

Let Us Take a Look at AltHistoryHub's "What if Trotsky Came To Power Instead Of Stalin?"

InDefenseOfToucans

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1 Introduction

Welcome to another response video, the thing I said I would never do again oops, but I saw people link the althistoryhub video in a serious political discussion and decided I needed to make a sort of response to it.

So, I do recognize that Alt History topics on the whole are more for entertainment, I also recognize given the point of divergence is pre-1917 in his scenario really any change could be justified. My hope is that my video response could educate and let people could understand why I think this video is entertainment and not even infotainment.

For this reason we will mostly be talking about the start of the video as the later part is mostly pure speculation as alt-history is, and some of the parts of the video are feelings and morality based, so I don't really care to go over those, I am a Communist and AltHistoryHub I assume is a Liberal of some flavor and so of course I support workers revolutions, where he would not, I won't spend much time on that at all, but rather on the historical facts.

Before getting into the facts of the video, I kind of want to first I want to respond to people linking this in more serious political environment, I have had it sent to me as if it was relevant politically and I really dislike Trotsky as leader of the USSR as an alt-history scenario, especially because I think people confuse it was somehow being an important question to Trotskyism, the person who linked it to me thought it debunked Trotskyism as an ideology, that if Stalin replaced with Trotsky wouldn't have done better then Trotskyism debunked. But that is not really the underpinning of Trotskyism as an ideological movement. Even when Trotsky was alive people kind of brought up this sort of scenario, and he dismisses it.

"Even now, in spite of the dramatic events in the recent period, the average philistine prefers to believe that the struggle between Bolshevism ("Trotskyism") and Stalinism concerns a clash of personal ambitions, or, at best, a conflict between two "shades" of Bolshevism. The crudest expression of this opinion is given by Norman Thomas, leader of the American Socialist Party: "There is little reason to believe". he writes (Socialist Review, September 1937, p. 6), "that if Trotsky had won (!) instead of Stalin, there would be an end of intrigue, plots, and a reign of fear in Russia". And this man considers himself ... a Marxist. One would have the same right to say: "There is little reason to believe that if instead of Pius XI, the Holy See were occupied by Norman I, the Catholic Church would have been transformed into a bulwark of socialism".

Thomas fails to understand that it is not a question of antagonism between Stalin and Trotsky, but of an antagonism between the bureaucracy and the proletariat.”

Trotsky was also asked why didn't he use his Military connections to coup Stalin, and his answer was

”There is no doubt that it would have been possible to carry out a military coup d'État against the faction of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin, etc., without any difficulty and without even the shedding of any blood; but the result of such a coup d'État would have been to accelerate the rhythm of this very bureaucratization”

So Trotsky said just replacing Stalin with him would not have reversed course, he compares this to asking if putting a Socialist in charge of the Catholic Church would make it a bulwark of socialism. Trotsky himself pointed out that it was structural issues and basically that any Bolshevik in charge could have very well went down the same path and if he or others did a military coup on Stalin it actually would have got worse quicker.

So one last thing I want to really hammer in, due to AltHistoryHub's point of divergence being as early as it is really any differences with Trotsky's actual positions could be justified in that Scenario as I am sure some people will point out, my issue is more we do know what Trotsky called for in the 20s, even if we assume that say Trotsky being more of an insider makes him less critical of things like the ban on factions and aggressive in enforcing it I don't think it would justify the differences in positions expressed in the civil war and economic positions after. Hopefully this makes more sense once I get into it, anyway this introduction is going on far far far far too long so let us get into it.

2 Could Trotsky have really taken power?

To open I want to talk about say a few things I do agree with, the very start of the video talking about how Trotsky really couldn't have taken over in 1924, I think this is very much true. Trotsky was not skilled at well being a politician, he was also known for being kind of an asshole and not very diplomatic, in our time line this cost him allies at a few points in the 20s. As well he very much seemed to have considered Stalin stupid which I don't consider true, he really seemed to underestimate his opponents. Moshe Lewin's Lenin's last struggle I think makes the correct assessment and that no Trotsky was not capable of actually taking power

”Trotsky alone would not have been capable of carrying out the reorganization and consolidation and the preservation of those later to be purged. Deutscher explains very well why he could not be Lenin's "heir": when Lenin finally succumbed to paralysis, for example, he concluded the very kind of "rotten compromise" that Lenin had warned him against.

...

He succumbed to a fetishization of the Party, to a certain legalism and to scruples that paralyzed him and prevented him from reacting unhesitatingly, as Lenin would have done, to what his enemies were doing against him. As the founder, Lenin was not afraid of unmaking and remaking what he had made with his own hands. He was not afraid of organizing the people around him, of plotting, of fighting for the victory of his line and of keeping the situation

under control. Trotsky was not such a man. Lenin disappeared and Stalin was assured of victory.”

3 Trotsky only joining the winning side?

Now onto the facts of the video and what I have issue with

”Trotsky was a Menshevik until 1917 when he realized they weren’t going to win out”

So while Trotsky did side with the Mensheviks in the split initially, he pretty much fell out with them by the end of 1904 and always existed more floating in the middle ground between Menshevik and Bolshevik, his main error in this time was that he was a ”liquidationist” in that he wanted both groups to merge. When he returned in 1917 he was a part of the Inter-Borough Organization which really had no difference in politics that would have excluded him from the Bolsheviks¹

Trotsky did not jump ship because one faction was losing.

A brief background, in 1917 the Bolsheviks initially under control of Alexander Shliapnikov opposed the provisional government. However the return of Kamenev and Stalin from Siberia in the middle of March changed this they took control of Pravda and began arguing in support of the Provisional Government and argued against the slogan ”Down with the war”, as well as they began pushing for unification with the Mensheviks. Overall it took a much more conservative swing. Kamenev even called Lenin’s calls for revolution and smashing of the bourgeois state to be ”anarchist ravings”²

Because of this Lenin needed the aid of two figures that had often been at odds with him previously, Nikolai Bukharin and Leon Trotsky, from Cohen’s biography of Bukharin.

”To make a socialist revolution, Lenin first had to radicalize his own recalcitrant party, an uphill struggle that occupied him from April until the final moment in October.

He was able to do so in the end by bringing to bear his great persuasive powers, but also by promoting and relying on people previously outside the party’s high command. Two groups were crucial in this respect: The Trotskyists, who assumed high positions immediately upon entering the party and played a major role in Petrograd; and the young left-wing Bolsheviks, of whom Bukharin was the most prominent, who were especially important in Moscow.”³

It would be in May that Trotsky would be invited by Lenin to join the Bolsheviks but his ego about his own group and becoming a Bolshevik got in the way at least according to his biographer Isaac Deutscher, not because of any position differences, there was also some issues within his group not trusting the Bolsheviks so he did want to win them over too..⁴ At this point too the Mensheviks looked more like ”the winning side” they were in the provisional

¹I. Deutscher. *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*. Verso, 2003. ISBN: 9781859844410.

²A. Rabinowitch. *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising*. A Midland book. Indiana University Press, 1991. ISBN: 9780253206619, pp. 45–49.

³S.F. Cohen. *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938*. Vintage books. Vintage Books, 1975. ISBN: 0394712617, p. 48.

⁴Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*, op. cit., pp. 256–259.

government and were over twice the size of the Bolsheviks at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies

I don't fundamentally disagree with the part after this, Trotsky was not the skilled politician that Stalin was and was not very diplomatic, but I covered this in the intro already.

4 The Testament and Lenin having no disagreements with Stalin, and Lenin's verbal support of Trotsky

First lets get the authenticity of the Testament out of the way. Kotkin to my knowledge is literally the only major historian of this subject to make any claims of it being less than authentic. Stalin himself never claimed it was either. Kotkin even mentions his position is contrary to "entrenched scholarship" Kotkin as well acknowledges that Lenin's sister who was not an enemy of Stalin said it captured something of Lenin's views.

The bigger issue I sort of take with is that there had been no other big disagreements between Lenin and Stalin, as well as the idea of Lenin supporting Trotsky vocally would have made a difference. Towards the end of Lenin's life there was a few large disagreements where Lenin called on Trotsky to defend his positions I will go over those below.

4.1 Monopoly on foreign trade

The Soviet State in 1921 had a monopoly on foreign trade, this meant the state would handle all foreign trading as to prevent the internal capitalists and market from directly interacting with external markets. Figures like Bukharin, Sokolnikov and others opposed this monopoly and wanted internal capitalists to be able to trade directly, they felt it would just be bypassed by smugglers or the state would not be able to take on these duties, Stalin supported ending it or at the very least weakening it. Lenin felt ending this would destroy the national industries and eventual soviet power. Lenin would successfully prevent the removal of it in May of 1922⁵

However 3 days after Lenin would become partly paralyzed and lose his ability to speak, during this period moves would be made to remove the monopoly on foreign trade this would be during October of 1922. Lenin then begun the battle to undo this damage, first he made moves to meet with Stalin and others to make sure it would reappear on the next agenda. Then on October 11th he asked Trotsky to meet with him on this problem, following that Lenin would send a letter to the Politburo demanding the removal of the decision. They decided to put it up to a vote of the Central Committee. Stalin would write a note on this letter "Comrade Lenin's letter has not made me change my mind as to the correctness of the decisions of the plenum concerning external trade" though Stalin agreed to let the question be brought back up and for Lenin to come and make an argument. However Lenin knew his health as in a decline

⁵M. Lewin. *Lenin's Last Struggle*. Ann Arbor Paperbacks For The Study Of Russian And Soviet History And Politics. University of Michigan Press, 2005. ISBN: 9780472030521, pp. 36-37.

and he would not be able to defend it. In December Lenin asked Trotsky that they should join forces and Trotsky agreed, however Trotsky attempted to bring in a secondary issue about the gosplan and its powers to regulate trade. Lenin wanted to put the second question off, but he was ready to make concessions to Trotsky's position. "At any rate, I earnestly ask you to take upon yourself, at the coming plenum, the defense of our common opinion." though December both men would correspond with great length as well as other figures who shared Lenin and Trotsky's opinion. December 15th Lenin wrote a letter to Stalin and other members of the Central Committee that he had taken the steps to retire, but he also declared "I have also come to an agreement with Trotsky on the defense of my views on the monopoly of foreign trade" in a postscript he said "Trotsky will uphold my views as well as I". On the 18th the Central Committee annulled its previous decision. Lenin would send another letter to Trotsky "It seems we have captured the position without firing a shot by mere movements of maneuver. I propose we should not stop but continue the attack"⁶

It was actually this that caused an anti-trotsky alliance to form. Lenin more vocally supporting Trotsky actually in some ways maybe have worsened Trotsky's position as it unified his opponents.

4.2 Georgian Affair

Another area where Lenin took issues with Stalin near then end of his life was the Georgian affair.

Following the Red Army Invasion of Georgia there was movement to establish a Transcaucasion Federation to administer the region. Lenin while encourage economic integration did support taking things slow and concessions to the Georgian Mensheviks and permitting them in government. The Transcaucasion policy would run into issues with the Georgian Communist Party's Central Committee through it was a bad idea and things should be taken slower.⁷

Stalin's autoonomisation project was that these republics would be incorporated into the RSFSR as autonomous republics. Lenin would push back on this plan and said that Russia, Ukraine and others would enter as equals to Russia in the USSR. Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia would enter as equals, but as part of the Transcaucasian Federation. The Georgian Central Committee was pissed and sent letters to Stalin, Kamanev, Bukharin and Lenin about their opposition and they were dismissed by each of them, this would result in the Georgian Central Committee resigning and this would catch Lenin and others's attention. Reports also came to Lenin of physical attacks and drawing of knives by Bolsheviks towards fellow party members in Georgia. The exact reason we don't know, though the information coming into him from Georgia was probably a part of it. Lenin would a very sudden change of mood, and he would declare the need to declare war on Great Russian chauvinism. Lenin would come out for a weakening of the union and that the USSR would only be a union for military and diplomatic affairs, the various republics would be given power over their own affairs.⁸

⁶Ibid., pp. 37–40.

⁷Jeremy Smith. "The Georgian Affair of 1922. Policy Failure, Personality Clash or Power Struggle?" In: *Europe-Asia Studies* 50.3 (1998), pp. 519–544. ISSN: 09668136, 14653427. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/153383>, pp. 521–530.

⁸Ibid., pp. 530–535.

I am going to quote Jeremy Smith summarizing Lenin's notes on the matter. "Ordzhonikidze comes in for particular blame for the conflict in Georgia. Dzerzhinsky also 'distinguished himself by his truly Russian frame of mind' in whitewashing Ordzhonikidze. He and Stalin shared the political responsibility for events in Georgia, and 'Stalin's haste and his infatuation with pure administration, together with his spite against the notorious "nationalist-socialism", played a fatal role here'."

Dzerzhinsky had been in charge of a commission to investigate this behavior but Lenin was convinced he was covering things up and Lenin became convinced that the Central Committee had a conspiracy to mislead him.

Lenin would have his secretaries investigate and prepare their own report, in it they would fully take the side of the Georgians, it was highly critical of Dzerzhinsky and Ordzhonikidze, there however was no criticisms of Stalin in the report. Though Lenin assumed he was a part of the cover up in some way.

In March of 1923 he wrote to the Georgians Mdivani and Makharadze 'I am with you in this matter with all my heart. I am outraged at the rudeness of Ordzhonikidze and the connivance of Stalin and Dzerzhinsky. I am preparing for you notes and a speech'

But Lenin knew he was too sick and would not be able to defend the Georgians and he turned to the only person he could trust to take up the issue and defend them. He sent Trotsky a letter urging him to take up the defense of the Georgians. However Trotsky would fail Lenin, in part Trotsky was sick but he also failed to correctly see the importance of the issue.

Stalin and other became aware of what Lenin had said to the Georgian and he encouraged that compromise must be reached, Stalin was well aware at this time it would be very bad for him at this time to be fighting both Lenin and Trotsky.

Trotsky despite turning Lenin down did end up coming to the defense of the Georgians to an extent and winning them some concessions and Stalin accepted them. He even pushed to have Ordzhonikidze removed from his post and 'deviationist' removed from the Georgians. But he only received one vote in support which was probably Bukharin. All this made Trotsky give up the fight. Eventually at the XII Congress Bukharin would make an impassioned speech defending the Georgians it really ended with neither side taking victory, and even had Trotsky fought Stalin more on it it is unlikely even with him carrying out Lenin's wishes it would have been enough to dislodge Stalin who was popular enough at the time combined there was nothing directly implicating him in the affair beyond helping cover it up.

4.3 Conclusion

So to conclude on this section, It is possible even more support from Lenin could have made a difference and there is more than what I showed here, but if the above didn't matter idk how much more could have made a difference. I just want to stress how improbable I think Trotsky taking over would have been, and althistoryhub does mention his justification is flimsy and he is not quite sure if it would have made a difference and I kind of wanted to show why I think he is right it is flimsy.

5 Trotsky's influence from the Cypher guy

Now onto the portion made by a person with historian in his channel name so we can assume there will be some good research done for this part

While it is true Trotsky held a lot of influence in the military this actually hurt him in many ways not mentioned, this often made him the most likely figure to betray the revolution in peoples eyes a Red Napoleon.

So this whole bit I am actually not quite sure what their point is, they list off a bunch of countries they think Trotsky invaded, and then go on to talk about how he was extreme. Are they implying that Trotsky was invading these countries against the wishes of the rest of the state and so he was seen as extreme? I am not quite sure, but that is not how it worked, Trotsky did not invade nations without approval from the government. It is possible maybe they are just listing it off for context that this occurred, but then why include Georgia and Finland?

I have an issue with the framing, when you list countries like this it gives the impression that these are separate countries, but in the case of the Russian Revolution many of these places had their own Red forces who were on the side of the Soviets and local nationalist forces sometimes on the side of the white army or fighting for themselves.

So in the context of the civil war I don't really think this is the same thing as invading a fully separate nation with its own government, the reason I say this is because the video seems to be using this part to justify their alt-history Trotsky being a warmonger and that he was an extremist within the party.

5.1 Finland

One of the most confusing things they list is Finland, they list Trotsky invaded Finland. I actually can't figure out where they get this idea from, did they think the Winter War and Continuation War occurred during the Russian Civil War? Do they think all of East Karelia is rightful Finnish land and by not giving it to Finland it counts as an invasion?

Finland's Independence would be recognized by the Soviet Government in 1917, and other then sending some limited aid to the Reds in the Finnish Civil war there was no invasion, and the aid was cut short due to Germany demanding it stop.^{9,10}

I could only find like 2 events that really was the nearest point of Red Army and White Finland coming into conflict.

In May of 1919 the Fins pushed into East Karelia, but the British did not support this move, and they retreated back across the border with the approach of the Red Army¹¹

In June of 1919 according to Red Army intelligence over 100k Finish troops were building up near Petrograd and the White Army was trying to get the assistance of Finland, but the whites wanted to reform the Russian Empire, the

⁹E.H. Carr. *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*. A history of Soviet Russia v. 1. Macmillan, 1978. ISBN: 9780333242162, pp. 188-289.

¹⁰E. Mawdsley and P.I.H.E. Mawdsley. *The Russian Civil War*. Allen & Unwin, 1987. ISBN: 9780049470248, p. 117.

¹¹Ibid., p. 159.

Soviets offered them peace and a guarantee if they stay neutral in the civil war. Mannerheim rejected the whites and took up the Soviet offer for peace.¹²

Neither of these events could be considered an invasion at Finland at all, so where they got the idea that Trotsky invaded Finland I have no idea.

5.2 Georgia

They also list Georgia as a country Trotsky invaded, rather than in the case of the last one which was wholly an imagined invasion there was actually an invasion of Menshevik Georgia.

In 1920 the Russian Soviet Republic concluded a treaty with Menshevik Georgia recognizing its Independence. However in 1921 the Red Army invaded and seized the country. Trotsky who was in the Urals at the time of the invasion was enraged and when he returned to Moscow he demanded the creation of a commission to investigate the events¹³ and "bring to book the presumed adventurer"¹⁴ he would lose the vote, however.

Trotsky really had nothing to do with the invasion of Georgia in fact it is well known it happened without his approval and he was pissed.

5.3 Poland

The situation with Poland requires a bit of history I think.

In early 1919 Poland made major pushes east, and due to the precarious positions of the Soviet forces they made many concessions in terms of land, in late November the politburo voted to accept any armistice with Poland so as long as their campaigns against Petlyura in Ukraine. Advances slowed down in part because Pilsudski was also not a big fan of the whites and didn't want to hurt the reds so much that the white army could pose a threat to Polish Independence.¹⁵

There were negotiations of borders, but these would breakdown in spring of 1920 when Poland would launch a major offensive and on May 6th would take Kiev from the Red Army, though without any fighting as the Red Army retreated.¹⁶

In July of 1920 Trotsky stated his intention with all Ukrainian and Belarusian territory secured he would order the red army to halt and not advance any further and to make a public offer of peace with Poland. Lenin and the majority of the Politbureau were for the continuation of the war into Poland. No one in this fight argued for the idea that Communism and Revolution be forced on an unwilling Polish population. Lenin and others knew in 1917 there had been Soviets in Poland and very strong support for Communism there, they believed them to still be there and strong. Even in early 1920 Trotsky spoke about Polish Soviets, none of them were fully aware to what extent they had been suppressed in Poland in the years sense. The Politburo asked Polish Communists who had

¹²O. Figes. *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*. Bodley Head, 2014. ISBN: 9781847922915, p. 672.

¹³Smith, "The Georgian Affair of 1922. Policy Failure, Personality Clash or Power Struggle?", op. cit.

¹⁴Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*, op. cit., p. 474.

¹⁵E.H. Carr. *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*. A history of Soviet Russia v. 3. Macmillan, 1978. ISBN: 0393301990, p. 154.

¹⁶Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, op. cit., p. 698.

joined the Bolsheviks and lived in Russia their opinions. Karl Radek, and Felix Dzerzhinsky opposed the invasion and said it would result in a surge in Polish patriotic sentiment. Another Polish Communist Lapinsky greatly exaggerated the strength of Polish Communism. Trotsky would side with the opinions of Polish Communists who opposed it. Trotsky would submit to the decision of the majority and carry out his job despite opposing it. When this war turned to disaster Trotsky argued in favor of a peace deal, which Lenin would support him on.¹⁷

So Trotsky opposed the war, however he was outvoted and he carried out his duty. Again this part of the video is supposed to be supporting Trotsky's zealotry and why he was considered too radical by the party standards, so how does that fit with him opposing the war?

5.4 Ukraine

Onto Ukraine

Following the February Revolution a independent Ukrainian government was setup in Kiev. They would seek recognition from the Provisional government, not for full Independence, but just autonomy and certain rights. The provisional government would reject their demands.¹⁸

After the October Revolution there would be negotiations between the Bolsheviks and the central Rada and some within the government actually supported some kind of agreement with the soviet government like the one with the provisional government. This would come to an end in December and open hostilities would begin.

The Rada would fail to really gain any support to oppose the Soviet forces, the idea of a Ukrainian nation was mostly exclusive to the towns, peasants support was only won with the promise of land reforms. It also lacked support in the east where the population was more Russian, and among the industrial workers in the cities which were often Russian and Jewish. While there was Soviets established in Ukraine, many either didn't have Bolshevik majorities and opposed the revolution, or didn't have majority support in their town. In Kharkov however the Bolsheviks did have power and the Soviet there declared an Ukrainian Republic of Soviets.¹⁹

At this time Trotsky was not in charge of the Red Army nor was there really a proper red army yet. Antonov-Ovseenko was in charge and his Chief of Staff was Mikhail Muravyov a Left-SR and he took about 1000 men and went to take Kiev. As they moved closer a revolt would break out in Kiev that would be crushed by the Rada, but his forces would end up taking the city²⁰

Now I actually can't find much information in any of my books on this brief period of Soviet Ukraine under the control of Moravyov, I can't find much descriptions on the events that I can fact check beyond Figgs mentioning it was very brutal and another book mentioning it was horribly Russian Chauvinist and oppressed Ukrainians, but it would be short lived military run state due to Ukraine becoming German during the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

¹⁷Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*, op. cit., pp. 464-469.

¹⁸J. Smith. *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. ISBN: 9781107292116, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹Mawdsley and Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 24-25.

Eventually the German Ukrainian state would end. The Rada reestablished its self in Kiev, it would also claim Western Ukraine which caused tensions with the Poles who also claimed it. Odessa at this time was occupied by the French, and the Bolshevik Pyatakov formed a Ukrainian Government in Kursk. A general strike in Kharkov would put the local Soviet back in power. While the Red Army moved south, Chicherin at the time said they were acting on their own to the Directorate of Ukraine.²¹

Which may not have actually been a lie at least fully, Stalin may have given authorization of the invasion of Ukraine without approval.²²

Trotsky's too wanted to push back into Ukraine the landing of french troops worried him that even more would land, but Lenin was opposed.²³

Now by early 1919 Ukraine was mostly back in Bolshevik hands. Pyatakov was in control this time.²⁴ Pyatakov was one of the clearest examples of Great Russian Chauvanism, in 1917 he was one of the biggest opponents of self-determination for minorities within the party, while being born in Ukraine he very much was Russian, he felt separatists tendencies only served the bourgeoisie to stave off revolution.²⁵ So it is no surprise how he ruled in Ukraine. Collective farms which failed and were not implemented in Russia were forced on Ukrainians, Ukrainian Nationalists were imprisoned en-mass, this would result in peasant uprisings and a loss of control of the Ukraine. Lenin would blame Piatakov personally for losing Ukraine to the whites again due to his chauvinism towards Ukrainians.²⁶ The volunteer army and Petlyura would seize back control of Ukraine and Kiev by September after a push north in July. The brutality of these governments would make the brutality of Pyatakov be forgotten.²⁷

Denikin the leader of the Volunteer Army refused to acknowledge Ukrainians even existed, they were just Russians to him. He wanted Russian to be the official language of instruction in Ukraine. Unshockingly this lost him the support of Ukrainian nationalists.²⁸

But the worst crimes of Petlyura and Denikin is what would happen to the Jewish population of Ukraine. Estimate of Jews killed in the pogroms varies, but it was likely in the hundreds of thousands. If you count those killed, raped, wounded and orphaned the number of victims is around a million. This would have been during the volunteer armies short period of control of mostly the only 6 months of 1919. While all armies in the civil war pogroms committed programs, none did it to this scale, they were systematic. They would move and eliminate entire villages, officers would declare so as long as there was Jews in Ukraine it could not be secured.²⁹ It is no shock then that the population turned on them

This time when the Red Army pushed back the Volunteer Army into Ukraine

²¹Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, op. cit., pp. 300-301.

²²Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, op. cit., p. 706.

²³Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*, op. cit., pp. 428-429.

²⁴Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, op. cit., pp. 302-303.

²⁵R.C. Tucker. *Stalin as Revolutionary, 1879-1929: A Study in History and Personality*. ACLS Humanities E-Book. Norton, 1974. ISBN: 9780393007381, p. 170.

²⁶Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, op. cit., pp. 706-707.

²⁷Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, op. cit., pp. 302-303.

²⁸P. Kenz, R.P. Stanford University. Hoover Institution on War, and R.P. Hoover Institution on War. *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920: The Defeat of the Whites*. Hoover Institution on War. Revolution and Peace v. 2. Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1977. ISBN: 9780520033467, pp. 151-156.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 166-172.

and crushed it. Lenin stepped in in November of 1919 saying they must find a common language with the Ukrainian peasants, he spoke out against the primitive Russian chauvinism displayed by Bolsheviks. He called for the use of Ukrainian language in all Soviet institutions. The Ukrainian left-nationalists were admitted into the Ukrainian Bolshevik Party, it was through accepting this nationalism and integrating it into the party that peace would come to Ukraine finally. In the period following this the Ukrainian language would flourish, the Ukrainian population of Kiev would go from 27 to 42 per cent.³⁰

During the First invasion was not Trotsky, the Second was mostly led by Piatakov, and the Third was pushing back the volunteer army and not invading any Ukrainian state in my view

5.5 Baltic States

Onto the Baltic states

In Estonia and Latvia both had Soviet Governments established at the same time as the one in Petrograd. Remember the Bolsheviks were not just Russians in European Russia they existed in all parts of the Russian Empire. In the Baltic they were particularly strong. Though these governments would be short lived in the Baltic and would either fall to the British or Germans.³¹

5.5.1 Estonia

In Estonia a white army push towards Petrograd would be supported, when they were defeated they retreated into Estonia and Trotsky did in fact call for an invasion to crush the white army, however Estonia realizing the situation they were in and the Bolshevik diplomats were able to offer Estonia a peace treaty if they stayed neutral, the white army in Estonia would be disbanded and a peace treaty signed.³²

5.5.2 Latvia

Following the collapse of German controlled states both Nationalist and Local Red forces fought in Latvia, there had been a very strong red presence there and with the aid of units of the red army the Latvian SSR was reestablished in early 1919, though by May it had collapsed due to economy destruction from the war, Germany connected forces and with the Estonian Government pushing south and cutting it off from Russia and sealing its fate.³³

5.5.3 Lithuania

This is a bit shorter as not really many of the books I have touch on it that much. Parts of it were controlled by red forces in early 1919 briefly after Germany pulled back, but then it was lost to the White army and Poland, in the intervening months Lithuania actually had a government established an an

³⁰Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, op. cit., pp. 707-708.

³¹Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, op. cit., pp. 312-314.

³²Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, op. cit., pp. 673-674.

³³Mawdsley and Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, op. cit., p. 118.

army, but part of the country would end up in Soviet hands again during the war with Poland, but due to the loss against Poland any red forces left.³⁴

5.5.4 Conclusion

Now I can't find much on the Baltic States and Trotsky but I note at the bottom of the page in *The Prophet Armed* that Trotsky had urged peace with the Baltic states. So take that as you will.

5.6 Armenia

Not a lot to write about here, at the time of the seizure of Armenia it came after Armenia had already been defeated by Turkey, a local uprising by local Bolsheviks followed by the Red Army had the government surrender without a fight. Trotsky was not involved with this as he was busy with Poland at the time. This was done under Lenin's orders.³⁵

5.7 Kazakhstan

So to be honest for Kazakhstan and really anything within "Russian Turkestan" the amount of information I can find is actually pretty low.

We come back to my general issue of talking about these things if they existed as nations, by the point the Red Army really took Kazakhstan it was just white army forces ruled over by Kolchak, and when we talk of Trotsky's invasion, he was in the west at the time Kamanev actually was overseeing this front and Trotsky didn't want him to push east at that time, and Trotsky got overridden, and Kamanev pushed east.

5.8 Azerbaijan

We finally come to the last country listed.

From the time of its Independence to April 1920 it had 5 different governments, the governments were blocked from land reform by the local capitalists which pissed off the rural poor, and unemployment was high due to no longer exporting oil to Russia, made a fertile ground for Bolshevik recruitment among the lower classes. As well as the army refused to resist and Baku was taken without armed resistance. Trotsky at this time was busy with Poland and did not take part in the invasion.³⁶

5.9 So how does this show Trotsky's extremism

None of these invasions that did happen were something he was for alone, if he was even for them which he was not in several cases. This could not have been something that made him an outsider to the party as there was support from these and Stalin supported them as well so if that hurt Trotsky wouldn't that also have hurt Stalin?

³⁴Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, op. cit., pp. 312-314.

³⁵Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, op. cit., p. 713.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 712.

5.10 Military Opposition

So ya, I don't see how all of that is supposed to show Trotsky was disliked by being too extreme these weren't invasions done by Trotsky alone, and in some cases there was no invasion or Trotsky was opposed to it. However there was some disagreements with him on war policy, mostly around his use of tsarists officials. As well as in general his military experience I think hurt him because people viewed him as a potential bonapartist, a military leader who might betray the revolution.

5.11 Trotsky and the Terror

Here they are not wrong, Trotsky was one of the major defenders of the Red Terror, and not all Bolsheviks supported the terror in the way it was implemented, though very few were opposed to it on some level. So I don't think this made him an extremist in the party given Lenin and Stalin and others supported it. So again why would this mean "no wonder he was not well liked" this was a popular position within the party, how does supporting the terror make him an extremist that would make him not liked by the very party that implemented the terror?

I also find their definition of Terror to be inaccurate. They define it as "which was when the Bolshevik secret police suppressed dissent through terrorism and mass executions." I at the very least wouldn't limit it to the actions of the Cheka, in many cases the terror started well before the official as workers and peasants took revenge on those they thought to be their enemies.

I also disagree with the comment about "they weren't called gulags yet" what existed during the civil war was very different from the gulag system to quote from *Soviet Penal Policy, 1917-1934: A Reinterpretation*.

"Civil war camps were located in the heartland of Russia, not in remote regions of Siberia or the north. Some of their prisoners, as Solzhenitsyn was aware, were allowed to live in residence outside of the camps. More important, the food and clothing provided to camp inmates were reportedly of relatively good quality, consisting in some jurisdictions of one Red Army ration per inmate ... Nor can one speak of a direct evolution from the civil war camps to the Stalin camps, because the former were closed in 1922 after the penal systems of Narkomiust and Narkomvnuudel merged. The immediate forebears of the Stalinist camps were the northern camps of the OGPU in Solovki, which were opened in 1921-22 and allowed to coexist with the new administration."

The bulk of the prisons/camps in the NEP era never resembled the gulag system. This is something I would like to do a future video on, how the rather progressive for the time system in use during the NEP died and was replaced with the GULAG.³⁷

As well Trotsky's red army made use of POW labor which is kind of a reality of war, during WW2 here in Kansas we used a lot of German POWs as agricultural laborers. The Geneva Convention which did not exist at the time even permits for POWs as laborers. I don't think use of POWs as labor is comparable to the GULAGs as well.

³⁷Peter H. Solomon. "Soviet Penal Policy, 1917-1934: A Reinterpretation". In: *Slavic Review* 39.2 (1980), pp. 195-217. ISSN: 00376779. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2496785>.

6 Trotsky in Charge Now

We are now onto the part of the video where Trotsky is in charge, this is less history based and more speculation and so I can't really say for 100 percent any given thing here is wrong, but I still want to point out there things don't line up with previous positions of Trotsky. I understand it is alt-history and at the end of the day you could say Trotsky goes mad and starts to eat children and well it is ok because it is alt-history.

6.1 Trotsky's Use of Experts

I don't know if I would say it is his main criticism, but yes Trotsky was always someone for consulting experts and he had a dislike of letting party officials take care of things, this can be seen during the civil war with him using Tsarist officers, or after where he wanted experts in control of economic choices and not the party. So ya alt-history hub I think is accurate in this.

Do want to mention/show that Trotsky's use of experts didn't mean he was for some detached technocrats running everything. This is from Trotsky in 1925.

"We must not build socialism by the bureaucratic road, we must not create a socialist society by administrative order .. Socialist construction is possible only with the growth of genuine revolutionary democracy"³⁸

6.2 Gulags

Then he brings up gulags and I think I responded to this kind of earlier, to my knowledge I can't ever find Trotsky commenting much on this, though the major change in Soviet Penal policy happened after his exile so it is hard to know what his position on it might have been. A big part of this seems to be based on Trotsky as a "fanatic" which I am not quite sure where the argument for is from.

6.3 Holodomor and the Kulaks

I have some major issues with this part, yes Trotsky was for collectivization, but his plan differed vastly from Stalin's I actually did a video on this.

I don't think the holodomor would have occurred under Trotsky, he generally had a better understanding of agriculture given his background growing up on a farm in Ukraine. The spiral towards the grain strike was Stalin's main motivating factor in him losing confidence in the NEP and switching to forced collectivization.

To quote Richard B. Day

"The only policy that might have avoided the "grain strike" was put forth by Trotsky. Underlining the dangers inherent in the goods famine, Trotsky consistently appealed for accelerated investments in the consumer goods industries."³⁹

³⁸R.B. Day. *Leon Trotsky and the Politics of Economic Isolation*. Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies. Cambridge University Press, 2004. ISBN: 9780521524360, p. 142.

³⁹N.I.B.K.C.S.F.C. Richard B. Day et al. *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism*. M.E. Sharpe, 1982. ISBN: 9780873321907. URL: <https://books.google.is/books?id=sQ26AAAAIAAJ>, pp. liv-lv.

As I covered in my video Did Stalin "Steal" Trotsky's Economic Program? Trotsky was not for forced collectivization, he was not for violently ending the Kulaks. In 1923 he condemned the idea of de-kulakizing proposed by Zinoviev.

To use a bit of the quotes I used in my other video which you should go watch in full.

"Trotsky's actual economic proposals in the 1920s were based on the NEP and its continuation. He urged greater attention to heavy industry and planning earlier than did Bukharin, and he worried more about the village "kulak"; but his remedies were moderate, market-orientated, or, as the expression went, "nepist." Like Bukharin, he was a "reformist" in economic policy, looking towards the evolution of NEP Russia towards industrialism and socialism."⁴⁰

"In propaganda texts, the majority's spokesmen accused the Left of planning to liquidate the NEP, to oppress the peasantry, to raise prices and lower the standard of living, and other sins. But the latter, no doubt sincerely, reasserted that it favored the NEP, did not intend to expropriate the property of the kulaks, nor indeed, that of any other private entrepreneurs, and that it, in fact even, welcomed some growth of these elements provided the growth of the socialist sector, mainly industrial, was constantly assured. They opposed using the G.P.U. against the private sectors."⁴¹

6.3.1 Trotsky on Trading with Capitalist Nations

They say Trotsky was not for trade with capitalist nations, I have no idea where they got this fact from, Trotsky very much was for. Trotsky was for buying foreign consumer goods to help make sure the peasants were happy in areas where local soviet industry was lacking to give them time to build up those industries⁴²

Trotsky even supported grain exports, he wanted to import foreign industry to help with industrialization.⁴³

Trotsky had been against certain plans, and wanted to make sure there was a monopoly on foreign trade, but he was not against foreign loans and trade as he thought it was the only way to break the deadlock between agriculture and industry.

6.4 He Agreed with the Goals but not the methods

My single biggest issue with this video is how they talk about it being a minor thing that Trotsky disagreed with the methods? But methods are a huge thing, if I hate that my neighbor lets his dog poop on my lawn and I want to him to stop, and my method is talking to him or putting up a fence, but my roommate decides to murder my neighbor and his dog. Sure we had the same goals, but we disagreed on the methods. I don't know how someone can act like having a difference in opinion on methods is a minor aspect.

⁴⁰R.C. Tucker and W. Brus. *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*. Norton, 1977. ISBN: 9780393008920.

⁴¹M. Lewin, N.I. Bukharin, and Princeton University. *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: from Bukharin to the Modern Reformers*. Princeton University Press, 1974. ISBN: 9780691052182, p. 35.

⁴²Day, *Leon Trotsky and the Politics of Economic Isolation*, op. cit., pp. 140–141.

⁴³Richard B. Day et al., *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism*, op. cit., p. 85.

7 Trotsky In charge and WW2

I am mostly going to skip over this part, on what Trotsky in charge WW2 would look like is not an interesting question to me and I don't have much to add, though I think they paint Trotsky was a warmonger, and well I made a video on that you should go watch it if you want my thoughts on that. I also don't want to get into the whole Socialism in One country thing, I think it is the incorrect way to examine the differences to Trotsky and Stalin.

7.1 Bad Military Choices Poland

They claim at around 12 minutes that Trotsky didn't make the smartest military choices because he invaded Poland. Trotsky opposed the invasion of Poland.⁴⁴

So I don't know how this can show he made bad choices when he was opposed to it.

8 Trotsky's Legacy

I am not going to go in depth on this part, a lot of their assessment here is on faulty ground as has been shown. I take issue with them acting as if Trotsky is partly responsible for this what if scenario as I showed in the opening he shot that down. Also no Trotskyism is not based on the idea of what if Trotsky was in charge. I also disagree with a core idea of theirs in that Trotsky did some brutal things during the civil war therefore he would have taken the same actions as Stalin, there is a difference between actions in war and peace time, so I don't think it is an absolute guarantee.

8.1 Trotskyist's created Neo-Conservatism

This is probably the single wrongest idea expressed in the video. I am actually so tired of this myth I am going to do a whole video on it. I will give a short overview here. I am just going to quote William F. King's *Neoconservatives and "Trotskyism"* which was published in *American Communist History*, in 2004.

"Yet today, as a result of a civil war within American conservatism, it is precisely the history of "the neocons" that is being distorted through a polemical campaign aimed at prominent neoconservatives and the foreign policy of the Bush administration. Leading the campaign against the neocons are the self-styled paleoconservatives, an intellectual faction made up of libertarians, right-wing populists, and traditionalist conservatives who consider themselves the legitimate successors to the pre-Cold War Old Right. In an attempt to discredit the neocons' conservative credentials, the "paleocons" have forcefully asserted that neoconservatism is a descendant of American Trotskyism, and that neoconservatives continue to be influenced by Leon Trotsky in their views on foreign policy. Reflecting a propensity for flirting dangerously with when not openly embracing anti-semitism, paleoconservatives have even charged that a "cabal of Jewish neocons" is manipulating US foreign policy and implementing Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution from the White House."

⁴⁴Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*, op. cit., pp. 464-469.

”Very few (four) of the original neoconservatives were ever Trotskyists. The small minority of neocons that were involved with the movement passed briefly and marginally through it during their late adolescence.”

This is basically just old slander and anti-semitic conspiracy. Now not everyone who believes in this is anti-semitic or is arguing there is a Jewish Cabal controlling modern American conservatives. But some of the people who helped initially popularize the theory of neo-cons descending from Trotskyism without a doubt did think there was a Jewish cabal.

9 Conclusion

I don't have much to add now in the conclusion, at the end of the day alt-history is entertainment. The core issue is and what promoted me making this video is seeing people sharing this in more serious political spaces or repeating things they heard from it. It is a fun enough little video as long as you don't take anything said in it as historical fact, even the part trying to cover history by the person with "historian" in their channel name.

As with all of my videos you can find the script in the description which contains my work cited. To end I want to just repeat the sentiment that Trotsky himself mocked the idea that just replacing Stalin with him would change the USSR into a bulwark of Socialism, and compared it to putting a socialist in charge of the catholic church.

Hope you found this video informative, please go watch the other two videos of mine I referred to in this video "Was Leon Trotsky for Spreading the Revolution via the Red Army, and Did Stalin "Steal" Trotsky's Economic Program?"

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