

# Trotskii and Lenin's Funeral, 27 January 1924: A Brief Note

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IAN D. THATCHER  
*Brunel University*

## Abstract

Leon Trotskii was fond of recalling Lenin's assessment of Stalin as a 'cook making only peppery dishes'.<sup>1</sup> Out of the many instances in which Trotskii presented Stalin as a sly manipulator, one of the most famous is when Stalin supposedly lied to Trotskii about the date of Lenin's funeral, in this way keeping his rival for power out of the limelight as Stalin posed as Lenin's nearest and dearest mourner. It is a simple and appealing way of making an accusation of mendacious cunning stick, for the first questions that seem to be asked of any funeral are 'how was the turnout?', 'who attended?' This brief note seeks to clarify what Trotskii claimed about his absence from Lenin's funeral and in which texts, for there are different versions. It will also chart how historians have reported this incident. Finally, it will assess how far archival materials that became accessible after communism's collapse can shed new light.

In Soviet and non-Soviet historiography Vladimir Lenin is seen as the central architect of the Soviet Union. Even Mikhail Gorbachev felt that he had to present *perestroika* as the 'Leninism' of his day. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that failure to attend the first Soviet leader's funeral would be seen as pivotal in explaining who won and lost in the post-Lenin power struggle. The notion that Stalin arranged and then took full advantage of his main rival Trotskii's absence remains popular.<sup>2</sup> The story, however, that Trotskii would have been present in Moscow for Lenin's funeral on 27 January 1924 had he not been given the wrong date of 26 January comes from Trotskii himself. His non-attendance at Lenin's funeral is recounted in the autobiography *My Life* (1930) and in the biography of Stalin that was work in progress when in August 1940 a Kremlin-appointed assassin saw off this unwelcome biographer. The two versions are worth comparing for they differ significantly. In *My Life*, Trotskii stated that on Monday 21 January, the day of Lenin's death, he was at the Tiflis railway station, en route to Sukhum for convalescence. His secretary, Nikolai Sermuks, delivered a telegram from Stalin that

<sup>1</sup> L. Trotskii, *Moia zhizn* (Moscow, 2006) [hereafter Trotskii, *Moia zhizn*], p. 454.

<sup>2</sup> For example see Joseph Cummins, *Great Rivals in History* (2008), pp. 250, 253.

passed on the sad news of the first Soviet leader's demise. The General Secretary was sending a similar telegram to all sections of the party, including the party in Tiflis that, according to *My Life*, received its telegram after Trotskii. Trotskii established a 'direct wire' to the Kremlin and received clear instructions: 'The funeral will be on Saturday and since you will not make it back in time we advise you to continue on to your convalescence.' Trotskii claimed that this gave him no choice, so he followed the advice. It was only subsequently that he discovered that the funeral was not on the Saturday but on the Sunday and that he would have been able to make it comfortably back to Moscow. Trotskii commented:

As remarkable as this may seem, they lied to me about the date of the funeral. The plotters gambled correctly that it would not enter my head to double-check and subsequently, when it was too late, some excuse could be thought up. I remember that during Lenin's first illness [1918] I was informed only on the third day. This was the method; the aim was to 'buy time'.<sup>3</sup>

At this point Trotskii does not seem to have noticed a very telling difference between Lenin's illness in 1918 and his death in 1924. If in the former case the leader of the Red Army found out only on the third day, in the latter instance the news was relayed 'hot off the press' and certainly ahead of the local party dignitaries in Tiflis. Trotskii went on to recount how he did not leave Lenin's death unmarked. He stated that unnamed 'party comrades' in Tiflis demanded of him that he write some farewell lines. Trotskii admitted that his first response was negative: his only desire was to 'be left alone'; he could 'barely take a pen in hand. The short text of the Moscow telegram [informing of Lenin's death] was rushing around my head.'<sup>4</sup> He soon realized, however, that the Tiflis comrades were right. The train was delayed for half an hour as Trotskii pulled himself together and wrote a few pages that were relayed directly to Moscow. So after presumably lying to Trotskii about the date of the funeral, the alleged plotters nevertheless accepted from their arch-enemy a gushing obituary. Several paragraphs later in the autobiography, after reproducing a note from Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaja, that spoke of Lenin's long-held affection for Trotskii, an extract is cited from Natalia Sedova's notebook kept in Sukhum. Trotskii's wife had apparently recorded the fact that friends in Moscow expected him to cut short his trip and return to Moscow but that 'it did not occur to anyone that Stalin's telegram had prevented his return'. So in *My Life* the association of Stalin with the telegram of deception is made via Natalia, not directly by Trotskii. Furthermore, a letter from their son, Leon Sedov, is mentioned in Natalia's notebook. This apparently informed the parents that

<sup>3</sup> Trotskii, *Moia zhizn*, p. 495.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

he had attended the funeral with a high temperature and reproached them for not doing likewise.<sup>5</sup>

In the posthumously published Stalin biography, Trotskii approached the issue of his absence from Lenin's funeral through the common assumption made by then that it was precisely this fact that explained why Trotskii did not win power after January 1924. For Trotskii, however, 'this explanation can hardly be taken seriously'.<sup>6</sup> Stalin's 'we vow to thee comrade Lenin speech' that was made much of after the event had, Trotskii claimed, no impact at the time. Nevertheless, Trotskii clearly felt that some explanation for his absence had to be offered. After noting his son's and friends' anguish that he was not present in Moscow, Trotskii for the first time recalled that it was his intention to return. A first publication of Trotskii's telegram to the Kremlin read: 'I deem it necessary to return to Moscow. When is the funeral?' An hour later it was now Stalin, not Moscow, that replied. A first full publication of this telegram now read: 'The funeral will take place on Saturday. You will not be able to return on time. The Politburo thinks that because of the state of your health you must proceed to Sukhum. Stalin.' Trotskii continued: 'Only in Sukhum, lying under the blankets on the veranda of a sanatorium, did I learn that the funeral had been changed to Sunday.' But if the power struggle was not going to depend on who was at Lenin's funeral, why did Stalin lie? According to Trotskii, it was to prevent any line of investigation that could link Lenin's death to an act of poisoning by Stalin:

Stalin manoeuvred, deceiving not only me but, so it appears, also his allies of the triumvirate. In distinction from Zinoviev, who approached every question from the standpoint of its immediate effectiveness as agitation, Stalin was guided in his risky manoeuvres by more tangible considerations. He might have feared that I would connect Lenin's death with last year's conversation about poison, would ask the doctors whether poisoning was involved, and demand a special autopsy. It was, therefore, safer in all respects to keep me away until after the body had been embalmed, the viscera cremated and a post mortem examination inspired by such suspicions no longer feasible.<sup>7</sup>

The early and late versions thus contain very different Trotskiis (from one crushed by the news and having no choice but to continue on with the journey to one who was determined to return but foiled by Stalin's deviousness) and key alterations in the details: from communicating with 'the Kremlin' and Stalin being connected only by Natalia's notebook, Stalin is subsequently the named signatory of the 'deceiving' telegram acting on the Politburo's authority. The latter account gives a definite time lapse from initial request to reply: it took Stalin all of sixty minutes to decide how best to fool Trotskii. It also offers an explanation of Stalin's

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 497.

<sup>6</sup> L. Trotski, *Stalin* (1947) [hereafter Trotski, *Stalin*], p. 381.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382.

motivation: not so much to keep Trotskii from attending as to prevent an embarrassing call for an autopsy.

The changes between *My Life* and *Stalin* have not previously been noted. The impact of Trotskii's writings seems to have been to put the following story into general circulation: at the Tiflis railway station on 21 January had Trotskii known that Lenin's funeral was to be held on 27 and not on 26 January as he was told, he would have returned to Moscow. He was prevented from doing so by Stalin's telegram in which the General Secretary deliberately misled Trotskii. Historians have responded to the puzzle in several ways.

First there are those who accept Trotskii's account, incorporating it as one of many tragic episodes in which the real genius of the revolution was defeated by its outstanding mediocrity. Isaac Deutscher is one of several historians who have two bites at this cherry by writing separate biographies of Stalin and Trotskii. In his work on Stalin, Deutscher admitted that Trotskii's absence 'on the scales of history . . . weighed but little', but a qualifying footnote was added pointing out that 'in the train of events that led to the downfall of Danton, the incident of his illness and departure from Paris played a not dissimilar role.'<sup>8</sup> The Trotskii trilogy by Deutscher added a spin of its own. Stalin apparently told Trotskii that the funeral was to be held on 23 January, a date that made Trotskii's return a clear logistical impossibility, whereas 'In fact, Lenin's funeral took place several days later, on 27 January.'<sup>9</sup> The trilogy was also clear in stating the outcome of the deception: 'Trotsky's absence did not merely breed rumour and gossip in Moscow. It left the field free to his adversaries.'<sup>10</sup> Joel Carmichael's 'appreciation' of Trotskii's life bizarrely quotes Krupskaja from Michael Karolyi's memoirs to the effect that upon hearing of Lenin's death Trotskii fainted for two hours. Carmichael accepts the story of deliberate deception via telegram and emphasizes that 'what was significant was the source of the information – Stalin!'<sup>11</sup> Ronald Segal recounts Stalin's lie, but is more interested in its impact from the point of view of the masses:

At the elaborate ceremonies, with the members of the Politburo in place beside the body, like so many mourning successors to the estate, no empty space was needed to mark the absence of Trotsky. The enormous crowds, as his own son, looked for him and wondered why he, of all Lenin's closest colleagues, was not there.<sup>12</sup>

Dmitrii Volkogonov, who in his *perestroika*-era Stalin biography had written simply that Trotskii could in any case have made it back to Moscow in time for the funeral, had, by the time of writing his Trotskii biography published several years later, considerably fleshed out the details. He had

<sup>8</sup> I. Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1967), p. 268.

<sup>9</sup> I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky 1921–29* (Oxford, 1959), p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> J. Carmichael, *Trotsky: An Appreciation of his Life* (1975), p. 288.

<sup>12</sup> R. Segal, *Leon Trotsky: A Biography* (New York, 1979), p. 285.

most importantly located and published the telegram sent by Stalin to the local Cheka in Tiflis by which Trotskii was informed of Lenin's death and the initial date of the funeral: 'Convey this at once and report when it was handed over. Mogilevsky or Pankratov to decode personally. Tell Comrade Trotsky. On 21 January at 6.50 p.m. Comrade Lenin died suddenly. Death followed the failure of the respiratory centre. Burial on Saturday 26 January.'<sup>13</sup> Volkogonov, like other historians, dates this telegram 22 January, not 21 as in *My Life*. Given the time of Lenin's death, it may well have been the case that it reached Tiflis in the early hours of the 22nd and Trotskii simply confused the timing. Certainly, by the time Trotskii wired his goodbye address to Lenin it was 22 January, for this was the signature when the remarks were published. Whether it was very late on the 21st or very early on the 22nd, both timings illustrate how quickly Stalin acted to keep Trotskii abreast of developments. Furthermore, it becomes very important to ascertain whether Trotskii read the complete Stalin telegram unearthed by Volkogonov. *My Life* stated that Sermuks 'looking beyond me with glazed eyes handed me a paper that spoke of the catastrophe. This was Stalin's telegram telling of Lenin's death. I passed the paper to my wife who had already grasped what had happened.'<sup>14</sup> If Trotskii saw this telegram in full, he would have known the funeral's date *before* he contacted the Kremlin. He should therefore have been able to work out possible travel arrangements on his own accord. Perhaps, Stalin rushed to pass on the news because he expected that Trotskii would wish to make all haste to return to Moscow. The need for a Trotskii telegram to the Kremlin may then have another explanation: did Trotskii ask the Central Committee's permission to abandon or not to abandon his convalescence given that it had probably had to have been approved? In this event a reply may not have been out of deception but out of concern, or it could have expressed a consensus held by Trotskii and the Politburo that treatment was more important than the strain of Lenin's funeral. An alternative sequence of communication emerges: first, Stalin informs Trotskii of Lenin's death and date of funeral via the local Cheka; secondly, Trotskii contacts the Kremlin; thirdly, it is mutually agreed that Trotskii would not interrupt medical treatment or that, as one web-published memoir claims, that it was left up to Trotskii to decide whether to attend the funeral or not;<sup>15</sup> fourthly, it is mutually agreed that Trotskii would provide an immediate written response. Volkogonov, however, did not follow this line of enquiry. He

<sup>13</sup> D. Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary* (1996) [hereafter Volkogonov, *Trotsky*], p. 266.

<sup>14</sup> Trotskii, *Moia zhizn*, pp. 494–5.

<sup>15</sup> The web pages of the Lenin Mausoleum have published the memoirs of E. A. Dzhaparidze (1907–96), a daughter of one of the twenty-six Baku commissars. These cite Sergo Ordzhonikidze (who attended the Central Committee meeting of 21–22 January) saying that Trotskii had been told to please himself whether or not to return for Lenin's funeral, and that he chose not to. See: <http://www.aha.ru/~mausoleu/documents/21januar.htm>; accessed 18.07.08. I am grateful to Steve Smith for this reference.

remained within a Trotskii discourse, quoting an unreferenced source but clearly the Stalin telegram that advised Trotskii not to return to Moscow contained in Trotskii's *Stalin*. Volkogonov claimed more than Trotskii in terms of consequences by concluding that the absence from Lenin's funeral was 'perhaps the decisive event leading to Trotsky's defeat'.<sup>16</sup>

There are numerous historians, however, who doubt aspects of Trotskii's story. Several highlight the basic fact that the journey from Moscow to Tiflis took three days by train. If Trotskii was informed on 21–22 January that the funeral was to be held on the 26th, it would make no difference whether it was held then or the day after. In any event he could have been in the capital by the 25th at the latest and should have known this from having only recently made this same journey.<sup>17</sup> In fact, as R. H. McNeal points out, it was possible for the 'narkom of the armed forces to commandeer special trains or even aircraft'.<sup>18</sup> E. H. Carr accepted that the day of Lenin's funeral may have been altered but doubts that there was any evil intent as early as 22 January. After all, Carr pointed out that the decision to hold the funeral on 27 January was published on the 25th and was probably 'only taken on the previous day'.<sup>19</sup> McNeal focuses only on *My Life* and ignores the citation of Natalia's notebook in stressing that Trotskii did not claim to have communicated with Stalin but only with the Kremlin. In any event, McNeal doubts that Stalin could have answered Trotskii's telegram:

There is no persuasive evidence that Stalin was busy plotting to keep Trotsky away from the funeral . . . No substantiating documents have turned up in Trotsky's archive, although one might expect that he would have taken some pains to preserve such a communication . . . Stalin's office was not in the Kremlin at this time, and if Trotsky had contacted Lenin's office, the office of the Sovnarkom, which was in the Kremlin, he would not have been dealing with Stalin.<sup>20</sup>

N. A. Vasetskii is not so much interested in who may have authored a telegram as in Trotskii's response. Vasetskii is amazed by Trotskii's inability to understand the importance of going to the Kremlin. Even if he had arrived a day late, everyone would have understood and they would have appreciated his presence at such a sad moment for the revolution. After all, Trotskii was not alone: 'No-one reproached Rykov who was down with influenza and did not attend Lenin's funeral.' Vasetskii also contrasts Trotskii's behaviour in 1918 when an attempt was made on Lenin's life. Then Trotskii had abandoned the critical eastern front in the civil war to rush to Moscow. But when the situation was even more

<sup>16</sup> Volkogonov, *Trotsky*, p. 266.

<sup>17</sup> G. Swain, *Trotsky* (Harlow, 2006), p. 155; A. B. Ulman, *Stalin: The Man and his Era* (1973), pp. 235–6; D. Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (1991), pp. 90–1.

<sup>18</sup> R. H. McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (Basingstoke, 1988) [hereafter McNeal, *Stalin*], p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Interregnum* (1965), p. 346. Carr also claimed that in *Stalin* Trotsky repeated the story from *My Life* 'in almost the same words'. I clearly disagree with this.

<sup>20</sup> McNeal, *Stalin*, p. 86.

dangerous following Lenin's death, he chose to continue travelling away from the capital: 'Trotskii knew full well what Lenin meant for the party and for the Soviet state. But in 1918 Lenin was only injured and in 1924 he was dead. The situation was therefore more critical. How could he have reacted so lightly, believing even the General Secretary Stalin?'<sup>21</sup> In my biography of Trotskii I ignore the issue of the telegram, but suggest that Trotskii's decision was a reflection of his isolation in the Politburo.<sup>22</sup> He probably could not stand the thought of being in the company of Stalin et al., the colleagues from whom he was already alienated, bearing witness to their (for him) false fealty to Lenin and to the revolution, and took advantage of his illness to shy away.

Certain details of Trotskii's accounts have not been taken up by historians. There has been no reaction to the suggestion that Stalin lied to prevent Trotskii enquiring about an autopsy. No historian has investigated whether there was a hastily convened meeting of the Politburo to discuss the issue of Trotskii and Lenin's funeral at which Stalin was chosen to pass on its message. Archival materials from the Soviet Communist Party's elite bodies, the Politburo and the Central Committee, do not provide clear answers, but they do suggest that Stalin acted honourably. Before communism's collapse it was known that there was an Emergency Plenum of the Central Committee on 21–22 January and a text 'To the Party. To All Workers' approved for publication,<sup>23</sup> but it was not clear whether Trotskii was discussed as a separate item on the agenda. It is now apparent that on 21 January Stalin convened a meeting of the Central Committee, not the Politburo, to discuss Lenin's death. The meeting was called for 2 a.m. on the night of 21–22 January. In attendance were thirty-one full members of the Central Committee, eight candidate members, eight members of the Presidium of the Central Control Commission and five other leading comrades. The only item on the agenda was Lenin's death. Seventeen instructions about the funeral and associated arrangements were passed, point 6 of which read: 'Saturday will be burial day when the body will be carried from the House of Unions to Red Square where it will be laid to rest.'<sup>24</sup> So Stalin's first telegram to Trotskii contained no deliberate lie, it merely passed on the initial agreed date set by the Central Committee. If there was any subsequent discussion of Trotskii and the funeral, either by the Central Committee or by a hastily convened Politburo session, it was not recorded. No correspondence between Trotskii and the Central Committee or Politburo seems to have

<sup>21</sup> N. A. Vasetskii, *Trotskii: Opyt politicheskoi biografii* (Moscow, 1992), p. 190.

<sup>22</sup> I. D. Thatcher, *Trotsky* (2003), p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> *Vsesoiuznaia kommunisticheskaia partiia(b) v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov konferentsii i plenimov TsK I. 1898–1925* (Moscow, 1936), pp. 569–70. This publication, like all subsequent editions of the decisions of the party's leading bodies, claims that the text follows that printed in emergency editions (*ekstrennyi vypusk*) of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* issued on 23 January. I have located no such editions.

<sup>24</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, o. 2, d. 110 on Roasarkhiv/Hoover Institution, *Archives of the Soviet Communist Party* (Moscow and Stanford, CA, 1996), film no. 2.2438.

survived from the crucial night of 21–22 January. The available sources suggest concord between Trotskii and the Politburo. The Politburo was informed of Trotskii's need for rest and recuperation at its meeting of 5 January 1924 (item 1 on the agenda).<sup>25</sup> On 27 February 1924 Trotskii telegraphed the Politburo a progress report of his health that was noted at a Politburo meeting of 28 February (item 23 on the agenda).<sup>26</sup> There is no correspondence in which Trotskii reproached colleagues at the time for deliberately keeping him from Lenin's funeral.

Despite the resilience at a general level of the story of deliberate deception, the balance of historical judgement, even before the aforementioned archival materials were available, either questioned Trotskii's version or discounted it as a serious event in deciding the power struggle. In this context it should be noted that Trotskii was not excluded from the broader expressions of grief about the loss of Lenin. Not only did Trotskii contribute to memorial books in Lenin's honour,<sup>27</sup> the text dictated at the Tiflis railway station ran to a decent newspaper article and was printed in leading Soviet dailies on 24 January.<sup>28</sup> This was the earliest possible date of publication given that no newspapers were issued on 23 January. As the Soviet population read the newspapers from which they were first informed of Lenin's death, they should also have been struck by comrade Trotskii's reaction. His valedictory farewell was given lead page equal billing with the official announcement from the Central Committee in one newspaper.<sup>29</sup> The Central Committee was given the first page and Trotskii a prominent position on the second page in three key broadsheets, including *Pravda*.<sup>30</sup> *Izvestiia* was the only important newspaper that awarded Trotskii's article a centre, first-page column above a pencil drawing of Lenin, and then printed the Central Committee on the second page.<sup>31</sup> To this extent Trotskii's grief was expressed well in advance of Lenin's funeral and should have been known to all. This makes it yet more likely that there was no plot to minimize Trotskii's influence in marking Lenin's death. After all, why lie to keep him away from the funeral only then to give Trotskii such publicity in the press releases of Lenin's death? Moreover, since the newspapers, wherever they placed Trotskii's article, declared that it had been received over the telegraph from the Tiflis railway station, readers would have been aware that Trotskii was out of Moscow, if not why. There should have been no such mass

<sup>25</sup> *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b). Povestki dnia zasedanii 1919–1929*, ed. G. M. Adibekov, K. M. Anderson and L. A. Rogovaia (Moscow, 2000), p. 263.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see Trotskii's essays in the collection *U velikoi mogily* (Moscow, 1924).

<sup>28</sup> An English translation can be found in Leon Trotsky, *On Lenin: Notes towards a Biography* (1971), pp. 203–4.

<sup>29</sup> L. Trotskii, 'Lenina net . . .' (middle column under a picture of Lenin) and Tsentral'nyi Komitet RKP, 'K partii. Ko vsem trudiashchimsia' (right-hand column by side of Lenin picture), *Ekonomicheskaiia zhizn*, 24 Jan. 1924, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Pravda*, 24 Jan. 1924, pp. 1–2; *Torgovo-promyshlennaia gazeta*, 24 Jan. 1924, pp. 1–2; *Trud*, 24 Jan. 1924, pp. 1–2.

<sup>31</sup> *Izvestiia*, 24 Jan. 1924, pp. 1–2.

shock at Trotskii's absence and this makes it yet more unlikely that the funeral had any great consequences for Trotskii's political future. There may have been no ill intent in not giving a full explanation for Trotskii's absence at the time. It may have been considered wise to keep news of Trotskii's infirmity quiet at a time of danger given Lenin's death.

If we discount the alternative version of exchange of telegrams suggested above and the possibility of no telegrams, it remains unclear who corresponded with Trotskii on 22 January and what was said. The most recent Stalin biographies have not located the text of a Stalin telegram to Trotskii. Robert Service repeats Stalin's hostile intent ('Stalin knew Trotski would attract all the attention if he appeared in Moscow for the ceremony') and agrees with Trotskii that Stalin's trickery made no difference. Crucially, though, a Stalin telegram is not referenced.<sup>32</sup> Simon Sebag Montefiore, who has trawled extensively through Stalin's archives, omits the incident in his discussion of Stalin and Lenin's death.<sup>33</sup> In the absence of hard evidence it may be reasonable to assume that the story of Stalin's deception is precisely just that: a story. In *Stalin* Trotskii mentioned Kamenev's and Zinoviev's reluctance to answer questions about what happened around Lenin's funeral.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps this awkwardness was part of a more general participation in keeping Trotskii away. If fault there is, it could be with the Central Committee and not Stalin, whose name might first have been suggested by Natalia and then taken up by Trotskii. Or much later Trotskii may have thought that if Stalin sent the first telegram, informing him of Lenin's death and the initial date of the funeral, he must have signed any subsequent telegram. It could also have been suggested by the association of Trotskii's location: Tiflis is in Georgia and this was Stalin's home republic! But perhaps no Stalin telegram has been found because one never existed. If true, it would credit Stalin with considerable political acumen; much more than Trotskii would ever have wished to concede. This could be why Trotskii presents a sly Stalin to explain his absence, but denies that the ploy had any real impact. It may be the case that only later, in defeat, did Trotskii need a fall guy for something that had by then been identified as a personal error.<sup>35</sup> In so many ways the account offered by Trotskii, in either version, is unsatisfactory. It simply does not ring true. Above all, why would Trotskii trust Stalin of all people, against whom he had on his own admission recently formed a bloc with Lenin? Did he really overlook Lenin's feeling that Stalin was a chef who would prepare only peppery dishes?

<sup>32</sup> R. Service, *Stalin. A Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), p. 219.

<sup>33</sup> S. Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (2003), p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Trotski, *Stalin*, p. 382.

<sup>35</sup> One might conclude that this incident provides further evidence about why Trotskii lost to Stalin. Trotskii bumbles at a time when he is under the weather and makes what subsequently becomes clear is the wrong call – which he later tries to cover up. Stalin just acts according to the book, which is why he is in the job he is: the safe pair of hands. This explains why party members at the time would plump for Stalin rather than Trotskii, a man who makes bad decisions and then tries to put the blame on someone else.