

Alexander Reznik's *Trotsky and Comrades*: A false account of the emergence and politics of the Left Opposition

By Clara Weiss
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Aleksandr Reznik, Trotskii i tovarishchi: Levaia oppozitsiia i politicheskaia kul'tura RKP (b), 1923-1924, Sankt-Peterburg 2017. Unless otherwise indicated, all page numbers refer to this book.

Two years ago, *Trotsky and Comrades: The Left Opposition and the Political Culture of the Russian Bolshevik Party, 1923-1924* by Alexander Reznik, a professor of history at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, was published in Russian. A second edition was published earlier this year.

Although it contains some useful material, the book is ultimately a distortion of the politics of the opposition and its historical emergence, aimed at buttressing one of the greatest historical lies of the 20th century: that there was no Marxist alternative to Stalinism in the Soviet Union, and that Trotsky's Left Opposition did not represent the continuity of the program of the October Revolution in the Soviet Union and internationally.

Reznik offers a relatively honest portrayal of the popularity of Trotsky and his great talent as a socialist writer. He acknowledges that "...despite Trotsky's defeat in the inner-party struggle [in 1924], he remained an authoritative political figure in the eyes of a whole number of groups of party members [for much of the 1920s]." (p. 100)

However, despite his acknowledgement of Trotsky's influence among the masses, and especially among students, Reznik's central argument is that the Left Opposition was nothing but a heterogeneous coalition of disparate political forces, in which Leon Trotsky's role has been overestimated and which was conclusively "defeated" by 1924. He writes that "'Trotskyism' was part of the left opposition but the opposition was not 'Trotskyist.'" (262) In an interview from early 2017, Reznik explicitly stated that Trotskyism to him was nothing but a "construct."

In advancing this argument, he is falsifying the emergence and politics of the opposition in two critical ways. First, Reznik explicitly rejects any consideration of questions of economic and, above all, foreign policy for the politics of the Left Opposition—even while acknowledging that these were considered a priority by Trotsky and the oppositionists themselves. This is combined with a complete omission of any discussion of Trotsky's program of world socialist revolution.

Second, Reznik skews the chronology of the emergence of the opposition, implicitly denying the continuity between the program of the October Revolution, Lenin's struggle against a growing national faction within the party and a growing bureaucracy, and the program and politics of the opposition.

His historical method is one of subjective eclecticism. In the introduction, he announces that all previous studies of the opposition have suffered from an excessive "focus on texts" as well as on Trotsky and Moscow (which was the indisputable center of the opposition's activities at the time). This provides him with a justification to pick and choose the

texts he wants to quote, the leaders of the opposition and the aspects of Trotsky's activities that he wants to discuss. Combined with this is a conundrum of subjective approaches to history that are currently fashionable within academia, including the "history of emotions" and a study of "patron-client relationships," that serve more to confuse the reader than to add any new knowledge or understanding of the opposition.

The politics of Trotsky and the Left Opposition

While Reznik spends pages discussing whether there existed "patron-client" relationships between Trotsky and other members of the opposition (concluding that no significant ones existed), Trotsky's politics and perspective are not explained at all; the term "permanent revolution" is not even mentioned in the entire book of 260 pages. This is a staggering omission in a book on the Left Opposition, for it was this perspective, i.e., the strategy of international revolution, which stood at the very center of the inner-party struggle and the innumerable public and internal attacks on Trotsky and the opposition by Stalin's faction.

In contrast to the conception of Georgi Plekhanov and the Mensheviks, which envisioned a bourgeois democratic revolution as the next stage in the historical development of the revolution in Russia, Trotsky foresaw that the development of world capitalism would propel the working class, in countries of belated capitalist development such as Russia, to seize power and complete the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolutions as part of a socialist reconstruction of society.

He and Lenin agreed that the bourgeoisie was incapable of playing a revolutionary role in Russia. However, unlike Lenin, who proposed a "dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry," Trotsky recognized that there could be no such thing as a dictatorship of two classes.

While the poor peasantry had to be won to the dictatorship of the proletariat, it would eventually come into conflict with the working class, to the extent that the latter would move to infringe upon the right to private property, including the right to own land. The inevitable resultant contradiction between the interests of the working class and the peasantry in the revolution could only be resolved through the extension of the revolution on a world scale. In his seminal writings on the 1905 revolution, Trotsky wrote:

The revolutionary authorities will be confronted with the objective problems of socialism, but the solution of these problems will, at a certain stage, be prevented by the country's economic backwardness. There is no way out from this contradiction within the framework of a national revolution. The workers' government will from the start be faced with the task of uniting its forces with those of the socialist proletariat of Western Europe. Only in this way will its temporary

revolutionary hegemony become the prologue to a socialist dictatorship. Thus permanent revolution will become, for the Russian proletariat, a matter of class self-preservation. If the workers' party cannot show sufficient initiative for aggressive revolutionary tactics, if it limits itself to the frugal diet of a dictatorship that is merely national and merely democratic, the united reactionary forces of Europe will waste no time in making it clear that a working class, if it happens to be in power, must throw the whole of its strength into the struggle for a socialist revolution. [1]

To omit a discussion of permanent revolution from the book, renders not only the attacks on Trotsky and his role, but the entire development of the revolution and the rise of Stalinism, incomprehensible.

Following Lenin's adoption of this perspective in 1917, it was this internationalist strategy that underlay the Bolshevik seizure of power, followed almost immediately by the founding of the Third Communist International, the Comintern, as well as the policies and strategy of the Soviet leadership during the Civil War of 1918-1922. But the contradictions of the revolution that Trotsky foresaw in 1905 powerfully asserted themselves after the revolution, under conditions where the revolution in Europe, including, above all, in Germany, but also in Hungary and Bulgaria, suffered one set-back after another.

Following the almost five-year long Civil War of 1917-1922—which had erupted right after World War I—the Soviet economy lay in ruins. In 1921, the Bolshevik leadership felt forced to adopt the New Economic Policy (NEP), making significant concessions to the principles of the private market economy. These were aimed at guaranteeing the support of the peasantry for the proletarian dictatorship, and to speed up the process of economic recovery.

While strengthening layers of the middle and upper peasantry, the NEP simultaneously led to a temporary worsening of the situation facing the industrial workers and poor peasants. There was a serious unemployment crisis in industry, affecting, at its peak in 1924, 1.24 million out of 8.5 million workers and employees in the USSR.

In 1923, the so called "scissors crisis," a term coined by Trotsky, threatened a serious famine: As prices for industrial goods were rising, the tens of millions of poor farmers in the Soviet Union were unable to afford manufactured goods. They began resorting to subsistence farming and to stopping the sale of their agricultural products to the cities. By August 1923, a series of strikes would erupt in major Soviet cities. The so called "smychka," the alliance of workers and peasants, was under serious threat.

These processes also changed the social and political make-up of the Bolshevik Party itself. Thousands of the most dedicated Bolshevik workers had been killed in the Civil War. Another layer of the working class was recruited into the state apparatus, and transformed into middle or high-ranking bureaucrats. A bureaucratic layer had begun to emerge, which was stifling the creative energy and democratic participation of the masses in the economy, while the inner-party regime became ever more repressive.

It was under these conditions that the perspective of international socialism became the main target of attack by a significant section of the party leadership, centered around the "troika" comprising Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev, which reflected the interests of the rising Soviet bureaucracy.

Reznik repeatedly insists that the opposition of 1923-23 was nothing but "... a group of supporters of a reformation of the party in accordance with the ideal of a more democratic, inner-party regime, that was both heterogeneous in terms of its composition and informal in terms of its organization." (259) This account is false to the core. Not only does it ignore the major questions of international strategy and orientation that

were central to the opposition's program. It is also aimed at bolstering the political role of figures and tendencies that, while part of the opposition for a few years, did not dominate its outlook and composition.

Reznik makes a big fuss over the fact that it may have been Preobrazhensky who likely authored most of the Declaration of 46 of October 15, 1923, widely considered as the founding document of the Left Opposition. But this is, though not uninteresting from the standpoint of the historical record, not consequential for our assessment of the politics of the opposition, or of Trotsky's role in the Declaration of the 46. Trotsky was sick at the time, and Preobrazhensky was one of his closest comrades-in-arms. It would have been only logical for the latter to draft the Declaration, just as many important opposition documents were co-written, or written entirely by other leading oppositionists.

However, politically speaking, there is no question that the Declaration was a statement of the politics that were associated, first and foremost, with Leon Trotsky. It was, in its main outline, based on a long letter by Trotsky to the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission from October 8. The official response by the majority leadership to the Declaration of the 46, which Reznik conveniently omits from his account, likewise acknowledged the centrality of Trotsky to the opposition. It included a special subsection entitled "The Declaration of the 46 supporters of cde. Trotsky," stating that "cde. Trotsky has become the center around which all enemies of the main cadres of the party are gathering." [2]

Particularly striking about Reznik's attempts to minimize the role of Trotsky is his simultaneous elevation of the Democratic Centralists, led by Timofei Sapronov, who dominated, according to Reznik, the opposition in the city of Perm, and with whose views Reznik clearly sympathizes. The Democratic Centralists indeed formed a sizeable minority of the signatories of the Declaration of 46, and included notable figures like Nikolai Osinsky and Yakov Drobnis. It is also true that there were significant political differences between Sapronov and Trotsky. Above all, Sapronov was proceeding from a largely national standpoint in this analysis of the revolution in Russia, focussing almost entirely on the question of inner-party democracy and, to a lesser extent, economic policy. However, it is misleading and wrong to ascribe to Sapronov and his views a role anywhere close to that of Trotsky. Already, by 1926, Sapronov and his supporters had broken with the Left Opposition on the grounds that a new party had to be built, in order to complete a new social revolution in the USSR, which Sapronov came to describe as a "petty bourgeois dictatorship" over the working class.

The origins of the inner-party struggle

Closely related to Reznik's obfuscation of the political program of Trotsky and the opposition is his reinvention of the chronology of the emergence of the opposition. He narrows it down to just 6 months: from July-August of 1923, when Trotsky "began discussing with his closest co-thinkers" (p. 79) through the publication of the Declaration of the 46, until the party discussion on the positions of the opposition in December 1923-January 1924.

Chronology matters. This account of the emergence of the opposition suggests not only that the fundamental political issues concerning the opposition did not arise before the summer of 1923. It also implies that there was no relationship between their struggle and that carried out by Lenin who, in Reznik's account, cannot be considered among "Trotsky's closest co-thinkers."

Again, Reznik simply ignores key historical documents that contradict his argument. Trotsky himself referred in his letter from October 8, 1923 to his failed "efforts of a year and a half" to correct the leadership's course, as the reason for his decision to now make his views and criticism known to the party as a whole. [3] Reznik also dismisses the works of the Marxist historian and sociologist Vadim Rogovin as "conceptually and

factually outdated” (p. 14) in his introduction, failing to quote and engage with Rogovin’s works even once in the entire book. This is a thoroughly dishonest approach. [4]

The first of Rogovin’s seven-volume history of the Left Opposition, *Was There an Alternative?* (1992), remains the most comprehensive account of the emergence of the Left Opposition in any language. In it, Rogovin carefully traced the continuity between the struggle taken up by Lenin against a growing nationalist chauvinist tendency within the party and its bureaucratization, and the emergence of the Left Opposition. It is precisely this continuity that Reznik seeks to deny.

However, Lenin’s “last struggle,” encompassing, above all, the struggle over the monopoly of foreign trade and the “Georgian Affair,” anticipated the questions of political and economic orientation that would play such a central role in the inner-party struggle.

With the Soviet Union having just been founded and the Civil War won, for most of 1922, the party leadership was split over the maintenance of the monopoly of foreign trade. Established in the aftermath of the seizure of power in November 1917, by April 1918, the monopoly of foreign trade guaranteed that the major companies, which had been nationalized by the government in the wake of the revolution, could not independently establish relations with capitalist companies or states abroad. The purpose of the monopoly was to safeguard the workers’ state against an uncontrollable influx of private capital and cheap commodities, which would have undermined Soviet industry and the very economic foundations of the state.

In October 1922, Lenin learned that, in his absence, the Politburo had voted to lift the monopoly of foreign trade. Alarmed, the bed-stricken Lenin sent off several notes, emphatically arguing against the lifting of the monopoly. In a letter from December 13, 1922, he warned “...in the epoch of imperialism when there are monstrous contrasts between pauper countries and immensely rich countries...the only system of protection worthy of consideration is the monopoly of foreign trade.” [5]

Lenin recognized that the move to lift the monopoly on foreign trade was based on a complete underestimation of the balance between the world capitalist market and the workers’ state, in the epoch of imperialism. The proposals by the leadership majority, he warned, would have worked to undermine the position of the working class and industry in the Soviet Union, while benefiting the layer of small profiteers and business people that had emerged within the framework of the NEP. With the help of Trotsky, Lenin was able to have the decision reversed.

Almost simultaneously, in December 1922, another major dispute, the so called “Georgian Affair,” flared up. After a long conflict between Stalin and the leadership majority of the CPSU, and the majority of the Georgian party around the Mdivani group, over the status of the Georgian republic within the Soviet Union of Socialist Republics, a leading supporter of Stalin’s positions, Ordzhonikidze, erupted into physical violence against a leading member of the Georgian party. Lenin was extremely alarmed by the incident, which led to some of his most important late writings.

In a note from December 30, 1922 on “Nationalities and the ‘Autonomization,’” Lenin placed the chauvinist attitude displayed by Ordzhonikidze and Stalin in the context of the bourgeois elements in the Soviet state apparatus, which had been strengthened by the delay of the international revolution and the economic backwardness of the country. He identified it as an expression of the resurgence of the type of “Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat,” within the state apparatus. [6]

This was not just a matter of the politics of the Soviet Union, but directly concerned the orientation and the authority of the Third International, that is the fate of the world revolution. Lenin warned of the harm the resurgence of Russian chauvinism in the Soviet state would do “to the whole International, and to the hundreds of millions of the peoples

of Asia” and concluded: “It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities.” [7]

In both conflicts, Lenin turned to Trotsky as his closest ally in the party leadership. Lenin’s sickness and eventual death in January 1924 was, in fact, critical to the isolation of Trotsky and his supporters in the party leadership.

The 12th Party Congress, held from April 17-25, 1923 in Moscow, was the first where Lenin was unable to deliver the opening report or participate in the selection of the party leadership. By that point, the “troika” of Stalin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev was well established. It made full use of the Congress, and Lenin’s absence, to create conditions favorable for the bureaucracy to impose its policies upon the party without a democratic discussion.

At the Congress, future leaders of the Left Opposition raised many of the same issues that had been preoccupying Lenin. Christian Rakovsky, a prominent Bulgarian-Russian revolutionary and one of Trotsky’s closest allies, sharply criticized the increasingly chauvinist attitude within the state apparatus toward the union republics. In his speech on the state of Soviet industry, Trotsky analyzed at length the so called “scissors crisis” and advocated, in particular, for a strengthening of Gosplan, the central State Planning commission. His proposals, though formally adopted at the Congress, were disregarded in the months that followed.

At the Congress, the Central Control Commission (TsKK) was massively expanded 10-fold, while the Central Committee primarily remained the same size. Only a third of the members of the CCC were workers who were still employed in industry. All of the others worked in the party and state apparatus. The CCC would go on to play a central role in stifling party discussions about the Declaration of the 46 and other documents submitted by the Left Opposition.

Shortly after the Congress, supporters of Trotsky’s and Lenin’s positions were demoted. Rakovsky, for instance, was demoted to the position of Soviet ambassador to London, and soon thereafter entirely removed from his work in Ukraine. In other words, by the time Reznik’s account of the emergence of the opposition is established, the inner-party struggle was, in fact, well underway.

The impact of the German Revolution

In mid-October 1923, following the issuing of the Declaration of 46, which circulated widely within the party, the leadership eventually felt forced to allow for a limited discussion of the opposition’s analysis. Without adding much new material, Reznik depicts the course of the discussion in Moscow, and to some extent in the city of Perm. In Moscow, the center of the opposition, no less than two thirds of the students there supported the opposition. A concerned secretary of the party bureau in the Urals wrote to Zinoviev, “From all corners [of the country] there are reports about the Sverdlovites [students from the Sverdlov University in Moscow] being there which everywhere advocate for the opposition.” (p. 100) Between one fourth and a third of the workers’ cells passed resolutions echoing its views. [8]

This is despite the fact that the party leadership sought to manipulate the discussion in every possible manner: at the regional conferences in January 1924, opposition delegates were vastly underrepresented, and the results of votes, especially in workers’ party cells, were not correctly reported in *Pravda*.

Reznik unequivocally concludes that, because the opposition remained in a minority in this discussion and the following months, it suffered a “defeat.” As reasons, he cites “repressive and educational [!] measures,” which “neutralized the critical mass of oppositionists and guaranteed the ‘easy’ crackdown on Trotsky in the course of the ‘literary discussion’ in 1924-1925.”

Reznik here advances, as an explanation, what actually needs to be explained: Why was the party leadership and the bureaucracy able to implement these repressive measures in the first place? Why was there no mass opposition to them by a working class that had just completed the greatest social and democratic upheaval in world history?

This question remains inexplicable without an examination of the development of the revolution *internationally*. This Reznik explicitly refuses to do, even though he acknowledges that the German Revolution was preoccupying everyone in the party leadership, and critically shifted the mood in the fall of 1923. In one of the most revealing indications of his own national outlook, Reznik's cursory references to the revolution as interrupting the discussion in the party about culture and literature, suggest he sees it as nothing but a nuisance and a distraction from what could have been, in his view, a "Soviet cultural revolution."

But the development of the revolution in Russia cannot be viewed in isolation from the revolution in Germany. The conditions for addressing all the economic problems that were plaguing the first workers' state, isolated and backward as it was, and that ultimately shaped the balance of forces in the party and the state apparatus, would have been profoundly different, and improved, if the German proletariat had been able to seize state power in the fall of 1923.

Despite the fierce political differences over the correct policy in Germany, there was a keen understanding, within the party and the Soviet working class, that the development of the revolution there was of the utmost significance to the fate of the workers' state. The party's main newspaper, *Pravda*, reported on the "struggle in Germany" on a daily basis. When Heinrich Brandler, a leader of the German Communist Party (KPD), went to Moscow in August 1923, he found the streets "...plastered with slogans welcoming the German revolution. Banners and streamers were posted in the center of the city with such slogans as 'Russian Youth, Learn German—the German October Is Approaching.' Pictures of Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were to be seen in every shop window. In all factories, meetings were called to discuss 'How Can We Help the German Revolution?'" [9]

Demonstrations and rallies on the "German cause" were organized throughout the Soviet Union. A staff member of a Komsomol newspaper in Sverdlovsk described the activities of his newspaper, during October-November 1923, as a time when "all the work was concentrated on Germany, since the revolution was ripening there. It was the time of 'German corners,' German language courses and intensive pre-draft [military] education." [10] A worker from Perm responded to the question: "Which measures do you deem possible in the near future in order to pass on to a communal way of life [kommunal'nyi byt]?" "A social revolution, at least in Europe." [11]

When the revolution in Germany failed, following earlier defeats in Germany in 1918/1919, in Hungary in 1919 and Bulgaria in 1920, it put an end to a whole period of revolutionary upheavals that had swept the continent since 1917, allowing for a temporary restabilization of capitalism. This provoked a massive shift in the mood of the revolutionary masses (not just in the Soviet Union), which fostered sentiments of pessimism and passivity, and helped strengthen the bureaucracy.

Trotsky himself identified this shift in the mood of the masses as a major factor leading to the isolation of the Left Opposition. While Reznik fraudulently claims that Trotsky "...de facto avoids remembering events in which he suffered defeat" (15) in his autobiography, Trotsky in fact devoted three full chapters to the emergence of the opposition in *My Life*.

Reznik is both unwilling and incapable of offering any analysis of the shift in the social balance of forces in the USSR and the political moods in the working class, and their impact on the inner-party struggle. In an explanation that reveals more about his own views than about the history of the Left Opposition, Reznik argues that the fact that the opposition in

1923 "focused almost exclusively on political questions, allegedly ignoring the "specific interests of workers and trade union activists" led to their "mutual estrangement." The opposition, according to Reznik, therefore found support mostly among intellectuals. In the same breath, Reznik writes that the workers "did not see objective advantages in a democratization within the ruling party." (261)

This argument, in fact, repeats the slurs hurled against the opposition by the Stalinist faction, which claimed that it was distant from the working class and that the methods and policies of the Stalinist faction reflected the real interests of the workers. Moreover, it is based on a thinly veiled contempt of the working class: judging by this argument, neither democratic demands nor "political questions" could ever find support among workers (much less questions of international strategy).

Reznik thus quite explicitly states that the Left Opposition neither represented the interests of the working class, nor ever stood a chance of winning any significant support in the first place. For Reznik, the struggle was lost in early 1924. In reality, however, it had just begun.

In his *Lessons of October* (1924), Trotsky established a clear continuity between the petty-bourgeois national opposition of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin against the seizure of power in 1917, and the political line they advocated in Germany in 1923. In the fall of 1924, his pamphlet became the subject of a hitherto unprecedented campaign of slander and historical falsification, aimed at discrediting Trotsky and the opposition, and denying the role that both their program and the leaders themselves had played in the revolution of 1917. It was around the same time that Nikolai Bukharin explicitly advanced the program of "socialism in one country," as the political articulation of the interests of the bureaucracy. (Like "permanent revolution," "socialism in one country" is never mentioned in Reznik's book.)

In the ensuing years, the party was subjected to a massive and historically unprecedented campaign of slander and falsification, directed against the the opposition, the program of permanent revolution, and the historical truth about the program and leaders of the 1917 revolution.

In 1925-27, the Left Opposition was engaged in a struggle internationally over the correct political line for the Chinese Revolution, which would have monumental significance for the further course of the 20th century.

Reznik betrays an utter disinterest and indifference toward the historical falsifications of the Stalinist faction and the ongoing struggles of the Left Opposition, ignoring them completely. The growing suppression and eventual expulsion of the Left Opposition in 1927 is euphemistically described in Reznik's conclusions as "divisions within and then also the split of the party in 1926-1928."

Despite the evermore vicious repressive measures, which culminated in the mass murder of revolutionists during the Great Terror of the 1930s, the Left Opposition continued its political struggle. In 1928, the International Left Opposition was formed, which soon had sections and supporters in the United States, Canada, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, Spain, Poland, India, China and many other countries.

Even in the Soviet Union, despite horrendous political pressures and persecution, the Soviet Left Opposition continued its work. This has been extensively documented in Vadim Rogovin's most recently translated volume *Bolsheviks against Stalinism*. It was also powerfully illustrated in the recent find of documents by imprisoned Soviet Left Oppositionists from the early 1930s. A campaign of terror was carried out, both inside and outside the USSR, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Trotskyists, and hundreds of thousands of revolutionaries. Nevertheless, in 1938, Trotsky and his supporters founded the Fourth International. None of this, for Reznik, is worth even so much as a brief mention.

Conclusion

When analyzing three biographies of Trotsky, written by British

historians, which were consciously aimed at denouncing the great revolutionist and falsifying his role in history, David North explained in his book, *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, that the emergence of this new type of “preventive biography” was rooted in the bourgeoisie’s fear of an upsurge in the class struggle that would provoke renewed interest in socialism and, along with that, in the politics and ideas of Leon Trotsky.

Reznik’s book is not the kind of hackwork, consisting of outright character assassination, that Robert Service of Oxford University has undertaken. However, it accommodates to the trend that has been analyzed and exposed by North, and provides it, ultimately, with a left cover. Reznik’s book is thus directed, quite consciously, against the campaign to defend the historical truth of the Left Opposition and Leon Trotsky, which has been undertaken by the Trotskyist movement, with the critical support of the late Vadim Rogovin, during the past three decades. It is on this basis that one must understand Reznik’s conscious dismissal of Rogovin as “outdated” and his complete omission of any mention of David North’s writings on the Left Opposition and, above all, *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*. [12]

To workers, students and young people who are interested in Trotsky and the Left Opposition as an alternative to Stalinism, Reznik’s book gives an unmistakable signal: there is nothing here to learn.

The significance and character of Reznik’s book cannot be discussed without mentioning the author’s politics. Reznik is affiliated to the tendency of Pabloism, through the Russian Socialist Movement (RSM), its Russian group. Pabloism emerged as a revisionist tendency within the Fourth International in the post-war period, advocating the liquidation of the Trotskyist movement into the Stalinist and social democratic parties, and the bourgeois national liberation movements. In his main arguments, Reznik takes his cue in his arguments from Simon Pirani’s *The Russian Revolution in Retreat* (2008).

Pirani broke from the International Committee in 1985-1986, and today develops analyses of the Russian and Ukrainian oil and gas sector on behalf of British imperialism at Oxford’s Institute for Energy Studies. Like Reznik, in his current book, Pirani insisted that “the 1923 opposition” represented a “hastily assembled coalition.” [13] Even more aggressively than Reznik, Pirani has sought to minimize Trotsky and blackout Rogovin’s works from the historiographical record. Echoing the arguments of anti-Communist ideologues, Pirani has argued that Stalinism did, indeed, at least in part, stem from the ideology of Bolshevism.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Pabloites supported the restoration of capitalism in the USSR. In the past decade, they have functioned as mouthpieces of US imperialist interventions in Libya and Syria. In Russia, they have lined up behind the phoney “democratic” campaign against Putin by the US-backed Alexei Navalny, who maintains well-known ties to the far-right. They have also entered various alliances with Stalinist and far-right forces. It is in this context that Reznik’s denial, not only of the historical continuity of Trotskyism and its international program, but also of its very existence as a distinct political tendency, must be understood: it is the historical reflection of the shift of the Pabloites into the camp of conscious anti-Trotskyism and counter-revolution.

Endnotes:

[1] Leon Trotsky, *Our Differences*, in: 1905, New York 1971, pp. 317-318. The translation was slightly changed by Fred Williams.

[2] Quoted in Vadim Rogovin, *Byla li al’ternativa? Trotskizm, Vzglyad cheres gody [Was There an Alternative? Trotskyism]*, Moskva 1992. The original Russian is online available here.

[3] *Documents of the 1923 Opposition*. Emphasis added. Trotsky established a similar chronology in his autobiography *My Life*. URL: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/ilo/1923-lo/ch01.htm>

[4] It should be mentioned that Reznik’s dismissal of Rogovin in this book also flatly contradicts his own assessment from 2010. In an earlier

version of his book which was published in 2010, Reznik acknowledged that Rogovin had undertaken the “only attempt to write a conceptual history of the Left Opposition as a ‘Trotskyist’ international movement from 1923-1940,” and that he was “rightly considered one of the pioneers of the study of ‘Trotskyism’ and usually as one of the most important ‘Trotskyist’ historians.” Aleksandr Reznik, *Trotskizm I levaia oppozitsiia v RKP (b) v 1923-1924*, Moskva: Svobodnoe marksistskoe izdatel’stvo 2010, p. 9.

[5] Lenin, “Re the Monopoly of Foreign Trade. To Comrade Stalin For The Plenary Meeting Of The Central Committee (December 13, 1922)”

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/dec/13.htm>

[6] Lenin, “The Question of Nationalities or ‘Autonomisation’ (December 30-31, 1922):

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/dec/testamnt/autonomy.htm>

[7] Ibid.

[8] Reznik here offers not much more than what has already been established by Darron Hincks in his paper “Support for the Opposition in Moscow in the Party Discussion of 1923-1924,” in: *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (1992), pp. 137-151.

[9] Quoted in: Gleb Albert, “‘German October is Approaching’. Internationalism, Activists and the Soviet State,” in: *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (December 2011), p. 111.

[10] Quoted in: Ibid.

[11] Quoted in: Ibid., p. 118.

[12] This was not due to ignorance. In correspondence with the WSW, Aleksandr Reznik has acknowledged that he read the book when it came out in 2010. This omission is all the more significant since Reznik does refer to Service’s book, remarking that it made “superficial, biased and simply wrong conclusions,” while calling Service one of several important “professional historians and specialists in the history of Bolshevism” (p. 13). It is, therefore, not surprising that Ian Thatcher, the author of one of the “preventive biographies” of Trotsky reviewed by David North, would welcome Reznik’s book. Ian D. Thatcher, “Trotskii i tovarishchi. Levaia oppozitsiia i politicheskaia kul'tura RKP(b) 1923–1924“, in: *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2018), pp. 131-133.

[13] Simon Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat. Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite*, Routledge 2008, p. 211.

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