Comrade Trotsky’s recently published book (1917), devoted to the ‘Lessons of October’, is fast becoming ‘fashionable’. This is not surprising, given that it set out to become a sensation inside the party.

After last year’s events revealed that our party opposition had been completely wrong, and after the facts proved over and over that the party leadership had been right, comrade Trotsky is reviving the discussion again, if this time ‘by other means’. The preface to this book (and the ‘crux’ of this book lies in this preface and in the notes to it) is written in a quasi-Aesopian language, so that the quite inexperienced reader will not notice the hints and allusions permeating it. It is first necessary to decipher this peculiar coded language (which proliferates in comrade Trotsky’s writings despite his demand for ‘critical clarity’). For comrade Trotsky’s work, which claims to be a faithful companion [sputnik] for the ‘study of October’, is in danger of becoming a guide ‘for every present and future discussion’. After all, it is essentially assuming the mantle of the fight against the line of both the party and the Comintern. It has none of the hallmarks of a theoretical analysis, but looks more like a political platform as a basis for undermining the specific resolutions adopted by the various congresses.

Comrade Trotsky’s book is not written just for the Russian reader – this is quite clear to anyone. To a great extent, it has been written in order to ‘inform’ foreign comrades. But now, when a whole series of Communist parties are facing the issue of their ‘Bolshevisation’, when interest in the history of our party is undoubtedly growing, comrade Trotsky’s book can render a real disservice. Not only does it not teach Bolshevism, it will become a real factor in ‘debolshevising’ [razbol’shevichivanie] foreign Communist parties – so one-sided, biased, and sometimes even monstrous is its distortion of events and its attempt to analyse them and draw conclusions for the present.

1 ‘Kak ne nuzhno pisat’ istoriiu Oktiabria (Po povodu knigi L. Trotskogo 1917)’, Pravda, no. 251, 2 November 1924, pp. 2–3. This appeared as an unsigned editorial. Later collections, in which it appeared, identified Nikolai Bukharin as the author (see Za Leninizm 1925, pp. 9–25). It also appeared as a separate pamphlet (see Kak ne nuzhno 1924).
This is why it is necessary to evaluate critically this new work by comrade Trotsky. It cannot go unanswered. It is regrettable that comrade Trotsky, who has drawn incorrect conclusions from the ‘lessons of October’, has no desire to draw any conclusions from the more recent ‘era’ of last year's quarrels [spory]. The best test of different points of view, as comrade Trotsky himself recognises, is experience, life itself. And life has shown that the guiding political line recognised by the party not only has not brought the country to ‘the verge of ruin’, as last year’s opposition predicted with its prophesy of all the plagues of Egypt on our ‘country’, it is in fact rapidly moving the country forward, in spite of issues like the harvest and so on which have nothing to do with any ‘platform’.

On the other hand, an enormous number of new tasks has arisen in the new circumstances; difficulties which are connected with the process of growth. Above all else then, the whole party desires no-nonsense [delovoi] work, tested by experience, and on the basis of a ‘platform’ which has incorporated this experience. For this reason it would be even less desirable to revisit the old arguments, even in a different form.

But comrade Trotsky saw fit to do this anyway. He of course bears full responsibility for this. We must respond to this book regardless, for the party must respond to any propaganda that is directed at decisions that have been taken by the party so cordially and so unanimously. Let us take a look now at the ideological baggage [ideinyi bagazh] that comrade Trotsky has brought to the party, at those ‘lessons’ which he has drawn from October and which he is kind enough now to teach to our young and old comrades.

1 The Question of Historical Verification

Comrade Trotsky’s arguments hinge on his evaluation of the significance of various periods in the history of our party. In essence, he sees things this way: the entire period of development of the party up to October was of only secondary importance; only the moment of the seizure of power was decisive, only this period stands out from all the others, only in that moment are we able to evaluate the classes, the party, their leading cadres, and individual figures.

To engage now […] in an evaluation of various viewpoints about revolution in general and the Russian revolution in particular, and to bypass the experience of 1917 while doing it, would be a fruitless, academic exercise, and in no sense a Marxist political analysis. This would be like discussing the advantages of different swimming styles, while stubbornly refusing to look at the river in which the swimmers will be practising these styles.