

October 8, 1923 Letter from Leon Trotsky to the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission of the Russian Communist Party

Leon Trotsky
8 October 2023

Leon Trotsky's October 8, 1923 letter to members of the Central Committee (CC) and the Central Control Commission (CCC) of the Russian Communist Party was one of the most important political documents that underlay the formation of the Left Opposition to the emerging Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. This translation was first published in the International Workers Bulletin, issued by the Workers League, the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party (US), on October 18, 1993. The translation was based on the first full Russian publication of this letter by the journal Izvestiia TsK KPSS in its May 1990 edition, pp. 165-175. The translation and notes were slightly edited to facilitate the understanding of the document. For an introduction to this document which explains the historical context in which it was written, see David North's "On the Founding of the Left Opposition."

8 October 1923

Top secret

To Members of the CC and CCC^[1]

1. One of the proposals of comrade Dzerzhinsky's^[2] commission (on strikes and other matters) states that it is necessary to oblige members of the party who know about groupings within the party to immediately inform the GPU, the CC and CCC. It would seem that informing the party organization that there are hostile elements operating within its ranks is such an elementary obligation of each party member, that there is no need to pass a resolution about it six years after the October Revolution. The fact that the need for such a resolution has arisen is an extremely troubling symptom, accompanied by other no less clear symptoms. The need for such a resolution signifies: a) that illegal opposition groupings^[3] have formed within the party, which can become dangerous to the revolution, and b) that there exist in the party such moods which allow comrades who know about such groupings to not inform the party organization about them. Both of these facts testify to the extreme worsening of the situation within the party since the time of the XIIth Congress, at which the full unity of 90% of the party was proclaimed in the reports of the Central Committee. It is true that this evaluation was optimistically exaggerated even at that time. There are very many members of the party, and by no means the worst, who were deeply alarmed at the methods and means with which the XIIth Congress was convened.^[4] The majority of delegates to the congress were filled with such alarm. It is beyond dispute that the overwhelming majority of the party, taking into consideration the international situation and Lenin's illness in particular, were fully prepared to support the new Central Committee. It was precisely this desire to guarantee the possibility of the unanimous and successful work of the party, first of all in the realm of the economy, that smoothed over the groupings in the party and forced many to suppress their

dissatisfaction and refrain from expressing their legitimate concern from the tribune of the congress. Six months of work by the new CC, however, intensified the methods and means with which the XIIth Congress was convened [April 1923]. And the result inside the party of this was both the formation within the party of openly hostile and embittered groupings, and the presence of many elements who know about this danger and yet who remain silent about it. We see here both the sharp deterioration of the inner-party situation, and the growing distance of the CC from the party.

2. The extreme deterioration of the inner-party situation has two causes: a) the fundamentally incorrect and unhealthy inner-party regime and b) the dissatisfaction of the workers and peasants with the severe economic situation which has developed not only as a result of objective difficulties, but as a result of obvious fundamental mistakes in economic policy. Both of these reasons, as will become clear from the following, are closely bound up with each other.

3. The XIIth Congress gathered under the slogan of the **smychka** [a term used to refer to the alliance between the working class and the peasantry]. As the author of the theses on industry^[5], I pointed out to the CC before the congress was held the enormous danger if our economic tasks were to be presented at the XIIth Congress in an abstract-agitational form, precisely when our task consisted in calling for "a turn in the attention and will of the Party" toward the concrete and vital tasks of lowering the costs of state production. I can only advise all members of the CC and CCC to acquaint themselves with the correspondence which was exchanged on this question in that period within the Politburo.^[6] I proved that with the inclination toward simply explaining in our agitation and using the slogan of the smychka, while ignoring its real economic content (planned economy; sharp concentration of industry; sharp reduction of overhead expenses of industry and trade), the report on the organizational tasks of industry would be robbed of practical significance. At the insistence of the Plenum, however, I gave a report in which I tried on my part to refrain from complicating the work of the future CC, which was being chosen for the first time without comrade Lenin.

4. The resolution on industry^[7] demands the strengthening and reinforcement of the organization of Gosplan [the State Planning Commission], its consolidation as the leading organ of planning. It is extremely noteworthy that after the XIIth Congress the CC received at its disposal comrade Lenin's note which was written when he had already fallen ill. Here he expresses the idea about the need to give Gosplan even legislative (or, to be more precise, administrative-management) rights.^[8] In actual fact, however, Gosplan during the period after the congress has been moved even further into the background. Its work on various assignments is useful and necessary, but this has absolutely nothing in

common with the planned regulation of the economy in the form which was established by the XIIth Congress. The incoherence of the plan assumes the most obvious forms in the work of the central and generally most basic state-economic organs. To a greater extent than before the XIIth Congress, the most important economic questions are decided hastily in the Politburo, without the necessary preparation and apart from their relation to the plan. Comrades Rykov and Pyatakov,^[9] who are in charge of state industry (with comrade Rykov being in charge of the economy as a whole), sent a report on 19 September to the CC in which they cautiously say that “several decisions of the Politburo compel us to direct attention to the fact that, under the conditions which have developed, the direction of the state industry, which has been entrusted to us, is becoming exceedingly difficult.” It is true that the comrades I have named refused to distribute their letter, considering it unwise to start a discussion on this subject at the Plenum. But this formal circumstance (refusal to send their letter), in no way alters the fact that the directors of economic activity characterize the policy of the Politburo in economic questions as the policy of accidental, unsystematic decisions, which render any planned direction of the economy “exceedingly difficult.” In private conversations this evaluation assumes an incomparably more categorical character. There is not a single party or Soviet organ where economic questions are examined and worked out in their inner connections and with the necessary perspective. In order to be absolutely precise, we must say: there is no direction of the economy, chaos proceeds from the top.

5. Within the framework of this letter I will not attempt to make a concrete analysis of our policy in the realm of finance, industry, grain procurement, grain export, or taxes, since this would require the development of very complex argumentation with the introduction of much material. There can be no doubt today that one of the main reasons for the present trade and industrial crisis is the self-sufficient character of our financial policy, i.e. one which is not subordinate to a general economic plan. Separate great successes in industry are interrupted or are at risk of being interrupted by the lack of coordination between the basic elements of the state economy; and, due to the very nature of the NEP, every interruption in the realm of state industry and state trade means the growth of private capital at the expense of state capital. What chiefly characterizes the moment is the fact that the rapidly growing disproportion between the prices of agricultural and industrial products is equivalent to the liquidation of the NEP, for the peasant — the basis of NEP — doesn't care why it is he can't buy: whether it's because trade is banned by decree, or because two boxes of matches cost as much as a pood [36 pounds] of grain. I won't begin now to draw a picture of how concentration — a question of life and death for industry — at every step runs up against “political” (i.e. local) considerations and moves ahead much more slowly than prices for industrial products. But I feel that it is necessary to deal with a minor aspect of the problem, which, however, gives an extremely clear illustration of the whole question. It shows what the party's direction of the economy is degenerating into, given the absence of a plan, system and correct party line. At the XIIth Congress there was demonstrated a disturbing abuse of industrial and trade advertising on the part of several party organizations.^[10] What was the essence of this abuse? Some party organizations, who are supposed to lead economic organizations by teaching them a higher level of conscientiousness, precision, economizing, and a feeling of responsibility, are in actual fact corrupting them, by resorting to the crudest and most wasteful means of deceiving the government: instead of simply taxing the industrial enterprises for the sake of the party organizations, which would be illegal, but which would at least make sense, they resort to the forced purchase of ridiculous advertisements, which leads to a squandering of paper, typographical labor and so forth. What is most outrageous in all this is that the managers don't decide to resist this extortion and this demoralizing activity, but meekly pay for a half-page or a full page of

advertising in some “Communist's Companion”, according to the exact orders of the city committee's secretary. If one of the managers were brave enough to refuse, i.e. if he were to demonstrate a genuine understanding of party duty, then he would immediately be assigned to the ranks of those who fail to acknowledge “the party leadership,” with all the resulting consequences. After the XIIth Congress things didn't improve in this area, with the exception, perhaps, of a few individual places. A person would have to understand nothing about proper economic work and what a feeling of responsibility means in order to look through his fingers at economic “leadership” of this type, or to consider that such phenomena have little significance.

6. There is no doubt that the XIIth Congress, along with the whole party, tried to reinforce the leading and controlling influence of the party in economic organizations, especially in the direction of placing on the managers genuine responsibility for the methods and results of their economic work. But it is precisely along this line (initiative, economizing, responsibility and so forth) that accomplishments have been minimal. And the dissatisfaction of the masses is caused primarily by the wastefulness and unaccountability of very many economic bodies, the leaders of which all the more willingly subordinate themselves to the so-called party “leadership” (in the form of senseless advertisements and other extortions), so that all their basic activity remains as before beyond any genuine direction or control.

7. The last Plenum of the CC created an extraordinary commission for reducing expenses and lowering prices.^[11] This very fact is a cruel witness to the incorrectness of our economic work. All elements of pricing were analyzed in a timely fashion and the resolutions of the XIIth Congress on lowering production costs and trade expenses were carried unanimously.^[12] The organizations which should have carried out these resolutions are well known: the Supreme Soviet of the People's Economy, Gosplan, the Soviet of Labor and Defense, and the Politburo, as the leading political organ. What does the creation of an extraordinary commission mean under these conditions? The fact that the standing bodies, whose direct task was to produce at the lowest possible cost, failed to deliver the needed results. What can an extraordinary commission accomplish? Acting from the side, it can here or there get things moving, give a push in the right direction, insist on certain measures and finally, simply administratively order the lowering of various prices. But it is absolutely clear that the mechanical lowering of prices by governmental agencies, under the influence of political pressure, will in most cases only enrich the middleman and will hardly have any effect on the peasant market. Closing the scissors,^[13] that is, to approach a real, genuine economic smychka, can only be done organically: by strictly planned concentration, by an organic, and not a precipitate, lowering of production costs, and by guaranteeing the actual responsibility of managers for the methods and results of their economic activity. The very creation of a commission on lowering prices is eloquent, and at the same time, devastating proof of how policy which ignores the significance of planned, flexible regulation, under the influence of its own inevitable consequences, is again trying to command prices as under war communism. One leads to the other, undermining the economy rather than healing it.

8. The monstrous price disparity, added to the burden of a single tax, which is burdensome mainly because it doesn't correspond to real economic relations, has once again aroused extreme dissatisfaction among the peasants. The latter is reflected in the moods of the workers both directly and indirectly. Finally, the changed moods of the workers have spread to the lower ranks of the party. Opposition groups have come alive and gained strength. Their discontent has sharpened. Thus the smychka: from the peasant — through the worker — to the party — has shown us its backside. Whoever didn't foresee this earlier, or who has been closing his eyes to it until recent days, has received a rather graphic lesson. The

general agitational formulas of the smychka yield directly opposite results if there is no resolution of the central problem: the rationalization of state production and the closing of the scissors. This was the essence of the sharp clash within the Politburo on the eve of the XIIth Congress. Life has given an irrefutable reply to this argument. This cruel lesson, which we haven't begun to resolve, could have been avoided at least by half if not by three fourths if there had been anything approaching a correct accounting of the interaction between economic factors, and a planned approach to basic economic problems.

9. As one of the most important tasks of the new Central Committee, the XIIth Congress indicated the careful personal selection of managers from top to bottom.^[14] The attention of the Orgburo [Organizational Bureau] in selecting personnel was directed, however, along completely different lines. In appointing, removing or relocating members of the party, what has been valued most of all was the degree to which they might assist or oppose the maintenance of the inner-party regime which secretly and unofficially, but all the more aggressively — is being run through the Orgburo and the Secretariat of the CC. At the XIIth Party Congress it was said that the Central Committee should be composed of “independent” 15 people. This word now has no need of any extra commentary. After this, the criterion of “independence” began to be advanced during the appointment by the general secretariat^[16] of gubkom [provincial committee] secretaries, and beyond that, of secretaries from top to bottom, right down to the smallest party cell. This process of selecting the party hierarchy from comrades who are recognized by the secretariat to be independent in the sense of the word mentioned above has proceeded with unheard of effort. There is no need to introduce separate examples here, when the entire party knows and is talking about hundreds of prominent cases. I will only point to Ukraine, where we cannot help but experience serious consequences from this truly disruptive work in the upcoming months.^[17]

10. During the most severe moments of war communism, appointment from above in the party was not one tenth as widespread as it is now. The appointment of gubkom secretaries has now become the rule. This creates what is essentially a position for the secretary that is independent of the local organization. If he encounters opposition, criticism, or dissatisfaction, the secretary can resort to a transfer by relying on the center. At one of the sessions of the Politburo it was noted with satisfaction that when provinces are joined together, the only question that interests the organizations being merged is who will be secretary of the united gubkom. Appointed by the center and therefore almost independent of the local organization, the secretary in turn is a source of further appointments and dismissals — within the borders of the province. This secretarial apparatus, created from the top down and becoming ever more self-sufficient, is gathering up all threads in its own hands. The participation of the party masses in the actual formation of the party organization is becoming ever more ephemeral. In the last year and a half, a specific secretarial psychology has been created; its chief characteristic is the belief that the secretary is capable of deciding each and every question, without being familiar with the heart of the matter at hand. We frequently see how comrades, who have displayed no organizational, administrative or other qualities whatsoever while they headed soviet organizations, begin to imperiously decide economic, military and other questions as soon as they assume the post of secretary. Such a practice is all the more harmful since it weakens or destroys any feeling of responsibility.

11. The Xth Party Congress [in March 1921] proceeded under the sign of workers' democracy.^[18] Many of the speeches delivered at that time in defense of workers' democracy seemed to me to be exaggerated and to a certain degree demagogic, in view of the incompatibility of fully developed workers' democracy and a dictatorial regime. But it was absolutely clear that the clamping down during the epoch of war

communism would have to give way to a broader and more lively party collegiality. However, the regime which fundamentally developed even before the XIIth Congress, and which after the congress became much more reinforced and fully formed, is much further away from workers democracy than the regime during the most severe periods of war communism. The bureaucratization of the party apparatus has reached unheard of proportions by applying methods of secretarial selection. If during the cruelest hours of the civil war we argued in the party organizations and even in the press about the use of specialists, about a partisan versus a regular army, about discipline and so forth, then now there is not even a hint of such an open exchange of opinions about problems which are truly troubling the party. There has been created a very wide layer of party workers who are part of the apparatus of the state or the party and who simply refuse to hold any party opinions, or at least ones that can be openly stated; it seems that they consider that the secretarial hierarchy is the apparatus which creates party opinion and makes party decisions. Beneath this layer of those withholding their own opinions is the wide layer of the party masses, before whom each resolution stands already in the form of an appeal or a command. In these ranks of the party there is an enormous amount of dissatisfaction, some of which is absolutely legitimate and some of which is caused by incidental factors. This dissatisfaction is not being dissipated through an open exchange of opinions at party conferences or by the pressure of the masses on the party organizations (the election of party committees, secretaries, etc.), but is building up in secret and leading therefore to internal abscesses. At a time when the official, i.e. secretarial, apparatus of the party presents an ever greater picture of an organization which has achieved almost complete homogeneity, reflections and judgments about the sharpest and most painful issues simply bypass the official party apparatus and create conditions for illegal groupings within the party.

12. The XIIth Congress officially set a course in the direction of the Old Bolsheviks.^[19] It is absolutely obvious that the cadres of old, underground Bolsheviks are the revolutionary leaven of the party and its organizational backbone. We must and should, with all the normal ideological and party measures, assist the selection of Old Bolsheviks who, of course, have the necessary qualifications, for leading party posts. But the way the selection is now carried out — the method of direct appointment from above — contains an even greater danger: with this method the Old Bolsheviks are divided at the top into two groups, guided by the criterion of “independence.” Old Bolshevism as such is, as it were, made responsible in the eyes of the entire party for all the peculiarities of the present inner-party regime and for its serious mistakes in building the economy. We must not forget that the overwhelming majority of the members of our party consists of young revolutionaries without the tempering of the underground, or of members who have come from other parties. The growing discontent with the self-sufficient secretarial apparatus, which identifies itself with Old Bolshevism, may have, given the further development of events along the same lines, the most severe consequences for maintaining the ideological hegemony and organizational leadership of the underground Bolsheviks in our party which now numbers half a million.

13. An ominous symptom was the attempt by the Politburo to build a budget based on the sale of vodka,^[20] i.e. to generate income for the workers' state independent of the successes of building the economy. Only a decisive protest within the Central Committee and beyond its confines put a stop to this attempt, which would have struck the cruelest blow not only to the work of the economy, but to the party itself. However, the idea of the future legalization of vodka has not been rejected by the Central Committee as yet. There is absolutely no doubt that there is an inner connection between the self-sufficient character of the secretarial organization, which is increasingly independent of the party, and the tendency to create a budget as independent as possible from the successes

or failures of the party's collective construction. The attempt to turn a negative attitude toward the legalization of vodka into a virtual crime against the party and to drive a comrade from the editorial board of the central newspaper for demanding the freedom to discuss this fatal plan, will forever remain one of the most unworthy moments in the history of the party.

14. The army has been and continues to be just as severely affected by both the unsystematic direction of the economy and the inner-party regime characterized above. The decisions made by the Politburo with regard to the army always have an episodic or incidental character. The basic questions of building the army, of its preparation for military deployment, have never been examined in the Politburo, since the Politburo, which is weighed down by a multitude of various questions, never has the chance to investigate even a single issue in full detail and in a planned, systematic way. Economic and international events evoke from the Politburo absolutely opposed decisions concerning the army within the shortest amount of time. In order not to go too deeply into the matter, I will point out that by the time of the Curzon ultimatum^[21], the question was twice raised in the Politburo of increasing the size of the army by one hundred or two hundred thousand; it required great effort to turn down this proposal. In July, when I was on vacation, the Plenum of the Central Committee instructed the Revolutionary Military Council [Revvoensoviet] to draw up a plan to reduce the army by fifty or one hundred thousand troops. This assignment was feverishly worked on by the General Staff in July and August. At the end of August it was cancelled because of the events in Germany^[22] and replaced by a directive to work out a plan for strengthening the army. Each such directive, requiring complex and difficult planning, provokes a series of corresponding proposals, directives and questions from the center to the outlying districts. In the latter the impression is created that the Revvoensoviet lacks any guiding idea in its work. One of the central committee members who, it seems, should have known where the impetus for these decisions originates, found it possible to formulate this conclusion about the contradictory nature of the Revvoensoviet's directives, in printed form no less in a military journal of the Ukrainian military district.

As for the party selection carried out under the aegis of the official institutions of the party, then it deals no less severe a blow to the moral cohesiveness of the army. Absolutely the same kind of systematic work which was carried out from above against, let us say, the old Ukrainian Sovnarkom, has been carried out and is being carried out against the Revvoensoviet of the Republic. The tempo of the work in this latter instance is a bit slower and its forms are a bit more cautious and disguised. But in essence, both here as well as there, what can be seen is predominantly the appointment of personnel who are ready to assist the isolation of the leading bodies of the army. Duplicity is introduced from above into the internal relations of the military apparatus. Usually indirectly, but sometimes rather openly, the Revvoensoviet is counterposed to the party, although there is hardly a Soviet institution which so strictly carries out both the letter and the spirit of not only the directives of the party, decided at its congresses, but all the resolutions of the Politburo; the Revvoensoviet permits within its walls neither condemnation nor even discussion of these decisions, although, as has been said above, they are not always distinguished by their expediency or coordination. The simplest step would be to replace the Revvoensoviet. However, while not deciding for the time being to take such a step, the Orgburo is developing its organizational policy in the military area, which forces all serious personnel in the army to anxiously ask themselves: where will this work end and what is it leading to?

15. Guaranteeing the fighting capability of the army now depends nine tenths not on the War Department, but on industry. The generally unsystematic nature of the economy has its effect, it goes without saying, fully and completely on industry which supplies the army. The change of

leading personnel, which was conducted here, too, according to the criterion of "independence," was completed with such speed, that in today's extremely responsible period, military production, where work should have been conducted with ten-fold energy, has remained without real leadership for almost three months.

Instead of concentrating its attention on industry as a whole, and military industry in particular, at the last Plenum an attempt was made to add a group of central committee members headed by comrade Stalin to the Revvoensoviet.^[23] Apart from the inner-party meaning of this measure, which requires no explanation, the very announcement of a new Revvoensoviet cannot be understood by our neighbors as anything but the transition to a new, i.e., aggressive policy. Only my protest, expressed in the most decisive form, kept the Plenum from immediately carrying out the given measure. The Plenum set aside the creation of a new Revvoensoviet "until mobilization." At first glance it seems inexplicable why we should carry out such a proposal in advance, distributing it in dozens of copies, when it is absolutely unknown when, and under what circumstances, a mobilization will be needed, if it will be needed at all, and who in particular the party can assign at that time to military work. But in actual fact, this directive, which at first glance seems so unclear, is one of those indirect preparatory steps toward reaching the goal mentioned earlier. They are typical in the practice of the majority in the Politburo and Orgburo. Moreover, the Plenum decided to immediately add to the Revvoensoviet one or two members of the Central Committee "in a special capacity for monitoring military industry," which is in no way subordinated to the Revvoensoviet and which has remained for almost three months without a leader. On this grounds the Politburo added comrades Lashevich and Voroshilov^[24] to the Revvoensoviet; comrade Voroshilov, meanwhile, appointed "in a special capacity for monitoring military industry," remains in Rostov. In essence, this measure, too, is preparatory as mentioned above. It is no accident that, in reply to my reproach that the actual motives for the changes in the Revvoensoviet have nothing in common with the officially stated reasons, comrade Kuibyshev^[25] not only didn't deny the contradiction — and how could he deny it? — but openly said to me: "We feel that it is necessary to fight against you, but we cannot declare you an enemy; that is why we are forced to resort to such methods."

16. The present rapidly growing crisis in the party cannot, of course, be overcome with repressive measures, regardless of how correct or incorrect they are in each given case. The objective difficulties of development are very great. However they are not lessened, but increased by the fundamentally incorrect party regime; by diverting attention from creative tasks to inner-party groupings; by artificially selecting personnel, often disregarding their party and Soviet standing; by replacing authoritative and competent leadership with formal commands, counting exclusively on the passive obedience of all. Undermining economic development, this inner-party regime was and is the immediate reason for the growing dissatisfaction of some, for the apathy and passivity of others, and for the virtual removal from work of still others. Perhaps the party could live temporarily with the present oppressive inner-party regime, if it guaranteed economic successes. But this is not the case. That is why this regime cannot last for long. It must be changed.

17. If the unsystematic nature of the economic policy and secretarial bureaucratism of party politics caused alarm even before the XIIIth Congress, then, on the other hand, no one, probably, expected that this policy would so quickly reveal its bankruptcy. The party is entering into what may be the most crucial epoch in its history, carrying the heavy burden of the mistakes made by our leading bodies. The activity of the party has been stifled. With great alarm the party is watching the howling contradictions of our economic work with all its consequences. Perhaps with even greater alarm the party is watching the divisiveness which is artificially introduced from above at the cost of rendering helpless the

leading party and Soviet organs. The party knows that the official motives for appointments, dismissals, replacements and transfers by no means always coincide with the true motives or with the interests of the cause. As a result, the party has broken down. On the sixth anniversary of the October Revolution and on the eve of the revolution in Germany, the Politburo is forced to discuss the draft of a proposal which states that every member of the party is obliged to inform the party organizations and the GPU about illegal groupings within the party.

It is absolutely clear that such a regime and such a general state within the party are incompatible with the tasks which may arise and according to all evidence will arise before the party because of the very fact of the German revolution. An end must be put to secretarial bureaucratism. Party democracy, at least within the bounds which are necessary to prevent the party from being threatened with stagnation and degeneration, must be given full rights. The party ranks must, within the bounds of party principles, explain what they are dissatisfied with; they must receive the real opportunity, in accordance with the party regulations and, primarily, with the entire spirit of our party, to create its organizational apparatus. There must be a regrouping of party forces, depending on the real demands of our work, primarily in industry and in particularly in military production. Without truly carrying out the decisions of the XIIth Congress regarding industry, it is impossible to guarantee anything approaching a stable level of workers' wages and the systematic raising of this level. The least painful and shortest way out of this situation would be if the present leading group acknowledged all the consequences of the regime it artificially supports, and demonstrated that it is sincerely ready to assist the redirection of party life in a healthier direction. In this case the methods and organizational forms for changing course could be found without any difficulty. The party would breathe more freely. It is precisely this path that I propose to the Central Committee.

18. The members of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission know that, while I have been struggling as decisively and precisely as possible within the Central Committee against incorrect policies, particularly concerning the economy and inner-party regime, I have decisively refrained from presenting the struggle within the CC to be judged by even a very narrow circle of comrades, and particularly by those who in the event of anything close to a correct inner-party course will have to occupy prominent posts within the Central Committee or the Central Control Commission. I must state that my efforts over the last year and a half^[26] along these lines have not produced any results. There is the danger that the party may be caught unawares by a crisis of extreme sharpness, and in this case the party would have the right to accuse everyone who saw the danger, but didn't openly call it by name, of placing form higher than content.

In view of the situation which has been created, I consider it not only my right, but my duty, to say what is to every member of the party whom I consider to be sufficiently prepared, mature, self-possessed and, consequently, able to help the party to emerge from the impasse without fractional shocks and convulsions.

L. Trotsky

8 October 1923.

[Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), fond 17, opis' 2, delo 685, listy 53-68; typewritten copy]

[1] L.D. Trotsky's letter was written under conditions of 1) the sharpening economic crisis in our country, which threatened to break up the "smychka" [alliance] between the workers and peasants; 2) the growing bureaucratization of the party apparatus; and 3) the noticeable activation of the so-called ruling "troika" (G.E. Zinoviev, L.B. Kamenev and I.V. Stalin) which aimed at discrediting and politically isolating L.D. Trotsky. The pretext for writing the letter was the decision of the September (1923) Plenum of the CC to change the composition of the Revolutionary

Military Council of the Republic (Revvoensovet) and to introduce into it six members of the Central Committee of the party. The letter has never been published in full before its publication in May 1990 in *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*. Various excerpts from it first appeared in the journal *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* [Socialist Herald] (Berlin) #11(81) from 24 May 1924, pp.9-10, and in the Soviet press, in the journal *Molodoi kommunist* [Young Communist], 1989, #8, p.49.

[2] This refers to the commission composed of F. E. Dzerzhinsky, G. E. Zinoviev, V. M. Molotov, A. I. Rykov, I. V. Stalin and M.P. Tomsky, formed to analyze the economic and inner-party situation, according to a resolution of the Politburo of the CC on 18 September 1923. Trotsky was appointed a member of the commission in early November but forced to withdraw from it by November 14, having been unable to attend any of its sessions because of poor health and an overload of work in other commissions. In his letter explaining his withdrawal from the commission, he noted that it had frequently met at short notice, making it "physically impossible" for him to participate. Active requirement in the sessions had previously been made an obligation for its members by the PB. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 17, op. 171, delo 33, list 142.

[3] This refers to "Workers Truth" and "Workers Group of the RCP." "Workers Truth" (Central Group "Workers Truth") was an illegal group in the RCP(b) which formed in the spring of 1921. Its participants thought that with the transition to the NEP the RCP(b) "was all the more irreversibly losing its ties and contact with the proletariat." "Workers Truth" adopted the goal of "introducing class clarity into the ranks of the working class." In a few of its illegal publications it set the task of forming a new workers' party. "Workers group RCP" was formed in the spring and summer of 1923 by G.Myasnikov and N.Kuznetsov, members of the former "workers opposition" who had been expelled from the party. It was joined by several old Bolsheviks who did not subordinate themselves to the decisions of the Xth and XIth Congresses of the RCP(b) concerning the inadmissibility of inner-party groupings. "Workers Group RCP" considered that it was necessary to form Soviets (Councils) of workers' deputies at all factories and plants; to choose the directors of trusts and syndicates at congresses of Soviets; and to follow the principle of "proletarian democracy" in directing industry; to make trade unions organs of control; to eliminate the Soviet of People's Commissars; and "to remove the ruling group in the party," which "had decisively broken from the working class." The September (1923) Plenum of the CC RCP(b) stated that "Workers Truth" and "Workers Group RCP" were conducting "anticommunist and antisoviet work" and declared that participating in them was incompatible with membership in the RCP(b). By resolution of the Central Control Commission in December 1923 active participants of these groups were expelled from the party.

[4] The XIIth Congress of the RCP(b) met in Moscow 17-25 April 1923. When referring to the "methods and means" with which the congress was convened, L.D. Trotsky has in mind the fact that on the eve of the congress at many provincial party conferences delegates to the congress were elected without alternate candidates, on the recommendation of the secretaries of the provincial committees, which, in turn, from the summer of 1922 had been chosen on the recommendation of the Central Committee, i.e. they were in fact appointed by the Secretariat which was headed by Joseph Stalin.

[5] A part of L.D. Trotsky's theses was printed in the edition *Stenograficheskii otchet 12-ogo s'ezda RKP/b v Moskve*, [The Stenographic Record of the 12th Party Congress of the RCP(b)] Moscow 1968, pp. 810-815.

[6] For a part of this correspondence, see *Ibid.*, pp. 816-820.

[7] Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 675-688.

[8] Here Trotsky is referring to V.I.Lenin's work, "On Giving Legislative Functions to Gosplan," (cf. Lenin, V.I. *Complete Collected Works*, vol.

45, pp. 349-353), first published in the USSR in 1956.

[9] Alexei I. Rykov (1881-1938), member of the party from 1898, in 1923 member of the Politburo of the CC, chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the People's Economy, deputy chairman of the Soviet of People's Commissars and of the Soviet of Labor and Defense. In 1917 and after, he was one of the most prominent representatives of the right wing of the Bolshevik leadership. Yuri (Grigorii) L. Pyatakov, (1890-1937), member of the party from 1910, in 1923 deputy chairman of Gosplan and the Supreme Soviet of the People's Economy. He became one of the leaders of the Left Opposition.

[10] *Stenograficheskiĭ otchet 12-ogo s'ezda RKP/b v Moskve*, pp. 327-328.

[11] Trotsky is referring to the September (1923) Plenum of the Central Committee of the RCP(b).

[12] *Stenograficheskiĭ otchet 12-ogo s'ezda RKP/b v Moskve*, pp. 680-681.

[13] "The price scissors" was the growing gap between the prices for industrial and agricultural goods. At the beginning of October 1923, the index of retail prices in comparison with the prices of 1913 stood at 187 and 58 respectively [where 1913=100] ("*Ekonomicheskaiia zhizn'*," 11 October 1923).

[14] *Stenograficheskiĭ otchet 12-ogo s'ezda RKP/b v Moskve*, p. 673.

[15] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 68, 200-201; see also note 4.

[16] Trotsky is referring to the Secretariat of the Central Committee which was headed by Joseph Stalin.

[17] Trotsky is referring to the removal of the Chairman of the Sovnarkom [Council of People's Commissars] in the Ukraine, C. G. Rakovsky — one of his closest co-thinkers and a future leader of the Left Opposition — and the replacement of many soviet personnel after the June (1923) Plenum of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party.

[18] The Xth Congress of the RCP(b) took place in Moscow 8-16 March 1921. At it, among other things, a resolution was adopted "On the Questions of Party Building," which spoke of the need for the democratization of inner-party life (cf. *Stenograficheskiĭ otchet desiatogo s'ezda RKP (b)* [*The Stenographic Record of the Tenth Congress of the RCP(b)*] Moscow 1963, pp.559-571).

[19] *Stenograficheskiĭ otchet 12-ogo s'ezda RKP/b v Moskve*, pp. 705-706.

[20] At the Plenum of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) held on 26-27 June 1923, there was discussion of the question of introducing a state monopoly on the sale of vodka. In his letters of that time, and in particular in a letter to the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the RCP(b) on 29 June, Trotsky categorically protested against this measure.

[21] The memorandum of the British Foreign Minister, G. Curzon on 8 May 1923 proved to be an unsuccessful attempt to put pressure on the Soviet government. The incident provoked a short-lived deterioration of Soviet-British relations, was exhausted within a few weeks and assisted the strengthening of the USSR's international position.

[22] This refers to the revolutionary events in Germany which began to develop in the summer of 1923. See also: Peter Schwarz, *The German October: The Missed Revolution of 1923*. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2008/10/1923-o30.html>

[23] This refers to a resolution of the September Plenum of the Central committee to introduce into the Revvoensoviet of the Republic several members of the Central Committee, and to create under the chairman of the RVS an executive body, whose members, it was proposed, would include S.S. Kamenev, G.L. Pyatakov, E.M. Sklyansky, M.M. Lashevich, I.V. Stalin and others (cf. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, delo 103, listy 2-3; f.17, op. 3, delo 384, list 3).

[24] Mikhail M. Lashevich (1884-1928) - member of the party from 1901. In 1922-25 chairman of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee, from

November 1925 member of the Revvoensoviet of the USSR. In 1918-19 and in 1923-25 — member of the Central Committee of the party. Kliment E. Voroshilov (1881-1969), was a member of the party from 1903. In 1921-24 — member of the South-East Buro of the Central Committee of the RCP(b), commanding the troops of the Northern Caucasus Military District. From 1924 — commander of the troops of the Moscow Military District, member of the Revvoensoviet of the USSR. Member of the Central Committee from 1921. Voroshilov was one of Stalin's closest allies since the civil war.

[25] Valerian V. Kuibyshev (1888-1935), member of the party from 1904. In 1922-23 secretary of the Central Committee of the RCP(b). From 1923 chairman of the Central Control Commission and People's Commissar of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate.

[26] Trotsky is referring to the period beginning in spring of 1922, when Stalin assumed the post of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the RCP(b).



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