

# [Hsc modern history research assessment task](https://assignbuster.com/hsc-modern-history-research-assessment-task/)

Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1945

1. Identify the major features of the life of Leon Trotsky between 1917

and 1940.

Leon Trotsky is well recognised as one of the greatest Marxists that

ever lived. After being arrested, sentenced to exile twice and supporting

the Mensheviks, Trotsky was deported to New York City where he was to be a

peaceful, productive member of society. Following the removal of the Tsar

during the Russian Revolution, Trotsky returned to Russia in May 1917.

In August 1917, Trotsky joined the Central Committee of the

Bolshevik party whose leader was none other than Vladimir Lenin. Trotsky

assumed key roles in the events and policies concerning the Bolshevik

Government, which included the Bolshevik Revolution, Treaty of Brest-

Litovsk, the Civil War and views on Russia’s economic policies. The

Bolshevik party focused on their one aim: overthrow the Provisional

Government and replace it with a “ dictatorship of the proletariat”.

Support from the people grew when they witnessed the Provisional Government

fail in their all-out military attack in July. The Bolsheviks took

advantage of this opportunity creating meaningful slogans for the people

such as “ end the war,” “ all land to the peasants,” and “ all power to the

soviets.” On the 12th of October 1917 the Military Revolutionary Committee

(MRC) was established, lead by Trotsky they planned to fight against the

Provisional Government. On the night of November 6th the MRC ordered the

Red Guards and other loyal units of soldiers to seize the key points of the

city, which was successful in securing Bolshevik power. Thus Trotsky’s

leadership of the MRC and the success of the revolution, earned Trotsky

Lenin’s respect and confidence as well as the appointment of Minister for

Foreign Affairs.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trotsky led a negotiation with the

Germans concerning an agreement that was declared in December 1917.

Trotsky ‘ marched’ out of negotiations, however the immediate threat posed

by German forces led the Bolsheviks to sign the treaty of Brest-Litovsk and

agree to even harsher terms than what was first proposed. Trotsky was the

main negotiator at the peace talks, supporting a strategy of ‘ no war, no

peace’. Despite Trotsky’s actions at negotiations, forcing the Bolshevik

government to agree to even harsher terms, Lenin understood Trotsky’s

motivations as a show of loyalty to the Bolshevik Government and allowed

him to stay Minister of Foreign Affairs.

As the Civil War started, the Bolsheviks passed a declaration

announcing the creation of the Red Army, which was Trotsky’s idea. On the

8th of April, Lenin appointed Trotsky as Minister for War. Shortly after

Trotsky introduced conscription and obtained the numbers to overcome the

Whites, the Red Army had a total of 3 million men by 1920. Trotsky’s

disciplinary actions paid off with the Red Army being able to launch a

counter-attack, driving the enemy back. Thus, with Trotsky’sother

military success of the Bolshevik Revolution and the support from within

the Army, Trotsky took on another major feature of his life, the Civil War

and successfully created Red Army into victory, as well as consolidating

his power by being made Commissar for War.

By the mid-1920’s there were many debates about the countries economic

problems. Trotsky proposed a reduction in War Communism, in order for

market forces to function more effectively. This policy was rejected at the

time but was later established as the New Economic Policy. It meant a

partial return to indirect methods of mobilisation, andto’state

capitalism’. In 1925 Trotsky campaigned for the abandonment of NEP

stating that it was too slow, instead Trotsky proposed rapid expansion of

socialism in the countryside, involving the high taxation of peasants,

rapid industrial growth and an aggressive foreign policy.

When Lenin suffered a stroke and died in 1922, it also signalled the

downfall of Trotsky. With Lenin out of action Trotsky was his obvious

successor, but he was met with opposition by the installation of an

informal Troika, made up of Zinovyev, Kanenev and Stalin. Trotsky waited

for a time to launch an attack on Stalin, by passing a vote of no

confidence, but this backfired and Trotsky was accused of ‘ factionalism and

opportunism’. Trotsky became ill which left Stalin to dominatethe

Thirteenth Party Congress in 1924. In 1925 Trotsky was removed as Minister

for War and in 1927 he was expelled from the party. Trotsky was once again

sentenced to exile in 1928 to Alma Ata (now Kazakhstan). During his exile

he founded a Marxist organisation name the Fourth International which was

supposed to be the opposite of the Stalinist Third International. On

August 20th, 1940 a Stalinist invaded Trotsky’s home and assassinated him.

2. Assess the contribution of Leon Trotsky to the Bolshevik Party between

1917 and 1928.

Leon Trotsky’s role in the Bolshevik Party was highly valued, as his

contributions gained the power needed to shape Russia into a communist

society. This was after all the aims of the Bolsheviks as they believed

that the people deserved “ all power to the soviets.” Trotsky used his

intellectual abilities as an orator and a writer to benefit the party and

his position as a member.

Trotsky first joined the Bolshevik Party as a member of the Central

Committee in 1917. Alongside Lenin, they were recognised as the most

influential opponents of the Russian Provisional Government.” Trotsky and

Lunacharsky were among the ten delegates of the ‘ united social-democrats’

who solidly supported the Bolsheviks throughout the three weeks of the

congress.” (Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 1, p. 89.) In contrast to

Trotsky’s prior interest in the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks sought to take

control of the liberals and return to a communist society with the

proletarians. Due to the outspoken views of the Bolsheviks, Trotsky was

arrested, but he was released less than a month later and was quickly

appointed Chairman of the Executives Committee of the Petrograd Soviet.

Since the Bolsheviks were under constant observation Lenin went into hiding

and left Trotsky in charge. Trotsky took on the responsibility and

prepared the Bolsheviks for the revolution to defeat the Provisional

Government. This was called the October Revolution, whereTrotsky

conducted all of the supporters in the insurrection into St. Petersburg.

Trotsky’s gift as an orator came in good use as he gave a number of

speeches to convince the people of the city to join the Bolshevik

revolution. “ Leon Davidovich Trotsky was not at that time formally a

member of our party, but as a matter of fact he worked within it

continually from the day of his arrival from America. At any rate,

immediately after his first speech in the Soviet, we all looked upon him as

one of our party leaders.” (Proletarskaya Revolutsia, 1923, p. 71.)

After the rise of the Bolsheviks Trotsky became the Minister for

Foreign Affairs. Trotsky was undeniably a key figure in negotiations,

particularly peace treaties between Russia and the central powers. A low

point for Trotsky was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk where he was forced to

accept ruthless terms that humiliated himself and the Bolsheviks. Lenin

still held respect for Trotsky and understood why he accepted the terms,

but Trotsky resigned and became the Minister of War instead. From the

remaining soldiers of the Imperial Army he founded the Red Army and was

their Commander. An opposing force, called themselves the White Army, of

anti-Bolsheviks wasformedthatcontainedsocialrevolutionaries,

Mensheviks, supporters of the Tsar, landlords and capitalists. Even though

he did not have any previous military training, Trotsky’s leadership is

considered responsible for their triumph over the White Army in the Russian

Civil War. To recruit more members for the Reds, Trotsky smartly made sure

that the army were always well fed and were better off than the rest of

Russia. Trotsky then began to make it a necessity for the supporting men

to join the army and fight with the Bolsheviks.

With the death of Lenin, Stalin took control of the party and the

government with no opposition from Trotsky. In 1923 at the Twelfth Party

Congress, Trotsky remained unspoken and loss all hope of regaining control

of the party. After having little to do with the Bolshevik party, Trotsky

independently continued to work on his idea of permanent revolution,

differing from the political view of Stalin. Stalin worked alongside

Kamenev and Zinoviev to take away Trotsky’s power within the party, in 1925

they openly criticised Trotsky, successfully removing Trotsky from his

position as Commissar of War. On November 12th, 1927 Stalin dismissed

Trotsky from the Soviet Communist Party consequently leaving Stalin,

Kamenev and Zinoviev in complete control of the Soviet Union. “ The

dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation

embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries …

the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts

… that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly

exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard

… for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass

proletarian organisation.” (V. Lenin)

In 1928 Trotsky was exiled to Alma Ata, signifying the end of his

reign with the Bolshevik Party. Without the strong and intellectual

guidance of Trotsky, it is quite possible that the Bolshevik Party would of

remained a small unnerving party with little influence over the people.

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