning to page 273-74 of the Service biography (as indicated in the footnote), there is no reference to a plan by Lenin to get rid of Trotsky. In fact, Service offers an entirely different assessment of Lenin’s plans. While in the past, according to Service, Lenin had used Stalin to control Trotsky, “the disputes with Stalin over policies on foreign trade and other matters reversed the situation: Trotsky was needed in order to control the ever more rampant Stalin.” Despite his past conflicts with Trotsky, “The October Revolution and the Civil War had brought them together, and Lenin was inviting Trotsky to resume close collaboration.”[73] A few pages later, Service comments further on Lenin’s view of Trotsky and Stalin: “Of the two men, he had come to prefer Trotsky despite his reservations. This was obvious in Lenin’s recent letters seeking an alliance with him on questions of the day where Stalin stood in his way. In late December [1922], too, Lenin asked Krupskaya to confide the message to Trotsky that his feelings towards him since Trotsky had escaped from Siberia to London in 1902 had not changed and would not change ‘until death itself.’”[74] Once again, we see that Thatcher, in the interest of his own campaign to discredit Trotsky, has attributed to another historian a statement he has not made.

Historians, like everyone else, are fallible. They make mistakes. Not every incorrect citation is proof of professional incompetence, let alone of a secret plan to distort and falsify. When one comes across such errors it is necessary to maintain a sense of proportion. But the problem that presents itself in the Thatcher biography is not a series of isolated mistakes but a system of distortion and falsification. Thatcher’s presentation is designed to create among readers — especially students — not only a false image of Trotsky, but also a disoriented and distorted conception of an entire historical epoch.

What finds expression in the biographies written by Thatcher and Swain is a process that may be legitimately described as the erosion of historical truth. The historical image of Trotsky as a great revolutionary fighter and thinker that emerged out of the exposure of Stalin’s lies and crimes — that is, out of the discrediting of the pervasive anti-Trotsky demonology that was pumped out of the Soviet Union (and, for that matter, all of Eastern Europe and China) and sustained by countless academics affiliated with

Stalin’s parties all over the world, is once again under attack. A sort of anti-historical intellectual counter-revolution is in progress, to which Thatcher and Swain are making their own disreputable contributions. Only in this way can we understand their zeal in attempting to belittle Trotsky, in even making him appear ridiculous.

### Problems of Everyday Life

Let us, for example, examine Thatcher’s treatment of Trotsky’s remarkable essays published under the title *Problems of Everyday Life*. Thatcher strains to present Trotsky as an effete snob, who “was far from impressed with the general mores of Russian society. He viewed the mass of Russians as uncultured. He described them as illiterate, inefficient, dirty, unpunctual, prone to swearing and abusive language, and under the sway of superstition.”[75] Presented in this way, the reader is clearly encouraged to view Trotsky as an elitist, distant and remote from the great mass of the Russian people. This intended image is reinforced by Thatcher’s sarcastic remark that “one cannot help thinking that his ideal human type consisted of his own habits writ large. His advice is littered with its own brand of simplification.”[76]

Thatcher’s summary is a spiteful and dishonest caricature of Trotsky’s writings on *Problems of Everyday Life*. What is portrayed by Thatcher as an example of Trotsky’s self-aggrandizing conceit, an immodest tribute to his own special qualities, is, when properly and knowledgeably viewed in the context of the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, one of the finest and most deeply felt elucidations of the relationship between culture, the development of proletarian class consciousness and the struggle for socialism. Presented by Thatcher as an irritating laundry list of Trotsky’s personal objections to the Russian workers, the characteristics that are cited — illiterate, inefficient, prone to swearing, etc. — were all manifestations of the terrible oppression suffered by the masses in Tsarist Russia. They were part of what generations of the best elements in the democratic and socialist intelligentsia often described as “our terrible Russian reality.” Their struggle against the shameful expressions of human degradation eventually found a profound response in the working class.[77]

When these writings are read as contributions to the development of class consciousness and *kul’turnost*, it is possible to appreciate the broader dimensions and ramifications of the issues raised by Trotsky in his *Problems of Everyday Life*, and of the significance of his essays such as “The Struggle for Cultured Speech” and “Civility and politeness as a necessary lubricant in daily relations.” Interestingly, as Professor S. A. Smith points out, “the struggle for cultured speech faded from the political agenda” in the late 1920s, after Stalin secured his grip on power.[78] It is only necessary to add that much of what Trotsky writes in these articles is not only of historical interest, let alone merely relevant to a Russian audience. As we today confront our own terrible reality, where culture is under relentless attack and every form of social backwardness spawned and encouraged, *Problems of Everyday Life* remains a book for our times.

At certain points in his biography, Thatcher descends to levels that can only be described as utterly absurd. He declares that “One can even claim that Trotsky was as dismissive of his female compatriots as any other egocentric male.”[79] He offers as proof a passage from a librarian’s memoir, which recalled that Trotsky’s wife apparently went to borrow a journal on his behalf. And so, writes Thatcher, “we discover Trotsky using his wife as a (unpaid?) secretary...”[80] Thatcher also berates Trotsky for failing, as he had advised in one of his essays, “to view reality through a woman’s eyes very seriously.” What evidence does Thatcher present to support this reprimand? “Certainly he did not advocate a female candidate to replace Lenin; nor did he produce the promised fuller account of what he thought a woman’s perspective on the world might be.”[81] How does one begin to reply to such criticisms?[82]

## Endnotes:

[50] Thatcher, pp. 7-8. [return]

[51] *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 244. Another excellent source for an objective presentation of the controversy sparked by *Lessons of October* is E. H. Carr's *Socialism in One Country*, Volume 2 (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1970), pp. 11-44. [return]

[52] Thatcher, p. 35. [return]

[53] Thatcher, predictably, tries to downplay the significance of the circulation figures by suggesting that the press run may have been greater than the actual readership. That is, of course, possible. But it is also possible that the readership, when copies that were passed around are considered, may have been greater than the press run. [return]

[54] Thatcher, p. 35. [return]

[55] Ibid, p. 35. [return]

[56] Ibid, p. 35. [return]

[57] London, 1967, pp. 60-61. [return]

[58] Ibid, p. 60. [return]

[59] *The Origins of Bolshevism*, New York, 1970, p. 345. [return]

[60] Thatcher, p. 125. In reality, Trotsky never made such subjective claims of personal infallibility. And Thatcher does not produce a single citation in which Trotsky argued that "only his methods" would work. [return]

[61] Ibid, pp. 125-26. [return]

[62] The October 19, 1923 letter is included in the collection of documents published in *The Struggle for Power: Russia in 1923*, edited and translated by Valentina Vilкова. Although Thatcher frequently cites Vilкова, he does not list her work as a source for the October 19 letter, nor does he refer to her assessment of this document. Vilкова writes that the October 19 letter "is a vivid illustration of the methods used by the majority when carrying out the discussion. Most probably the document has been written by Stalin, since the argumentation and the style of presentation coincided with that of the speech of the General Secretary at the October Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee. The letter contained seriously strained interpretations, sheer lies, and the falsification of both the historical facts and the appraisal of the situation in the Party and in the country as a whole" (New York: Prometheus Press, 1996) p. 28. [return]

[63] London, 1969, p. 307. [return]

[64] Thatcher, p. 127. [return]

[65] Gregor, p. 221. [return]

[66] In his general introduction to the entire volume, Gregor bitterly denounces Lenin in terms redolent of Cold War anti-communist ideologues. He argues that Stalinism was the logical outcome of Lenin's personal intolerance and political doctrine.

"Lenin was the mentor and Stalin the pupil who carried his master's legacy to its logical conclusion. The pages of history are full of accounts of atrocities committed in the name of high principle. The two bolshevik leaders were no exception. As difficult as it may be, to accept it, both, in their own ways, wished to serve what they regarded as the most worthy cause; and there lies one of the ironies of history, for there are no men more dangerous and ruthless than those who 'know' how to save mankind" (p. 38). [return]

[67] Thatcher, p. 128. [return]

[68] In a relevant passage, Trotsky stated, "The English have a proverb: My country right or wrong. We can say with much greater historical justification: Whether it is right or wrong at any particular moment, this is my party. And although some comrades may think I was wrong in raising this or that point; although some comrades may think I have incorrectly described this or that danger; I for my part believe that I am only fulfilling my duty as a party member who warns his party about what he considers to be a danger." For the full text of Trotsky's speech, see *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* (New York, 1975), pp. 161-80. The

citation presented here appears on page 179.

[69] *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 36 (Moscow, 1966), p. 595. [return]

[70] Ibid, pp. 594-95. [return]

[71] Ibid, p. 596. [return]

[72] Thatcher, p. 131. [return]

[73] *Lenin: A Political Life*, Volume 3 (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995), pp. 273-74. [return]

[74] Ibid, p. 285. [return]

[75] Thatcher, p. 135. [return]

[76] Ibid, pp. 135-37. [return]

[77] As explained very well by Professor S.A. Smith of the University of Essex, "From the 1880s a stratum of 'conscious' workers emerged, who rebelled against the poverty and degradation which surrounded them and who struggled to advance themselves through education. Modelling themselves on the radical intelligentsia, they identified themselves with the ideal of *kul'turnost'* which the intelligentsia represented. This concept of 'culturedness' connected ideas of growth of the individual to reflections on the evolution of society at large. On the one hand, it denoted inner cultivation, in the sense of intellectual development, refinement of manners and moral development: in short, the forging of a self worthy of man's innate dignity and capable of commanding respect in others. On the other hand, *kul'turnost'* was a sociological category used to evaluate the level of civilization achieved by a particular society along an evolutionary spectrum. In this respect, Russia was characterized precisely by its lack of *kul'turnost'*, perceived as lying closer to 'Asiatic' barbarism than to western-European civilization."

Smith continues, "For 'conscious' workers, a crucial element in the acquisition of *kul'turnost'* was the repudiation of swearing. Like the intelligentsia, these workers saw the ubiquity of swearing as a symptom of the lack of culture that enslaved Russian society. At the individual level, swearing was a sign of the underdevelopment of *lichnost'*, that inner sense of personal dignity and worth as a human being, and a sign of lack of respect for others. And learning to regulate speech (and emotions) was seen as vital to achieving the intellectual and moral self-activity that was at the heart of *kul'turnost'*. By extension, the capacity to control speech indicated an individual's potential to exercise control over wider aspects of working life and, ultimately, over society as a whole. At the social level, the widespread use of *mat* [swearing] among workers was, for the conscious minority, a depressing reminder of the political backwardness of the working class" (The Social Meanings of Swearing: Workers and Bad Language in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia," *Past and Present*, No. 160. (August 1998), pp. 177-79. [return]

[78] Professor Smith writes that "during the Stalin era, it became acceptable for the new breed of official to use *mat*." (Ibid, p. 200) [return]

[79] Thatcher, p. 137. [return]

[80] Ibid, p. 137. [return]

[81] Ibid, p. 138. [return]

[82] Thatcher fails to indicate who that female candidate might have been. So as not to permit even this point to go entirely unanswered, I will cite a brief passage from *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*, by Alexandra Kollontai, a leading female member of the Bolshevik Party. After the revolution she assumed the leadership of the Coordinating Office for Work Among Women. In relation to this assignment, Kollontai wrote, "The law liberalizing abortion was put through and a number of regulations of benefit to women were introduced by our Coordinating Office and legally confirmed. ... Our work received the wholehearted support from Lenin. And Trotsky, although he was overburdened with military tasks, unflinchingly and gladly appeared at our conferences" (New York, 1971), p. 42. This comment was written in 1926. By that time, it was no longer politic to praise Trotsky. This fact invests Kollontai's words with probative value. [return]

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