

Was Trotsky for Spreading the Revolution via the Red Army?

InDefenseOfToucans

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1 Introduction

I had a someone request a video on this topic, so I figured this could be a short little debunking video. People continue to think Leon Trotsky's Permanent Revolution advocates for Military Adventurism as in for invading other countries. I think this is a product of people getting Trotsky's role as the leader of the Red Army, mixed in with the incorrect narrative that the 1920s debates in the USSR being between Stalin's Socialism in One Country Vs Trotsky's Permanent Revolution. I some day hope to do a series of videos on what the arguments actually were about in the 1920s, but for now I wanted to make a quick video debunking the idea that Trotsky advocated for growing the revolution by Red Army as I need a break from the project I have been hammering away at for 2 months now.

2 No Trotsky was not for Military Adventurism

In the 1930s Trotsky was interviewed by Albert Goldman an American Civil Rights Lawyer as part of the Dewey Commission "GOLDMAN: But assuming there is no dual power in a country. Assuming that the proletariat does not attempt to take power. Did you ever believe or advocate the idea that the Red Army should be sent into other countries?

TROTSKY: A revolution by the Red Army would be the worst adventurism. To try to impose revolution on other people by the Red Army would be adventurism."

But a quote from 1937 is not enough, we should have more evidence then just Trotsky's words on his position in 37.

So let us look at a few historical examples.

3 Brest-Litovsk

In December of 1917 in a speech Trotsky did say that a revolutionary war might be needed, but this was on the condition the Kaiser refused peace and even then his speech he debated himself over if it would even be possible.

"If this dead silence were to reign in Europe much longer, if this silence were to give the Kaiser the chance to attack us and to dictate terms insulting to

the revolutionary dignity of our country then I do not know whether - with this disrupted economy and universal chaos entailed by war and internal convulsions - weather we could go on fighting” Trotsky then started no that they could build a powerful army of soldiers and Red Guard and fight if they had to.¹

The Bolsheviks had initially hoped that there might be peace without annexations, that regions might be given the right to self-determination. This can be seen in my first Brest-Litovsk video, I have not covered yet but eventually the Germans would offer no such terms. In January This time Trotsky advanced the idea of termination of the war without signing any peace and demobilize. He felt Germany would be too weak to actually attack them, of course this would end up being wrong, but this was the position Trotsky took, he did not advocate revolutionary war.² However a faction of people did, I will cover this more in depth in the future in the next video on Brest-Litovsk which should hopefully come out in the next months. Bukharin was the main leader of those who were opposed to the treaty and for revolutionary war.

So we can see in the treaty of Brest-Litovsk while Trotsky felt it might be an option it was in reaction to the idea of the Kaiser refusing peace and continuing to invade, not spreading the revolution at the end of a bayonet.

4 Poland

Let us take a look at Trotsky’s position on the war with Poland, worth mentioning that the war between the Soviet Republic and Poland was sparked by border skirmishes that had broken out without orders from The Polish or Soviet governments that occurred due to Poland seizing parts of Belarus and Ukraine. Like many events I want to dive further into this topic in a future video.

In July of 1920 Trotsky stated his intention with all Ukranian 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. 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 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.³

¹R.K. Debo. *Revolution and Survival: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1917-18*. University of Toronto Press, 1979. ISBN: 9780802054111, p. 47.

²Ibid., p. 69.

³I. Deutscher. *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*. Verso, 2003. ISBN: 9781859844410, pp. 464-469.

5 Georgia

On to Georgia, now this one is a bit more complicated than the others, this is yet another topic I would love to dedicate several videos to, so can look forward to that in the future.

But we can cover enough to talk about Trotsky's opinion of it.

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 events⁴ and "bring to book the presumed adventurer"⁵ he would lose the vote, however.

Trotsky in 1922 wrote *Between Red and White* and in it defend the invasion to some extent though he was ordered to write the book by the Politburo which might explain its difference with his earlier actions on the matter. Later in his *Biography of Stalin*, Trotsky would return to being critical of the invasion as he had been at the time.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, Trotsky in many situations during the civil war era opposed invasions even in the case of Poland where the Bolsheviks though there would be support among the workers for it. Now I don't want to go into Trotsky and the Left Oppositions actual opinions as that is a topic for a future video, but during those debates Trotsky was not calling for invading other countries to export the revolution.

In all was kind of fun doing a video by request, feel free to ask me in the comments or on Twitter if you want a topic or a point debunked. My channel's overall goal is not to just debunk individual points but provide a more accessible way to learn about Soviet History. But I kind of liked doing this one. My next video after this should be one on Yakov Sverdlov, I might also produce a video going over my goals for my channel for 2020 and my overall plans for content in the near future.

⁴Jeremy 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>.

⁵Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*, op. cit., p. 474.

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