

# Hsc modern history research assessment task



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## 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's other 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, and to '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 dominate the

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, where Trotsky 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 was formed that contained social revolutionaries, 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 lost 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

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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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