

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Miéville, China. *October. The Story of the Russian Revolution*. London and Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017. \$26.95.

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The primary requisites for any historical work are evidence and objectivity in studying that evidence. China Miéville's *October* has neither. There are no footnotes or endnotes. *October* is a partisan Trotskyist screed that ignores evidence—including that from Trotskyist historians—that threatens to complicate his simple framework: “Trotsky, good; Stalin and the post-Trotsky Soviet Union, bad.”

During the 1930s Leon Trotsky himself was widely published in, and handsomely paid by, the capitalist press. Miéville's *October* is similarly celebrated and for the same reason: it is an anticommunist attack on the heroic period of the Soviet Union, the historical legacy of the revolution of 1917.

What makes the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 a milestone in world history is the achievements of the Soviet Union and the Communist International during the twenty-five years *after* Trotsky's exile in 1929. These achievements are the reason that the revolution of 1917 remains a world-historical event. Like Trotsky and the whole tribe of anticommunists, Miéville slanders them.

*October* is a one-sided interpretation of the insurrection of October 25/November 7, 1917 in Petrograd and the events leading up to it. At the end Miéville outlines an explicitly Trotskyist, and completely inaccurate, interpretation of the subsequent development of the history of the Soviet Union. The flagrant incompetence, even dishonesty, of this false thumbnail sketch of Soviet history naturally raises the question: How historically accurate is the main part of the book?

Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (HRR) likewise contains no footnotes. It is a frankly anti-Stalin polemic published after his exile from the USSR. Beyond the Trotsky cult no one takes it to be a reliable account. At almost 900 pages only dedicated scholars or Trotsky cultists read it.

Miéville's text is much shorter. And Miéville is a skilled story-teller. But how much of it is accurate?

Miéville:

...the embrace of ‘Socialism in One Country’ is a dramatic reversal of a foundational thesis of the Bolsheviks ... (314)

This is Trotskyist dogma. In fact, Lenin had repeatedly said that Russia had “all that is necessary and sufficient” for building a socialist society. (“On Cooperation”, 1922). Miéville also claims that building socialism in the USSR was a wish for “autarchic socialism” and a “bad hope” (sic). Better that the Soviet Union fail than that it attempt to build socialism! Hitler, Winston Churchill, and in short the capitalists and imperialists of the world, would certainly have agreed.

Miéville:

[Lenin] grows suspicious of Stalin’s personality and his place within the machine. In his last writings, he insists Stalin be removed from his post as general secretary. His advice is not followed. (313)

Valentin Sakharov’s detailed study of Lenin’s supposed “Testament” was published in 2003. Sakharov concludes these documents are forgeries, not by Lenin. Stephen Kotkin agrees.<sup>1</sup> Miéville ignores Sakharov’s study.

The revolution in the rest of Russia is entirely missing—even the ten-day armed struggle in Moscow, which was not a coup against minimal opposition as in Petrograd, but a hard-fought Bolshevik victory with hundreds of casualties. Yet Miéville discusses only Petrograd.

Following his hero Trotsky Miéville can say nothing but lies about Stalin. A few examples:

There is a rare hint at something more troubling about the man in **the assessment of the party’s Russian Bureau in Petrograd, which allowed him to join, but only as advisor, without the right to a vote – because, it said, of ‘certain personal features that are inherent in him’**. Would that the rest of Sukhanov’s description had been accurate: that Stalin had remained no more than glimpsed, ‘looming up now and then dimly and without leaving any trace’. (97)

The words highlighted here are accurate. The rest is a “cheap shot.” Trotsky himself wrote that “Sukhanov obviously underestimates Stalin” here. (HRR, 209<sup>2</sup>) But Miéville cannot resist insulting Stalin.

These words are from the minutes of the Russian Buro of March 12, 1917 published in 1962 after Khrushchev’s lie-filled attack on Stalin at the XXII Party Congress and the same year Khrushchev expelled Viacheslav Molotov from the Party.

Molotov was one of the three members of the Russian Buro already in Petrograd in March 1917 along with Aleksandr Shliapnikov and Piotr Zalutskii.<sup>3</sup> And Molotov says this never happened! He wrote: “The transcript of March 12 is completely inaccurate as regards the factual situation.”<sup>4</sup>

Shliapnikov published three volumes of memoirs on the year 1917. He discusses the arrival of Kamenev and Stalin from Siberian exile<sup>5</sup> but mentions nothing about Stalin’s being given less than full membership in the Buro. Even

Trotsky, who misses no opportunity to attack and belittle Stalin, does not mention it.

In fact, it cannot be true because Stalin was already a member of the Russian Buro! He had been appointed to it and to the Central Committee in 1912 by the All-Russian Conference of the Bolshevik party.<sup>6</sup>

Miéville claims:

...the powerful and respected party right, particularly Stalin, went so far in the direction of moderation as to support a merger of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks ... (104)

This is a lie. Miéville copied it straight from Trotsky, who cites no evidence (HRR, 721–2). Trotsky also lied when he wrote that Stalin admitted this error in 1924. In reality, what Stalin in 1924 acknowledged as “profoundly mistaken” was the policy of “pressure on the Provisional Government through the Soviets.”<sup>7</sup>

Melville:

... his [Trotsky’s] supporters are ... driven to suicide. (314)

Also false. Adol’f Ioffe, the only Trotskyist suicide of the 1920s about whom we know anything, cited illness as his reason. Ioffe’s letter was published in the official Party journal *Bol’shevik* in 1927.

Miéville calls collectivization “brutal.” In reality collectivization was a real reform that modernized Soviet agriculture and stopped the 1,000-year cycle of killer famines, four of which had struck Russia and Ukraine in the 1920s alone.

Miéville on the Moscow Trials:

Party activists are ... forced to betray others, to confess to preposterous crimes with stentorian declarations. (315)

False again. We have had strong evidence of the guilt of the Moscow Trials defendants for decades. Beginning in 1980 the discoveries of Trotskyist historian Pierre Broué proved that Trotsky had consistently lied about the Moscow Trials and his own conspiracies in all his writings, including in “The Red Book on the Moscow Trials” (1936) and to the Dewey Commission in 1937. The clandestine bloc of Rights, Trotskyites, and other former oppositionists, did indeed exist. Broué’s discovery dismantles Trotsky’s claims that he and the defendants were “framed.”<sup>8</sup> Trotskyist writers do not mention it.

Stalin, however, did not lie about Trotsky. In a *Pravda* article of November 6, 1918 Stalin acknowledged Trotsky’s leading role in winning over the Petrograd garrison. Stalin retained this passage in his book *The October Revolution*, published in 1934, when Trotsky had been slandering Stalin for years.

According to Molotov Stalin complained that Trotsky’s contribution to the revolution was being suppressed.

In 1939 Stalin looked through the second volume of the “History of the Civil War” and asked me:

But where is Trotsky’s picture?

But he is an enemy of the people!  
He was People's Commissar of the Army and Navy!—said Stalin.<sup>9</sup>

At the second and third Moscow Trials Trotsky was charged with conspiring with Nazi Germany and fascist Japan against the USSR and with plotting assassination and sabotage in the USSR. There is a great deal of evidence to support these charges.<sup>10</sup> Miéville ignores it.

In 1961 Robert McNeal wrote:

Rarely has the historical image of a major leader been shaped as much by his arch-enemy as the generally accepted conception of Stalin has been shaped by the writings of Trotsky. . . . To the end of his life [Trotsky] could not believe that so vulgar a person as Stalin was capable of the most staggering social and economic undertakings or that “history” could continue to suffer such a creature.<sup>11</sup>

Miéville's *October* perpetuates this historical falsification.

The accomplishments of the socialist Soviet Union: collectivization, industrialization, a panoply of social welfare benefits for workers, the defeat of the Nazi hordes, the feats of the Communist International under Soviet leadership—these were the pivot on which the history of the world in the twentieth century turned. If we are to learn the lessons of 1917 we must discard biased, subjective, and anticommunist accounts like Miéville's and face the evidence squarely, no matter how disillusioning this will be to some of us. The new and better world for which the communists of the last century fought can only be built on a foundation of historical truth.

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## Notes

1. *Stalin. Volume I. Paradoxes of Power* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 498–501.
2. Haymarket Press, 2008.
3. *Sovetskaia Istoricheskaia Entsiklopedia*, at <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/sie/15125/PYCCCKOE>; Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968), 32.
4. Vladimir Nikonov, *Molotov. Molodost'* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2005), 234–5.
5. A. Shliapnikov, *Kanun Semnadsatogo Goda. Semnadsatyi God. 2* (Moscow: Izd. 'Respublika', 1992), 444–5.
6. P. V. Volobuev, ed. *Politicheskie deiateli Rossii. 1917. Biograficheskii slovar'* (Moscow: Nauchno Izdatel'stvo 'Bol'shaia Rossiiskaia Entsiklopediia', 1993) 303 col. 3.
7. *J. V. Stalin. Works. Volume 6. 1924*. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 348.
8. A thorough discussion of this evidence is in Grover Furr, *Trotsky's 'Amalgams'. Trotsky's Lies, the Moscow Trials as Evidence, The Dewey Commission* (Kettering, OH: Erythros Press & Media, LLC, 2015).
9. Feliks Chuev, *Molotov. Poluderbavnyi Vlastelin* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), 300. This is the expanded version of the Russian edition of *Conversations with Molotov*.
10. Grover Furr, *Leon Trotsky's Collaboration with Germany and Japan. Trotsky's Conspiracies of the 1930s, Volume Two*. (Kettering, UK: Erythros Press & Media, LLC, 2017).
11. Robert McNeal, “Trotsky's Interpretation of Stalin.” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 3 (1961), 97.