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Trotsky's Marxism

For many years, Trotsky was an impossible subject for a Marxist. The struggle in the Bolshevik Party in the twenties produced such a violent polarization of his image within the international working-class movement that all rational discussion of his person and works ceased. The anathema pronounced by Stalin made his name synonymous with treason for millions of militants all over the world. On the other side of the divide, a dedicated and segregated minority sanctified his memory, and believed his thought to be the 'Leninism of our time'. Even today, 30 years after his death and a decade after the death of Stalin, there is still a taboo on normal discussion of Trotsky within the Communist movement. Magical attitudes towards his figure continue—a striking anachronism in the world of today. The one exception to this rule is, of course, Isaac Deutscher's three-volume biography—itself only a part of a larger *oeuvre*. But here, paradoxically, the greatness of Deutscher's achievement has seemingly

overpowered any other potential contributors to a debate, within Marxism, on Trotsky's true historical role. It is surely significant that there has never been any Marxist appraisal of Deutscher's work, of a quality that matched its stature. It has been so much in advance of contemporary attitudes that it has not yet been properly assimilated, and hence has never been contested. Its implications, however, will only be assimilated by a continuous discussion of different areas within Soviet history—even where divergent views are developed. It would be an error not to broach specific problems for fear of failing to come to grips with the whole revolutionary epic, or its historian.

The aim of this essay is to approach such a problem—how should we judge Trotsky as a Marxist? This means comparing him with Lenin (rather than with Stalin) and trying to see what is the specific unity of his theoretical writings and his practice as a politician. For this purpose, Trotsky's life falls into four distinct phases: 1879–1917, 1917–21, 1921–29, and 1929–40. It will be the thesis of this essay that all four periods are best understood in the framework of a single problem: Trotsky's relation to the Party as the revolutionary organization of the proletariat, and its latent theoretical foundations. This focus, it will be argued, illuminates all the basic characteristics (vices and virtues) of Trotsky's thought as a Marxist, and explains the vicissitudes of his political career.

1879–1917
'Lenin's cudgel' to founder-member Menshevik

Before the October Revolution, Trotsky was never a disciplined member of any faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, Bolshevik or Menshevik. This record may be explained partly by political disagreements at different conjunctures with the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. But it also undoubtedly reflected a deeper theoretical option, which governed his actions in this period. One of his first recorded writings, Deutscher tells us, was an essay on party organization produced in Siberia. In this, Trotsky argued for a ruthless disciplinary control over the revolutionary movement by a strong Central Committee. 'The Central Committee will cut off its relations with (any undisciplined organization) and it will thereby cut off that organization from the entire world revolution', he wrote.[1] It was consistent with this view that Trotsky, when he left Russia in 1902, should have initially advocated an iron disciplinary system in the dispute between Iskra and the Economists at the Third Congress of the RSDP in Brussels in July 1903. The party's statutes, he argued, should express 'the leadership's organized distrust' of the members, a distrust exercised by vigilant, vertical control over the party.

This formulation is visibly different in spirit from anything that is to be found in *What is to be Done*? Trotsky In this phase, just emerged from exile and new to the national revolutionary movement, was known as 'Lenin's cudgel', but if we compare the writings of the two

[1] See *The Frophet Armed*, Isaac Deutscher, p. 45.

at this period, it is clear—as we shall see—that Trotsky's 'proto-Bolshevik' phase merely reproduced the external and formal aspects of Lenin's theory of party organization, without its sociological content—and thus necessarily caricatured it as a militarized hierarchy of command, a conception completely foreign to Lenin. Since it was not founded on any organic theory of the revolutionary party, there is nothing surprising about the fact that Trotsky suddenly switched to the opposite extreme at the same Congress, eventually denouncing Lenin as the 'party's disorganizer' and the architect of a plan to turn the RSDP into a band of conspirators rather than of the Russian working-class. 'Lenin's cudgel' thus became a founder-member of the Mensheviks in late 1903. In April 1904, Trotsky published in Geneva *Our Political Tasks,* an essay dedicated to the Menshevik Axelrod. In this, he frontally rejected Lenin's whole theory of the revolutionary party, explicitly denying Lenin's fundamental thesis that socialism as a theory had to be brought to the working-class from the outside, through a party which included the revolutionary intelligentsia. Trotsky attacked this theory as 'substitutionism' and he denounced it in lurid fashion: 'Lenin's methods lead to this: the party organization at first substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organization; and finally a single 'dictator' substitutes himself for the Central Committee.' He went to denounce Lenin for 'malicious and morally repulsive suspiciousness'.[2]

Party and Class

His own model of the Social-Democratic Patty was borrowed from the German Party and implied a party coextensive with the working-class. The obvious criticism of such a formulation, in a Marxist perspective, is that the true problems of revolutionary theory, and the relations between party and class, cannot be approached scientifically with the concept of 'substitution' and its implied opposite 'identity'. Party and class pertain to different levels of the social structure, and the relationship between them is always one of articulation. No exchange ('substitution') is possible between them, just as no identity between them is possible—for they are necessarily different instances of a stratified social ensemble, not comparable or equivalent expressions of a given level of it. The speculative concepts of 'substitution' or 'identity' *ab initio* preclude any accurate understanding of the specific nature of the practice of the revolutionary party on (and in) the working-class, as Lenin theorized it. They amount to a radical failure to see the inevitably autonomous role of political institutions in general, and the revolutionary party in particular—autonomous in relation to mass forces within a social formation determined in the last instance, of course, by the economy.

The failure to grasp the specificity of political organizations and the role of the revolutionary party—in other words the lack of a theory of the party—explains the sudden and arbitrary changes in Trotsky's attitudes towards party organization in these years. They merely had a psycho-

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[2] See *The Prophet Armed*, Isaac Deutscher, pp. 90 and 92.

logical meaning—expressions of an ambivalence between 'authoritarian' and 'libertarian' attitudes (later reproduced in the sudden changes from his attitudes to War Communism to his role in combating 'bureaucracy') whose abstract opposition itself indicated a pre-Marxist problem. They had no theoretical status proper—beyond this indication of an absence, a blank zone in Trotsky's thought.

This absence, however, was linked to a peculiarly intense intuition of mass social forces as such. In late 1904, Trotsky seceded from the Menshevik faction and went into intellectual partnership with Parvus, a Russian *émigré* in the German SDP. The extreme instability of his links to any organizational grouping was thus rapidly confirmed. It was this unanchored position, however, which paradoxically made possible his meteoric ascent in the 1905 Revolution—a spontaneous eruption over which no revolutionary organization had time to gain an effective control, before it dissipated its momentum and was defeated. Both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were taken by surprise by the Revolution, and their leaders only arrived in Russia with some delay. Trotsky, who was in St. Petersburg from the beginning, adapted much more quickly to the mass upsurge of October, unstructured as it was by any guiding political party. He soon won leadership of the St. Petersburg Soviet. Deutscher correctly observes that precisely in this success, 'he embodied the immaturity of the movement'. This immaturity, of course, produced the rapid and decisive defeat of the revolution five months later—the funeral of spontaneity in the history of the Russian working-class movement.

'Results and Prospects'

However, it was this experience that crystallized the first and most important of all Trotsky's writings—*Results and Prospects*—written in jail in 1906. This work contains all the elements of the later views set forth in a polemical pamphlet of 1928, *Permanent Revolulion,* but it is much more than this. It is unquestionably a brilliant prefiguration of the main class characteristics of the October Revolution of 1917. 'In a country economically backward, the proletariat can take power earlier than in countries where capitalism is advanced . . . The Russian revolution produces conditions, in which power may . . . pass to the proletariat before the politicians of bourgeois liberalism have had a chance to show their statesman-like genius properly . . . The proletariat in power will appear before the peasantry as its liberator.'[3]

Permanent Revolution

Trotsky correctly predicted that the atomization of the peasantry and the weakness of the bourgeoisie in Russia would make possible the seizure of power by the working-class while it was still a minority of the nation. Once in power, it would have to win the support of the peasantry at all costs, and would be obliged to move from 'democratic' to 'socialist' measures without any hiatus between the two. He called this

[3] *Results and Prospects*, p. 195.

process 'Permanent Revolution'—an inept designation which indicated the lack of scientific precision even in his profoundest insights. By evoking the idea of a continuous conflagration at all times and all places—a metaphysical carnival of insurrection—it lent itself to distortion in the polemic both of Trotsky's opponents and his followers. The romantic-idealist character of the formula inevitably generated critical errors in Trotsky's own thoughts, even at this date. Above all, this, formula conflated the two quite distinct problems of the class character of the coming revolution in Russia (uninterrupted progression from democratic to socialist demands) and the ability of the Russian revolution to maintain itself internationally. For in this essay Trotsky repeatedly proclaimed the impossibility of the revolution in Russia resisting counter-revolutionary assault without the assistance of simultaneous revolutions in Western Europe. The 'logic' of this assumption derived from the confused verbalism of 'Permanent Revolution'—a formula which allowed Trotsky to move from the national character of the revolution in Russia to the international conditions of its survival as if they were so many steps on a single escalator, 'permanently' moving upwards. The illegitimate nature of this procedure is all too obvious, and vitiated Trotsky's theses fundamentally. This does not detract from the magnitude of his achievement in correctly forecasting the basic nature of the October Revolution 11 years before it occurred, at a time when no other Russian leader had rejected the classic predictions of Plekhanov. It merely situates this achievement within the specific co-ordinates of Trotsky's Marxism.

The Absence of the Party

Results and Prospects is an extraordinary essay in class analysis. It is no less extraordinary in its lack of any analysis of the role of political organization in the socialist struggle. The party, once again, is quite absent from Trotsky's scenario of the future revolution. When he discusses the pre-requisites of socialism (planned production, dominance of large-scale factories and dictatorship of the proletariat), he nowhere mentions the party or its role. He attacks Blanquists and Anarchists, but then merely says: 'Social-Democrats speak of the conquest of power as the conscious action of the revolutionary class'.[4] Its vanguard has been forgotten.

The only discussion of parties in the whole one-hundred-page essay is a single, perceptive criticism of the Social-Democratic Parties of the West—which was an accurate comment on these organizations, but whose general application implied a complete hostility to the very existence of a revolutionary party.[5] Indeed, when Trotsky writes of the political struggle in Russia, he simply never refers to the role of revolutionary organizations—he only speaks of social forces.

One other comment on this premonitory work should be made. There is a patent unawareness of the problem of the Party in it. By contrast, Trotsky shows a great awareness of the *State*, as a bureaucratic and

[4] *Results and Prospects*, p. 229.
[5] *Results and Prospects*, p. 246.

military apparatus. There is a long and graphic account of the historical role of the Russian State in the formation of modern Russian society. Trotsky borrowed much of this analysis from the liberal historian Miliukov, and from his partner Parvus. But the eloquence of this excursus throws into sharp relief his parallel silence on the Party. This polarity was not accidental, and it reemerged in a crucial practical context in a later phase.

The immediate consequences of this critical absence in Trotsky's thought, however, became concretely evident after his release from jail. From 1907 to 1914 Trotsky's political record was one of intermittent and unavailing efforts to bring the opposed Social-Democratic factions together, for which purpose he eventually formed the unprincipled and short-lived August Bloc. He played no part whatever in the decisive work of building the Bolshevik Party, undertaken by Lenin in these years. He thus never gained the experience of party life which his contemporaries Stalin, Zinoviev and Bukharin accumulated in this formative period. Deutscher comments accurately: 'The years between 1907 and 1914 form in his life a chapter singularly devoid of political achievement. . . . His writings . . . consisted of brilliant journalism and literary criticism, but did not include a single significant work on political theory . . . In these years, however, Lenin, assisted by his followers, was forging his party, and men like Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and, later, Stalin were growing to a stature which enabled them to play leading parts within the party in 1917. To the stature which Trotsky had attained in 1904–6 the present period added little or nothing.'[6]

'The Intelligentsia and Socialism'

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Trotsky produced no important writings in this long interlude. He wrote one crucial essay, which illuminates the latent axes of his political thought with particular clarity. This was *The Intelligentsia and Socialism,* written in 1910. In it, Trotsky shows a bitter hostility towards intellectuals, inside and outside the socialist movement. This hostility was a reflection of his notion of the intelligentsia. It is evident, from his writings, that Trotsky saw intellectuals in a wholly pre-Leninist manner, as individuals of bourgeois origin concerned with 'ideas' or 'literature', and essentially divorced from the proletariat and political struggle. The basic image of the intellectual in his work is always that of the salon littérateur. Now this image is precisely that cultivated by the bourgeoisie itself—which has segregated 'art' and 'thought' from 'mundane' activities (such as economics and politics), diffused the ideal of the intellectual as one devoted to the remote, esoteric pursuit of these. Moreover, the vulgar anti-intellectualism of an ouvrierist or Labourist working-class is the mirror-image of this bourgeois conception: the 'intellectual' becomes a pejorative category indicating a dilettante, parasite or renegade. This nexus of conceptions, of course, has nothing whatever to do with Marxism. But it explains why Trotsky's apparent approximation to Lenin's position on party organization in 1903 was so formal and ex-

[6] *The Prophet Armed*, p. 176.

ternal. For Lenin's theory of party organization, in *What is to be Done?*, was inseparable from his theory of the role and nature of intellectuals in a revolutionary party. The essence of this was that: 1) intellectuals of bourgeois origin are indispensable to the constitution of a revolutionary party—they alone enable the working-class to master scientific socialism; 2) the work of the revolutionary party abolishes the distinction between 'intellectuals' and 'workers' within its ranks. Gramsci, of course, developed Lenin's theory in his famous analysis of the revolutionary party as the 'Modern Prince', all of whose members become intellectuals of a new type.

This complex conception contrasts with Trotsky's acceptance of traditional categories and the prejudices that went with them. When writing of intellectuals, he was thinking of the esoteric literary circles in Moscow whom he was later to attack in *Literature and Revolution*—never of the new intellectuals forged in and through the Bolshevik Party, as its members. In a word, he lacked any Marxist theory of intellectuals and their relation to the revolutionary movement, and so was left with mere attitudes. In his essay of 1910, he states flatly that as the socialist movement in Europe grows, fewer and fewer intellectuals join it. This law is true of students as well: 'Throughout their entire history . . . the students of Europe have been merely the sensitive barometer of the bourgeois classes.'[8] The nub of his analysis of the relationship between intellectuals and working-class is a sweeping dismissal of the former, which showed the extent of his failure to assimilate *What is to be Done?*[9] He writes, 'If the actual conquest of the apparatus of society depended on the previous coming over of the intelligentsia to the party of the European proletariat, then the prospects of collectivism would be wretched indeed.' Given this general standpoint, it is clear why his brief 'centralism' of 1903 was mechanical and brittle. It was a parody of Leninism—a militarized mimicry of its discipline, without its internal meaning—the transformation of 'workers' and 'intellectuals' into *revolutionaries* by a unified political practice. The only political role Trotsky ever accorded to intellectuals was that of 'substitutionism', in an essay specifically on the Russian intelligentsia.[10] Decembrists, Narodniks and Marxists were indifferently condemned as groups substituting themselves for the social classes they claimed to represent, in what Deutscher calls a 'gloomy survey' of Russian history. Once again, the lack of any theory of differentiated levels or instances of the social structure leads to the notion of a horizontal exchange between 'intellectuals' and 'classes' in which a substitution of one by the other is possible. Thus the only entry of the intellectuals into politics is necessarily a usurpation—it can only be at the expense of the proletariat. What is missing, once again, is the idea of the party as an autonomous structure which recombines and transforms two differential phenomena—the intelligentsia and the working-class. Within this conception, it makes no sense to talk of 'substituting'

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[8] *The Intelligentsia and Socialism.*

[9] Lenin's theory of the revolutionary party was not, of course, completely developed in *What is to be Done?* His mature theory only crystallized after the 1905 Revolution, in the practice of party construction.

[10] See *The Prophet Armed,* pp. 187 ff.

one element for another, since they are not commensurable to be interchangeable. They are *modifiable*—in a new political practice, which is a revolutionary party.

Trotsky's history before 1917 may thus be summed up as follows. He was always a franc-tireur outside the organized ranks of the working-class movement. He showed a unique intuitive insight into the class character of the forces that were gathering for the Russian Revolution. But this was coupled with a profound and consistent failure to understand the nature and role of a revolutionary party—a failure linked to his pre-Marxist conception of theory and organizations. As late as 1915, the belief that the party was an arbitrary epiphenomenon in the class struggle is patent in his writing: 'Between the position of a party and the interests of the social stratum on which it rests, there may be a certain lack of harmony which later may become converted into a profound contradiction. The conduct of a party may change under the influence of the temper of the masses. This is indisputable. All the more reason therefore for us, in our calculations, *to cease relying on less stable and less trustworthy elements such as the slogans and tactics of a party*, and to refer to more stable historical factors: to the social structure of the nation, to the relation of class forces and the tendencies of development.'[11] This incomprehension, of the role of the Leninist party explains his abstention from any participation in the crucial formation of the Bolshevik Party from 1907 onwards. He himself later characterized his attitude in this phase with great honesty and accuracy: 'I never endeavoured to create a grouping on the basis of the ideas of permanent revolution. My inner-party stand was a conciliationist one, and when at certain moments I strove for the formation of groupings, then it was precisely on this basis. *My conciliationism flowed from a sort of social-revolutionary fatalism:* I believed that the logic of the class struggle would compel both factions to pursue the same revolutionary line. The great historical significance of Lenin's policy was still unclear to me at that time, his policy of irreconcilable ideological demarcation, and when necessary, split, for the purpose of welding and tempering the core of the truly revolutionary revolutionary party . . . . In all the most important cases, where I placed myself in contradiction to Lenin tactically and organizationally, right was on his side.'[12]

It is now possible to locate the specific theoretical deviation which is latent in Trotsky's thought. Traditionally, Marxism has been constantly subject to the deformation called e*conomism.* This is the reduction of all other levels of a social formation to the movement of the economy, which becomes an idealist 'essence', of which social groups, political institutions and cultural products are merely 'manifestations'. This deviation, with all its practical political consequences, was widespread

[11] *The Struggle for Power* (my italics). Trotsky's attitude to the Party in these years may be compared with Luxemburg's. Luxemburg was aware of the revisionism of the German Party well before Lenin, but failed to split the SPD and thus delayed the work of constructing a tevolutionary party. The consequences were fatal—the defeat of the Spartakist insurrection of 1918. Both Trotsky and Luxemburg relied on the revolutionary elan of the masses at the expense of consideration of the problem of its mobilization in a revolutionary organization.

[12] *Permanent Revolution,* p. 49.

in the Second International It was characteristic of the Right, which dominated the International. What has been less noticed is that the Left of the International often exhibited an analagous deviation. We may call this, for the sake of convenience, *sociologism.* Here it is not the economy, but *social classes*, which are extracted from the complex historical totality and hypostasized in an idealist fashion as the demiurges of any given political situation. Class struggle becomes the immediate, internal 'truth' of any political event, and mass forces become the exclusive historical agents. Economism naturally leads to passivity and tailism; sociologism, on the contrary tends to lead to voluntarism. Luxemburg represents the extreme logic of this tendency within the Second International, where it takes the form of an explicit exaltation of spontaneity. Trotsky represents a different variant of this current, but the fundamental tenet is parallel. In his writings, mass forces are presented as constantly dominant in society, without any political organizations or institutions intervening as necessary and permanent levels of the social formation. Lenin's Marxism, by contrast, is defined by the notion of a complex totality, in which all the levels—economic, social, political and ideological—are always operational, and there is a permutation of the main locus of contradictions between them. Trotsky's extrapolation of mass forces from this complex tier of levels was the ultimate source of his theoretical mistakes, both before and after the Revolution.

1917–21
Statesman

The eruption of the February Revolution transformed the political relationships within the Russian Social-Democratic movement. The new situation suddenly freed Trotsky from his past. Within a few months, he had abandoned his Menshevik associates and aligned himself on Bolshevik positions. He now emerged as a great revolutionary. This was the heroic phase of his life, when he captured the imagination of the world, as the architect of the October insurrection and the military commander of the Civil War. Not only this: he was the supreme orator of the revolution. In his person, he was both Danton and Carnot —the great people's tribune and the great military leader of the Russian Revolution. As such, Trotsky was exactly the kind of man most observers abroad, whether sympathetic or hostile, imagined a revolutionary to be. He seemed the incarnation of continuity between the French and Russian Revolutions. Lenin, by contrast, was an apparently prosaic man—altogether different from the declamatory heroes of 1789. He represented a new type of revolutionary. The difference between the two men was fundamental, and is visible throughout the period when they worked so closely together. Trotsky never wholly acclimatized himself within the Bolshevik Patty. In July 1917, he was parachuted into the summit of the Bolshevik organization, its Central Committee, without any experience of party life or party practice. He was thus always perceived very differently within its ranks, from without. His international image never coincided with his internal party image; he was always to some extent suspected as late-comer and intruder. It is significant that as late as 1928, in the midst of the inner-party struggle, his colleague and ally Preobrazhensky could speak of

'We Old Bolsheviks' to distinguish his positions from those of Trotsky. He was certainly never quite accepted by the Old Bolsheviks as one of them. This separate role is evident in the Revolution and Civil War itself. Trotsky was the dynamo of the militarized Bolshevik State, when it was on a war footing. He was not a party man, with any responsibility for the maintenance and mobilization of party organization in these years. Indeed, he was criticized by many Bolsheviks for policies within the Army which were actually hostile to the party as such. Thus Trotsky was determined to strengthen the power of professional military officers with a Czarist past in the Red Army, and he fought the imposition of control over them by political commissars appointed by the party. The dispute over this issue—in which Trotsky already clashed with Stalin and Voroshilov—was a major controversy at the Eighth Party Congress in 1919. Lenin supported Trotsky, but resentment in the party against him was evident in the secret instructions passed at the Congress. Mikoyan's cry at the Twelfth Congress was thus an accurate reflection of how he was perceived by the permanent start of the party; 'Trotsky is a man of State, not of the Party !'[13]

The nature of Trotsky's talent as an orator was complementary to his talent as a military commander. Both were exclusive of a specifically party practice. An organizer of a political party has to persuade individuals or groups to accept the policies he advocates and his authority to implement them. This requires great patience, and ability to manoeuvre intelligently within a complex political struggle, in which the actors are equally equipped for discussion and decision. This ability is quite different from that of the mass orator. Trotsky had an extraordinary gift for communication with crowds. But the nature of his appeal to them was necessarily emotional—a great transmission of urgency and militancy. As a public speaker, however, he enjoyed a quite unilateral relationship with these crowds—he harangued them for determinate ends, to mobilize them in the struggle against counter-revolution. His military gift was parallel in character. He was not an organizer of the party—he had no experience of how a party actually worked, and he did not seem to be particularly interested in such questions. He did, however, achieve the feat of creating a Red Army of 5,000,000 men in two years, from virtually nothing, and leading it to victory against the White Armies and their foreign allies. His organizational ability was thus essentially voluntarist in character. He had authority *ab initio* to organize the Army; as People's Commissar for War he had all the prestige of Lenin and the Soviet State behind him. He did not have to *win* this authority in a political arena by persuading his peers to accept him. It was the authority of military command, and its power to enforce strict obedience. The affinity between the war commander and the popular tribune is thus quite explicable. In both cases, Trotsky's role was implicitly voluntarist. As a public speaker, he had to make an emotional appeal to mobilize the masses for precise purposes: as a pillar of the Soviet State he had to give orders to his subordinates for precise purposes. His task in either role was to ensure the means to a previously determined end. This is a different task from that of ensuring that a novel end prevails among various competing

[13] *The Prophet Unarmed,* p. 32.

opinions in a political organization. The voluntarist is in his element haranguing crowds or dispatching troops—but these roles should not be confused with the ability to lead a revolutionary party.

From Military to Economic Problems

By 1921, the Civil War was won. With victory, the Bolshevik Party had to switch its whole orientation from military to economic problems. Reconstruction and reorganization of the Soviet economy was now its main strategic objective. Trotsky's adaptation to the new situation revealed how consistent his whole political practice was in this phase. He simply proposed the imposition of military solutions on economic problems—calling for an intensified War Communism and the introduction of forced labour. This extraordinary episode was not just a parenthesis or aberration in his career. It had profound theoretical and practical sources in his past. His role as People's Commissar for War predisposed him to an economic policy that was conceived as a straightforward military mobilization: he was merely extending his previous practice in advocating it. At the same time his propensity for a 'command' solution undoubtedly reflected his incomprehension of the specific role of the party and his consequent tendency to seek political solution at the level of the *State.* Indeed, his slogan in trade-union debate of 1921 was explicitly 'statification' of the trade-unions. Trotsky also argued for a competent, permanent bureaucracy with some material privileges; for this Stalin was later to call him the 'coryphee of the bureaucrats'.

Moreover, Trotsky did not justify forced labour as a regrettable necessity imposed by the political conjuncture, the temporary product of an emergency. He tried to legitimate it *sub specie aeternitatis*, explaining that in all societies labour was compulsory—only the forms of compulsion varied. He combined this flat advocacy of coercion with an exalted mystique of social dedication, urging work-brigades to sing socialist hymns as they toiled. 'Display untiring energy in your work, as if you were on the march or in battle. A deserter from labour is as contemptible and despicable as a deserter from the battlefield. Severe punishment to both! . . . Begin and complete your work, wherever possible, to the sound of socialist hymns and songs. Your work is not slave labour but high service to the socialist fatherland.'[14]

This contradictory amalgam was united, of course, by the equal voluntarism of both notions: the economy as a coercive command or as mystical service.

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[14] See *The Prophet Armed,* p. 495. This image recalls the Jesuit of Paraguay. Trotsky was later to write that the reason why bourgeois Philistines detested Jesuits so much was that they were the soldiers of the Church, while most priests were merely its shopkeepers. It is, of course, true that there is no reason to make any discrimination between the two. Trotsky, however, seems to have preferred Jesuits to other priests. It is clear that in a revolutionary period, a socialist militant will be nearer a soldier than a shopkeeper in outlook; but should this temporary state of affairs lead any socialist to forget that the military outlook is no less a product of class society than a mercantile outlook?

Trotsky was initially able to win Lenin's support for his plans for the militarization of labour. But after the great debate on the trade-unions in 1921 and the termination of the Polish War, his bid to purge the trade-unions on a wide scale of their elected representatives was sharply repudiated by Lenin. The Central Committee of the Party publicly denounced 'militarized and bureaucratic' forms of work. Trotsky's policies were thus rejected by the Bolsheviks, amidst a general revulsion against him as the ideologue of War Communism. The outcome of the economic debate marked the distance between Lenin's idea of a highly disciplined party and Trotsky's advocacy of a militarily organized state.

1921–29
Oppositionist

The inner-party struggle of the twenties was obviously the central phase of Trotsky's life. A few years saw events that were decisive for world history for decades to come. These decisions were taken by very few people. It is not often that such decisions gain universal significance. What was Trotsky's role in the fateful drama of the twenties?

The struggle for dominance of the Bolshevik Party must to some extent be separated from the political issues which provoked it. For much of the time the conflict in the party focused on the exercise of power as such—within the context, of course, of the ideological disputes of the contending groups. It will be seen, in fact, that an over-ideological reading of the inner-party situation was one of Trotsky's most serious theoretical and political mistakes. It will thus be convenient to divide consideration of the twenties into two levels: that of the political-tactical struggle itself, and that of the ideological and strategic debate over the destiny of the Revolution.

The Political-Tactical Struggle

From 1921 onwards, Trotsky was isolated at the summit of the Bolshevik Party. It is important to emphasize that the struggle against Trotsky was initially a resistance by virtually the whole Old Guard of the Bolsheviks against the possibility of Trotsky succeeding Lenin. This is what explains the unanimity with which all the other leaders in the Politbureau—Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin, Kalinin and Tomsky—opposed him in Lenin's own lifetime. Trotsky seemed to be the outstanding revolutionary leader after Lenin. Yet he was not a historic member of the Party, and he was widely distrusted within it. His military prominence and his role in the trade-union debates seemed to throw a shadow of potential Bonapartism across the political landscape. Lenin himself evinced no special confidence in him. This was the situation which allowed Stalin in 1923, the last year of Lenin's life, to win control of the party machine, and with it of general political power in the USSR.

It is evident that Trotsky did not see what was happening in these years. He thought Zinoviev and Kamenev were more important than

Stalin, and failed to understand the significance of the new role of the General Secretary. This extraordinary lack of lucidity may be contrasted with Lenin's acute awareness, even in his illness, of the drift of events. In December 1922, he drafted his notes on nationalities, denouncing Stalin and Dzerzhinsky with unprecedented violence for their repression in Georgia. Lenin forwarded these notes to Trotsky with a specific instruction to force the issue to a decisive resolution at the CC. Trotsky ignored his request; he believed that Lenin had exaggerated the matter greatly. A month later, Lenin wrote his famous 'will', in which it is quite clear that he understood the significance of Stalin's ascent and foresaw that the party might split between the 'two most talented members' of the CC—Trotsky and Stalin. At the time, Trotsky himself was oblivious of all this. He did not fight for the publication of the will when Lenin died a year later. His reasons for this attitude are not certain. The will, however, was not a document that was very flattering to any of Bolsheviks leaders. Stalin was harshly criticized; Trotsky was treated with little ceremony ('administrative methods'), as was Bukharin ('no understanding of dialectics'). No-one in the Politbureau had a powerful motive for publishing this sombre document, with its virtual premonition of disasters in the future. Lenin, architect and leader of the Bolshevik Party, was thus intimately aware of what was happening within it; he showed a profound grasp of its internal situation a year before he died. Trotsky, who had little experience of party life, and had never reflected on the specific role or nature of the party, was oblivious.

After Lenin's death, Trotsky found himself alone in the Politbureau. Thereafter, he made mistake after mistake. He concentrated his fire on Zinoviev and Kamenev from 1923 to 1925 and by playing on their role in October 1917, helped Stalin to isolate them later. Then he thought that Bukharin was his main enemy, and devoted his energies to combating him. As late as 1927, he was considering an alliance with Stalin against Bukharin. He utterly failed to see that Stalin was determined to evict him from the party, and that the only way of preventing this was a bloc of the Left and Right against the Centre. Bukharin perceived this by 1927, and said to Kamenev: 'There is much more that divides us from Stalin than from each other.'[15] In effect, Stalin was already organizationally master of the party by 1923. Hence much of the inner-party struggle was shadow-boxing. The only thing that could have defeated Stalin was political unity of the other Old Bolsheviks against him. Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin saw this too late. Trotsky, however, was prevented from ever understanding the true situation by the theoretical character of his Marxism. Here, his constant under-estimation of the autonomous power of political institutions, and his tendency to collapse these back into the mass forces which were allegedly their 'social base', was his nemesis. For throughout the inner-party struggle, he was always interpreting the political positions adopted by the various participants as merely the visible signs of occult sociological trends within Soviet society. So Right, Centre and Left in the Party became in Trotsky's writings basically idealist categories, divorced from politics as such—the concrete arena

[15] See *The Prophet Unarmed,* p. 442.

of power and institutions. Thus, in spite of Lenin's warnings about the importance of Stalin and the alarming organizational power he was accumulating, Trotsky persisted in seeing Kamenev and Zinoviev as the main threat to him in the party, because they were the ideologues of the triumvirate, who spoke in the conventional idiom of ideas. This constant correlation—ideas: social forces—with its lack of any intermediary theory of the political level—led to disastrous practical mistakes in the prosecution of Trotsky's own struggle.

A particularly obvious example of this was his publication of the sequence of articles which make up *The New Course* (1923), In these, he explicitly states: 'The different needs of the working-class, of the peasantry, of the State apparatus and of its membership, act upon our party, through whose medium they seek to find a political expression. The difficulties and contradictions inherent in our epoch, the temporary discord in the interests of the different layers of the proletariat, or of the proletariat as a whole and the peasantry, act upon the party through the medium of worker and peasant cells, of the State apparatus, of the student youth. *Even episodic differences in views and nuances of opinion may express the remote pressure of distinct social interests* . . . [16]

Here the obverse side of the notion of 'substitutionism' is evident—the assumption of a possible 'identity' between parties and classes. The use of this couplet necessarily obscured the obvious fact that the relations between the two are never simplifiable to either of these poles. In one sense, a party is always a 'substitute' for a class, in that it does not coincide with it—if it did, there would be no need for a party—and yet it acts in the name of the class. In another sense, it is never a 'substitute' for it, in that it cannot abolish the objective nature of the proletariat and the global relation of class forces, which do not cease to exist even when the proletariat is dispersed and diminished, as after the Civil War, or when the party acts against the immediate interests of the working-class, as it did during the New Economic Policy. The relations between party and class form a spectrum of complex, changeable possibilities which are not negotiable with these bipolar descriptions. Thus it was noticeable that the notion of 'substitutionsm' did not enlighten Trotsky in his conduct of the inner-party struggle, precisely in a phase when the Importance of political apparatuses—the party—had increased very greatly relative to that of mass social forces (without, however, abolishing them). He was the last to see what was happening, despite his polemical construct. Indeed, since its implied opposite—'identity'—was a regulative notion for him, he was led to critical political mistakes whenever he tried to assess the relations between party and class in this phase. The *New Course* itself represents a particularly clear example of this. The credo of sociologism quoted above was accompanied by a ringing call for the proletarianization of the composition of the party, and its rejuvenation by an influx of the young. This reliance of sociological categories, idealistically conceived, had an ironic consequence. The very policy which Trotsky advocated for the renovation of the Party and its debureaucratization was implemented by Stalin with exactly the opposite results. The Lenin Levy of

[16] *The New Course,* p. 27 (my italics).

1924 decisively clinched Stalin's control of the party, by swamping the veteran Bolshevik cadres with a huge mass of politically unformed and manipulable workers. The proletarian composition of the party shot up. The mistake of thinking that social forces are immediately 'transposable' into political organizations was, of course, unthinkable within Lenin's theory of the party. Trotsky never abandoned it, however, in these years. In 1925, he stayed aloof when the troika split apart—viewing the struggle between Stalin and Zinoviev as a vulgar dispute in which no principle was at stake. When Zinoviev and Stalin were hurling political attacks at each other via the respective party organizations of Leningrad and Moscow, he wrote sarcastically to Kamenev; 'What is the social basis of two workers' organizations pouring abuse upon one another?' The abstentionism of this stance, of course, was suicidal. In a sense, Trotsky never fought on the political plane at all—by contrast with, for example, Zinoviev. He was not equipped to do so by his whole theoretical training. His conduct in the inner-party struggle fluctuated between an aggressive truculence (a great *dafke* in the Jewish sense and a profound passivity (the only salvation of Russia was the chance of revolutions abroad).[17] It never attained political-tactical coherence. The result was t hat he continually played into the hands of Stalin. By presenting a threat with, no solid institutional or political foundations by with a great array of public gestures, Trotsky provided precisely what the apparatus and Stalin, as its most outstanding representative, needed in order to turn the party into an authoritarian and bureaucratic machine. One might almost say that if Trotsky had not existed, Stalin would have had to invent him (and in a sense he was invented by Stalin).

The Ideological and Strategic Struggle

So much for the political-tactical struggle inside the Bolshevik Party. It is now necessary to consider to what extent the great ideological disputes—over the strategic options before the Revolution—reflected the same theoretical constellation in Trotsky's thought. It will be seen that the parallelism is, in fact, very close. This is evident in both of the main controversies of these years.

Socialism in One Country versus Permanent Revolution

The dispute over this issue dominated the ideological debates of the twenties. Lenin had established what was undoubtedly a correct position at the time of Brest-Litovsk. He said that the Bolsheviks should always be thinking of varying possibilities, not of false certainties. It was naive to speculate whether revolutions would or would not occur in the West, in general. Bolshevik strategy should not be based on the presumption of an occurrence of a European revolution; but nor should the possibility of one be discarded. After Lenin's death, however, this dialectical position disintegrated into polarized opposites

[17] Trotsky himself frequently spoke of 'revolutionary optimism' in later years. Optimism and pessimism, of course, are emotional attitudes which have little to do with Marxism. Bourgeois Weltanschauung has traditionally weltered in such categories. The adjective 'revolutionary' does not make 'optimism' a more profound category than the adjective 'heroic' ever made 'pessimism'.

within the Party. Stalin effectively wrote off the possibility of international revolutions, and made the construction of socialism in one country the exclusive task—both necessary and possible—of the Bolshevik Party. Trotsky declared that the October Revolution was doomed unless international revolutions came to its aid, and predicted that these revolutions were certain to occur. The falsification of Lenin's position is evident in either case.

It may be argued that Stalin, by discounting the possibility of successful European revolutions, effectively contributed to their eventual defeat—this accusation has often been made against his policies towards Germany and Spain. There was, indeed, an element of the self-fulfilling prediction in socialism in one country. However, given this criticism—which is precisely that Stalin's policies represented a debasement of Lenin's strategy—the superiority of Stalin's perspective over Trotsky's is undeniable. It forms the "whole historico-practical context in which the struggle for power discussed above unfolded. No matter how strong Stalin's position in the apparatus, it would have availed him little if his basic strategic line had been invalidated by the course of political events. It was, on the contrary, confirmed by history. In this lay Stalin's ultimate, unshakeable strength in the twenties.

Trotsky's Conception

What was Trotsky's strategic conception, by contrast? What did he mean by 'Permanent Revolution'? In his brochure of 1928 of that name, he included three quite separate notions in the same formula: the immediate continuity between democratic and socialist stages of the revolution in any given country; the permanent transformation of the socialist revolution itself, once victorious; and the inevitable linkage of the fate of the revolution in any one country with that of the world revolution everywhere. The first was to imply a generalization of his view of the October Revolution, discussed above, now proclaimed a law in all colonial countries. The second was banal and uncontroversial—no-one was going to deny that the Soviet State would ceaselessly undergo change. The critical notion was the third one: the position that the survival of the Soviet revolution depended on the victory of revolutions abroad. Trotsky's arguments for this assertion, the crux on which the whole of his political position rested, are astonishingly weak. He provides, in effect, only two reasons why socialism in one country was not practicable. Both are vague in the extreme. They seem to be that Russia's insertion into the world economy would render her hopelessly vulnerable to capitalist economic blockade and subversion. 'The harsh curbings of the world market' are invoked, without any account of what precise impact they would have on the nascent Soviet State.[18] Secondly, Trotsky appears to argue that the

[18] In an extraordinary passage, Trotsky actually says that if socialism were possible in Russia, world revolution would be unnecessary, because Russia was so large that the successful construction of socialism in the USSR would be equivalent to international victory for the proletariat everywhere. 'The example of a backward country, which in the course of several five-year plans was able to construct a mighty socialist society with its own forces, would mean a death-blow to world capitalism, and would reduce to a minimum, if not to zero, the costs of the world proletarian revolution.'

USSR was militarily indefensible, and would collapse to external invasion unless European revolutions came to its help. It is perfectly-evident that neither of these arguments were justified at the time, and that both were indeed disconfirmed by actual events. Soviet foreign trade was a motor of economic development, not of regression and capitulation—a factor of progress in the rapid accumulation of the twenties and the thirties. Nor did the world bourgeoisie pounce upon the Soviet Union in unison, sending supra-national armies marching on Moscow. On the contrary, inter-capitalist contradictions were such that they delayed imperialist attack on the USSR for 20 years after the Civil War. When Germany eventually invaded Russia, the Soviet State, industrialized and armed under Stalin and assisted by bourgeois allies, was able to throw the aggressors back triumphantly.[19] There was thus no substance in Trotsky's thesis that socialism in one country was doomed to annihilation.

Theoretical Error

What is important to isolate here is the basic theoretical error which underlay the whole notion of Permanent Revolution. Trotsky, once again, proceeded from a schema of (hypostasized) mass social forces —bourgeoisie versus proletariat in alliance with the poor peasantry—in one country, to a universalization of this equation via its direct transposition on to a world scale, where the 'international' bourgeoisie confronted the 'international' proletariat. The simple formula 'Permanent Revolution' effected this enormous jump. All it omitted was the *political* institution of the *nation*—that is to say, the whole formal structure of international relations and the system they constitute. A 'mere' political institution—bourgeois at that—evaporated like so much phosphorescence before a monumental class confrontation dictated inexorably by sociological laws. The refusal to respect the autonomy of the political level, which had previously produced an idealism of class action innocent of any party organization, now produced a global Gleichschaltung—a planetary social structure, soaring above its articulations in any concrete international system. The intermediary level—party or nation—is in both cases simply omitted.

This idealism has nothing to do with Marxism. The notion of 'Permanent Revolution' had no authentic content. It was an ideological concept designed to unify disparate problems within a single compass, at

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This is, of course, precisely the view implicitly advocated by Khruschev in the early sixties. Its use here shows how weak Trotsky's whole argument was in *Permanent Revolution.* Trotsky's argument against Socialism in One Country was not that an authentic socialism was impossible in a society with such a low level of productive forces and cultural accumulation, but that the Soviet State could not survive external attack, whether economic or military. The quality of Soviet socialism was not the issue for him here. The quotation above shows that in debate Trotsky accepted a summary equation between socialism and Soviet economic development.

[19] Trotsky always argued that since the contradiction between capitalism and socialism was more fundamental than that between the bourgeois countries, they were bound to unite in an attack on the Soviet Union. This is a classic instance of the central confusion between the *determinant* contradiction in the long-run, and the *dominant* contradiction in any given conjuncture.

the cost of an accurate account of any of them. The expectation that successful revolutions were imminent in Europe was the voluntarist consequence of this monism. Trotsky failed to understand the fundamental differences between Russian and Western Europe an social structures. For him, capitalism was one and indivisible, and the agenda of revolution was one and indivisible, either side of the Vistula. This formal internationalism (reminiscent of that of Luxemburg) in fact abolished the concrete international differences between the various European countries.[20] Stalin's instinctive mistrust of the Western European proletariat, and his reliance on Russian particularism, showed a more accurate—if narrow and uncritical—awareness of the segmented nature of Europe in the twenties. Events vindicated his belief in the enduring importance of the nation, as the unit demarcating one social structure from another.[21] Political agendas were not interchangeable across geographical frontiers in the Europe of Versailles. History kept different times in Paris, Rome, London or Moscow.

Collectivization and Industrialization

The second, and subordinate, issue which dominated the ideological debates of the twenties was over economic policy in Russia itself. Here the crux of the dispute concerned agrarian policy. Lenin had laid down a general strategic line for the rural sector in the Soviet Union. He regarded collectivization as an imperative long-run policy, which only made sense, however, if it was accompanied by the production of advanced agricultural machinery and a cultural revolution among the peasantry. He thought that economic competition between the collective and private sectors was necessary, not only to avoid antagonizing the peasantry but also to ensure that collective farming became efficient. He advocated experimentation with different forms of collective agriculture. These pilot projects were, of course, the absolute antithesis of Stalinist collectivization—in which deadlines were issued for the collectivization of given provinces and 'socialist emulation' was unleashed among the party organizations of the different areas to reach their targets before their neighbours. Once again, however, with Lenin's death his dialectical strategy disintegrated into polarized opposites. Bukharin advocated an ultra-right policy of private peasant enrichment at the expense of the towns: 'We shall move forward by tiny, tiny steps pulling behind us our large peasant cart.' Preobrazhen-

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[20] Gramsci commented perceptively on Trotsky's internationalism some years later: 'It should be considered whether Trotsky's famous theory of Permanent Revolution may not be the political reflection of the theory of the war of manoeuvre—in the last analysis the reflection of the general economic-cultural and social conditions in a country where the structures of national life are embryonic and loose, and cannot become "trench or fortress". In that case one might say that Trotsky, who is apparently "western" was, in fact, a cosmopolitan, that is superficially national and superficially western or European—whereas Lenin was profoundly national and profoundly European . . .' *Note Sul Machivelli.* p. 67.

[21] Lucio Magri discusses this in 'Valori e Limiti delle Esperienze Frontiste', *Critica Marxista* May-June 1965. It should be said that Stalin's later conception of the Cold War as simply the "class struggle on an international level" effectively equating states with classes, represented on opposite but identical error to Trotsky's in the twenties.

sky urged the exploitation of the peasantry (in the technical economic sense) to accumulate a surplus for rapid industrialization.

These violently contradictory formulas concealed a necessary complementarity, which Lenin's policy had been precisely designed to safeguard. For the poorer the peasantry was, the less surplus it had over and beyond what it consumed itself, and the less it was 'exploitable' for industrialization, Bukharin's conciliation of the peasantry and Preobrazhensky's counterposition of it to the proletariat were equally distortions of Lenin's policy, which was to collectivize but not to crush the peasantry, not to wage war on them. Both protagonists showed a vulgar Marxism that was endemic in much of the Bolshevik Old Guard. Preobrazhensky insisted that primitive socialist accumulation was an iron, inevitable 'law' of Soviet society. He attacked Bukharin for Lukacsism when Bukharin claimed that economic policy in the USSR was subject to political decision-making. Bukharin, for his part, wrote in his *Introduction to Historical Materialism* at this time, that Marxism was comparable to a natural science, which could potentially predict future events with precision of physics. The huge distance between formulations of this nature and Lenin's Marxism is obvious. (Lenin, of course, was the only leading Bolshevik to have studied, from the standpoint of *Capital*, Hegel, Feuerbach and the young Marx in Switzerland during the war.)

Given this disintegration of Leninism, there is, however, no doubt that —as with the controversy over Socialism in One Country—one position was superior to the other. Here, of course, it was Preobrazhensky and Trotsky who were correct in their emphasis on the need to check social differentiation in the country and bring the rural surplus under Soviet control. The imperatives of rapid industrialization were much more clearly seen, much earlier, by Trotsky and Preobrazhensky than by anyone else in the Party. This was their great historical merit in these years. Trotsky's call for planned industrialization and primitive socialist accumulation dated from the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923. The bold foresight of his position contrasts with Bukharin's accommodation to retrograde economic tendencies and Stalin's hesitations in these years. The subsequent history of the Soviet Union confirmed the comparative justice of the policies he was advocating then. What is the relation of his merits in the economic debate to his errors in the debate over Socialism in One Country. Is it just contingent? The answer seems to be that whereas the debate over Socialism in One Country concerned the international *political* articulations of the revolution, the economic debate concerned the *administrative* options of the Soviet *State.* Here Trotsky showed all his gifts as an administrator, which Lenin had noted, and his special sensitivity to the State, which has been discussed previously. His lucidity in the economic debate was thus consonant with the whole cast of his Marxism. He was supremely aware of the economic vocation of the Soviet State, at a time when the other Bolsheviks were merely pre-occupied with the day-to-day problems of the New Economic Policy. However, an economic strategy for the USSR required more than an administrative decision by the Soviet State. Its implementation required a correct *political* policy by the party

towards the different social classes—what Mao was later allusively to call the 'handling of contradictions among the people'.

Here Trotsky had no coherent perspective to provide. His lack of grasp of party problems made this virtually inevitable. The result was that the actual implementation of his policies was enacted—and denatured—by Stalin. After defeating Trotsky and the Left, Stalin turned against the Right and put the Opposition's economic policy into practice. But he did so with a crudity and violence that precipitated a permanent agrarian crisis, despite all the tremendous gains of the Five Year Plans. Trotsky had never concretely envisaged the problem of the political implementation of his economic policies. Stalin solved the problem with a concrete political answer—the catastrophe of forced collectivization. Trotsky, of course, recoiled from the collectivization campaigns with horror. He denounced Stalin for carrying out his policies in a manner totally contrary to his conception of them. Yet the resemblance was undeniable. This relationship was repeated on various occasions. The Lenin Levy, already discussed, was one. Later, as Deutscher comments, Stalin seems to have taken Trotsky's constant warnings of the danger of a bourgeois restoration based on the peasantry or a bureaucratic-military coup quite seriously. His way of fighting these dangers was campaigns of assassination. It seemed at these moments as if Stalin stood to Trotsky as Smerdyakov stood to Ivan Karamazov. Not just in the sense that he denatured the original inspiration when putting it into practice—but in the sense that the inspiration itself had original flaws which made this possible. We have seen what these flaws were. The fact is that in the twenties, Leninism disappeared with Lenin. Thereafter the Bolshevik Party was constantly driven from one extreme to another, by a logic of events which no leader or group had the theoretical understanding to master. Given the disintegration of Lenin's dialectical strategy, Left and Right policies bifurcated from it and yet were constantly recombined by the necessities of history itself. Thus Socialism in One Country was eventually carried out with the economic programme of the Left Opposition. But because this was only a combination of Left and Right policies, not a dialectical unity of strategy, the result was the crude, ad hoc pragmatism of Stalin and the innumerable, costly zig-zags of his domestic and foreign policy. The history of the Comintern was particularly rife with these violent shifts, in which new blunders were often merely added to old blunders in the effort to overcome them. The party got through these years with Stalin's elementary political pragmatism, his ability to adapt and swerve when circumstances changed—or afterwards. The fact that this pragmatism triumphed only emphasizes how steep was the drop in Bolshevik Marxism once Lenin was gone.

The tragedy of this decline was that of its historical consequences. After the Russian revolution, there was a situation in which the theoretical understanding of a small group of leaders might have meant an immeasurable difference for the whole future of the human race. Now, four decades later, we can partly perceive the fruits of the development that took place then, but the ultimate consequences are still to be seen.

1927–40
Myth

Trotsky had started his political life as a *franc-tireur*, outside the organized detachments of the revolutionary movement. During the Revolution, he emerged as the great people's tribune and military organizer. In the twenties, he was the unsuccessful leader of the Opposition in Russia. After his defeat and exile, he became a myth. The last period of his life was dominated by his symbolic relationship to the great drama of the previous decade, which had become for him a tragic fate. His activities became most futile. He himself was completely ineffective—the leader of an imaginary political movement, helpless while his relatives were exterminated by Stalin, and interned wherever he went. His main objective role in these pitiful years was to provide the fictive negative centre needed by Stalin in Russia. When no opposition any longer existed inside the Bolshevik Party, after Stalin's purges, Trotsky kept on publishing his Bulletin of the Opposition. He was the main accused at the Moscow trials. Stalin installed his iron dictatorship by mobilizing the party apparatus against the 'Trotskyite' threat. The myth of his name was such that the bourgeoisies of Western Europe were constantly afraid of it. In August 1939, the French ambassador Coulondre said to Hitler that in the event of a European way, Trotsky might be the ultimate victor. Hitler replied that this was a reason why France and Britain should not declare war on him.

This phase of Trotsky's life may be discussed at two levels. His efforts to forge political organizations—a Fourth International—were destined to failure. His unfamiliarity with the socio-political structures of the West—already evident in the debate on Permanent Revolution—led him to believe that the Russian experience of the first decade of the 20th century could be duplicated in Western Europe and the USA in the thirties. This error was linked, of course, to his parallel incomprehension of the nature of a revolutionary party. In his old age, Trotsky now believed that his great mistake had been to under-estimate the importance of the party, which Lenin had seen. But he had not learnt from Lenin. Once again, as in his early youth, his attempt to duplicate Lenin's party construction merely led to a caricature of it. It was an external imitation of its organizational forms, without any understanding of its intrinsic nature. Uncertain of the character of the new societies in which he found himself, and unaware of the necessary relationship between party and society as Lenin theorized it, Trotsky's organizational ventures lapsed into a futile voluntarism. By a supreme irony, he often found himself at the end of his life in the midst of precisely those salon intellectuals—the antithesis of the Leninist revolutionary—whom he had always detested and despised. For many of them were political recruits to his cause, especially in the United States—the Burnhams, Schachtmans and others. It was pathetic of course, that Trotsky should have entered into serious argument with creatures such as Burnham. His very association with them was graphic evidence of how lost and disoriented he was in the unfamiliar context of the West.

Trotsky's writings in exile are, of course, of much greater importance

than these ill-starred ventures. They do not add substantially to the theoretical constellation already described. But they confirm Trotsky's stature as a classical revolutionary thinker, stranded in a an impossible historical impasse. His characteristic, if erratic, intuition for mass social forces is what gives his later writings their merit. The *History of the Russian Revolution* is, as has often been pointed out, above all a brilliant study in mass psychology and its complementary opposite, individual portraiture. It is not an account of the role of the Bolshevik Party in the October Revolution so much as an epic of the crowds who were led to victory by it. Trotsky's sociologism here finds its most authentic, and powerful expression. The idealism that it necessarily involved produces a view of the revolution which explicitly rejects political or economic variables as of permanent importance. The *psychology* of the *class,* perfect combination of the constant couplet—social forces and ideas, becomes the determinant instance of the revolution: 'In a society that is seized by revolution classes are in conflict.

It is perfectly clear, however, that the changes introduced between the beginning and the end of a revolution in the economic bases of society and its social substratum of classes, are not sufficient to explain the course of the revolution itself, which can overthrow in a short interval age-old institutions, create new ones, and again overthrow them. *The dynamic of revolutionary events is directly determined by swift, intense and passionate changes in the psychology of classes* which have already formed themselves before the revolution.'[22]

Trotsky's essays on German Fascism are a pathology of the class nature of the dispossessed petty-bourgeoisie and its paranoias. These essays, with their tremendous prescience, stand out as the only Marxist writings of these years to predict the catastrophic consequences of Nazism and the folly of the political policies of the Third Period of the Comintern towards it. Trotsky's subsequent work on the Soviet Union itself was more serious than the demagogic title under which it was published indicated.[23] Here his life-long sociologism was an asset.

In practical political struggle, before and after the Revolution, his under-estimation of the specific efficacy of political institutions led him into error after error. But when he eventually tried to confront the problem of the nature of Soviet society under Stalin, it saved him from the pitfall of judging Russia by the standards of what later became 'Kremlinology'. When many of his followers were manufacturing new 'ruling classes' and 'capitalist restorations' in the Soviet Union at will, Trotsky in his analysis of the Soviet state and party apparatus emphasized, on the contrary, that it was not a social class.

Such was Trotsky's Marxism. It forms a consistent and characteristic

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[22] *History of the Russian Revolution,* p. xvii (*my italics*).
[23] *The Revolution Betrayed.*

unity, from his early youth to his old age. Trotsky should be studied today, along with Plekhanov, Kautsky, Luxemburg, Bukharin and Stalin, because the history of Marxism has never been reconstituted in the West. Only when it is, will the stature of Lenin, the one great Marxist of that epoch, be available