

Trotsky to be expelled from France - archive, 1934

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18 April 1934: "Trotsky had not kept his promise to remain neutral when he was granted the hospitality of France," said the French minister of the Interior

The French Government, at its meeting to-day, decided to expel Trotsky from France. Commenting on this decision, M. Sarraut, the Minister of the Interior, said that "Trotsky had not kept his promise to remain neutral when he was granted the hospitality of France." Trotsky, M. Sarraut said, would be asked to leave [France](#) (and, in the first place, the Paris district) within the shortest possible time.

Yesterday's reports of Trotsky's mysterious departure appear to be untrue, and it is understood that he is still at Barbizon. The decision taken by the French Government has, of course, been greeted with loud cheers in the papers of the Right, which take a pleasure in treating Trotsky as "the traitor of Brest-Litovsk."

Stalin mainly criticised

On the Left it is felt that the Government's action is rather childish, for what harm, it is asked, did Trotsky do to anybody in France by trying to hatch a Utopian Fourth International or by publishing in Paris a fortnightly paper with a very small circulation called "The Bulletin of the Opposition," largely consisting of the usual Trotskyite criticisms of the Stalin regime?

As for Trotsky's personal conduct, it is argued, there was surely not another political refugee in France to equal him for deliberate unobtrusiveness. It is widely felt that the decision to expel Trotsky is directed not only against Trotsky but also against M. Chautemps, who gave Trotsky his permit to live in France and who has made himself highly unpopular, especially with the Right, by his indecision in the Stavisky affair.

It has even been suggested that the "sudden discovery" of Trotsky, whose whereabouts must have been previously known to the Government, was not genuine. The attitude of M. Sarraut, the Radical Minister of the Interior, towards M. Chautemps is perhaps a little surprising, but there is no man more susceptible than he to the "Communist scare." It was he who coined the catchword "Communism is the enemy" in 1927 - the year in which he also appointed M. Chiappe to the Prefecture of Paris police. Perhaps it has not occurred to M. Sarraut that Stalin will get more pleasure out of Trotsky's expulsion than anybody else.

France and refugees

The decision is partly a pinprick for M. Chautemps, but it shows a point of view that is growing in certain quarters. A conservative Frenchman gave me a typical example of this attitude. He said:

"Why should refugees - actually he used a stronger word - from all over the world have

to come to France? I know that you in England will all be indignant about our expulsion of Trotsky, but why won't you yourselves take him? And why can't you take some of these German refugees off our hands? Much as we dislike it, we have at least let them come here. But you only hold protest meetings against the Hitler Terror. Can't you do something more than that?"

The feeling is not incomprehensible, but it shows a sad decline of the old French tradition of hospitality to political exiles. And now Trotsky (whose exile started with his banishment to Siberia after his break with Stalin in 1927) will start on another of his numerous journeys in search of a fixed abode. The French Government will apparently not even allow him to go to Corsica, though M. Sarraut's phrase suggests that he might be allowed to stay temporarily outside the Paris district. The Government probably hopes that Turkey will allow him to return to Prinkipo, and it is also possible that Trotsky may ask Switzerland for a visa.

But if these countries will not have him, the French Government may find itself in a rather awkward position – for what can it do with a refugee whom nobody wants? It is hardly conceivable that it will put him in prison, which is what happens to some of the humbler refugees who, after being nominally expelled, fail to find any country which will admit them.

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