



LEON TROTSKY AS MAN AND AS THEORETICIAN

Leon Trotsky

LEON TROTSKY at no time let subjectivism enter into an analysis of a situation, whether he was a creator of that situation or its victim. Because of the high tragedy of Trotsky's murder at the hands of an NKVD assassin who drove a pick-axe into the skull of the "Man of October" — so called because the day of his birth coincided with the date of the successful Bolshevik Revolution, October 25 — the last years of his life seem to have provided a field day for psychological approaches even on the part of political analysts.¹ The reason the present study is of Trotsky As Man and As Theoretician is not to add to the myriad writings about him which claim "subjectivism." By relating his behavior during the crucial period of the Moscow Trials, when all the "General Staff" of the Revolution was killed off by Stalin, and Trotsky himself was accused of the most heinous crimes, I hope, instead, to clear the air of such trite characterizations as "great egotist," "dictatorial and exacting," "arrogant and conceited." The inadequacies of his theories, unrooted as they are in philosophy, are far too deep to sink into such subjectivism.

In these Gulag Archipelago publicity days it may seem unnecessary to talk of such truisms as Stalin's monolithism, the nightmarish terror of Lubyanka and torture. But the Gulag Archipelago is both 37 years beyond the period which I'm describing, and it, too, is neither the whole truth nor objective history. It is necessary, instead, to return to the year 1937, when a lonely exile of the heroic mold of the former Commissar of War is suddenly confronted with the results of the whole decade of Stalin's victory over Trotsky; when Russia uses its state power, its Army, its brutality, its total disregard for history to fabricate the greatest frame-up in all of history; and when it is only through the sympathy of President Cardenas of Mexico that the Mexican press does hold open two columns of space for a few hours of time for Trotsky to answer the charges that it took the Stalinist bureaucracy a decade to fabricate.

Trotsky didn't know either what the accusation would be, or the year he was alleged to have done this or that. Moreover, the Trials had come at a time of the greatest personal grief in the Trotsky family, for the long arm of the GPU had

¹Isaac Deutscher's massive three-volume biography of Trotsky notwithstanding, there is yet to appear an objective biography worthy of the man and his times. This is no place to review *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed*, and *The Prophet Outcast*, but two matters cannot be left unsaid. One concerns Deutscher's many adjectives in praise of Trotsky, but he ends with a Stalinist apology: "By a feat of history's irony, Stalinism itself malgré lui broke out of its national shell" (Vol. III, p. 516). The second and truly damning point is that the last volume is devoted to the worst and pettiest type of gossip, with hardly a whiff of the life Trotsky lived: Trotsky the founder of the Fourth International, devoting his life to the Trotskyist parties at the expense of all else, is submerged by Trotsky the faithful lover of Natalia.

reached out to kill the only living son of Trotsky, Leon Sedov. It was a predetermined, insidiously planned feat of a master intriguer, calculated to give Trotsky the blow that Stalin hoped would render him incapable of answering the accusations against himself. The lapse between the two events was but two short weeks.

The death of Leon Sedov did indeed inflict the deepest wound, and in the most vulnerable spot. Lev Davidovich and Natalia Ivanovna locked themselves in their room and would see no one. For a whole week they did not come out of their room, and only one person was permitted in — the one who brought them the mail, and food, of which they partook little.

Those were dismal days for the whole household. We did not see either L.D. or Natalia. We did not know how they fared, and feared the consequences of the tragedy upon them. We moved typewriters, the telephone, and even doorbells to the guard house, out of sound of their room. Their part of the house became deathly quiet. There was an oppressive air, as if the whole mountain chain of Mexico were pressing down upon this house.

The blow was the harder not only because Leon Sedov had been their only remaining living child, but also and especially because he had been Trotsky's closest literary and political collaborator. When Trotsky was interned in Norway, gagged, unable to answer the monstrous charges levelled against him in the First Moscow Trials (August 1936), Sedov had penned *Le Livre Rouge*, which, by brilliantly exposing the Moscow falsifiers, dealt an irreparable blow to the prestige of the GPU.

IN THE DARK DAYS after the tragic news had reached us, when L.D. and Natalia Ivanovna were closeted in their room, Trotsky wrote the story of their son's brief life. It was the first time since pre-revolutionary days that Trotsky had written by hand.

On the eighth day, Leon Trotsky emerged from his room. I was petrified at the sight of him. The neat, meticulous Leon Trotsky had not shaved for a whole week. His face was deeply lined. His eyes were swollen from too much crying. Without uttering a word, he handed me the handwritten manuscript, *Leon Sedov, Son, Friend, Fighter*, which contained some of Trotsky's most poignant writing.

One passage read: "I told Natalia of the death of our son — in the same month of February in which, 32 years ago, she brought to me in jail the news of his birth. Thus ended for us the day of February 16, the blackest day in our personal lives . . . Together with our boy has died everything that still remained young within us . . ."

The very next morning, the morning papers carried the announcement of the Third Moscow Trials (March 1938).

Trotsky labored late into the night. One day he was up at 7 a.m., and wrote until midnight. The next day he arose at 8 a.m. and worked straight through to 3 a.m. the following morning. The last day of that week, he did not go to sleep until 5 in the morning. He drove himself harder than any of his staff.

Leon Trotsky wrote an average of 2,000 words a day. He gave statements to the NANA, the UP, the AP, Havas Agency, France, the *London Daily Express*, and to the Mexican newspapers. His declarations were also issued in the Russian and German languages.

The material was dictated in Russian. While I transcribed the dictation, the other secretaries checked every date, name, and place mentioned at the Moscow Trials. Trotsky demanded meticulous, objective research work, for the accusers had to be turned into the accused.

So unused to subjectivism was this revolutionary that, at the very moment of the Moscow Trials, he was deeply incensed when the papers printed "rumors" that Stalin had at no time been a revolutionist but had always been an agent of the Tsar and was now merely wreaking vengeance.

When I brought L.D. the newspapers that carried this explanation of the blood purge, he exclaimed, "But Stalin was a revolutionist!"

"Wait a moment," he called to me as I was leaving the room, "We'll add a postscript to today's article."

He dictated: "The news has been widely spread through the press to the effect that Stalin supposedly was an agent-provocateur during Tsarist days, and that he is now avenging himself upon his old enemies. I place no trust whatsoever in this gossip. From his youth Stalin was a revolutionist. All the facts about his life bear witness to this. To reconstruct his biography *ex post facto* means to ape the present bureaucracy."

No, Trotsky was not guilty of any subjectivism. This does not mean he did not suffer from theoretical deficiencies, but these stemmed not from any subjectivism, a failure to be "dispassionate." Rather, the analysis of the objective situation; including objectively grounded reason of the proletarian forces of revolution, were sans philosophic roots, and thereby lacked a unifying objective-subjective vision. Since all of Marx's revolutionary theories flowed dialectically from his philosophy of liberation, and since the first appearance of Revisionism in Marxian theory (Bernstein) by no accident arose with the demand to have done with "Hegel's dialectic scaffolding" and to return to "facts" — Bernstein's demands — revolutionary Marxists felt the strong need to reassert their "allegiance" to dialectics and rejection of "Kantianism." Insofar as not being guilty of any departure from the class struggle, or being guilty of a concept of the dependence on "men of good will" to resolve class contradictions, this certainly held true of Trotsky the revolutionary. Unfortunately, this did not lead to deep digging into the philosophic origins of Marxism in the Hegelian dialectic. It is here, and not in subjectivism, where dualism emerged in Trotsky's theory at its highest point of development—his most original theory, the Permanent Revolution.

I. The Permanent Revolution and "Conciliationism"

"It will always remain a matter for astonishment how the Kantian philosophy knew that relation of thought to sensuous existence, where it halted for a merely relative relation of bare appearance and fully acknowledged and asserted a higher unity of the two in the Idea . . . but stopped dead . . . so that it affirmed as true what it pronounced to be finite knowledge, and declared to be superfluous and improper figments of thought that which it recognized as truth, and of which it established the definite notion."

Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Vol. II, p. 226

SURELY no more brilliant prognostication has ever been made of an historic event. When no Marxist, let alone other theoreticians, projected for Tsarist Russia anything but a "bourgeois democratic revolution," Trotsky — at the time he was a young man of 26, and already the head of the St. Petersburg Soviet of 1905 — elaborated a theory which stated that the revolution in Russia would continue "in permanence," that is, go over from the bourgeois to the proletarian or

socialist stage. Here are the main theses as Trotsky wrote them:

"In a country economically more backward the proletariat may come to power sooner than in a country capitalistically advanced . . . Marxism is above all a method of analysis — not an analysis of texts, but an analysis of social relations . . ."

"We have shown above that the objective premises of socialist revolution have already been created by the economic development of the advanced capitalist countries . . ."

"It is the purpose of every Socialist party to revolutionize the minds of the working class in the same way as development of capitalism has revolutionized social relations . . . The colossal influence of the Russian revolution manifests itself in killing party routines, in destroying Socialist conservatism, in making a clean contest of proletarian forces against capitalist reaction a question of the day . . ."²

Despite the sweeping prediction made with Parvus³ in 1904 and elaborated into the specifically Trotskyist theory, 1905-6, the theory underwent no "suffering, seriousness, patience, labor of the negative,"⁴ that is to say, was not fleshed out either as to the actually developing forces for revolution or deepening of theory to meet the new reality. It was still-born throughout the period 1906-1917, as well as after Lenin's death when Trotsky began claiming it was "proved." It remained like a bolt out of the blue, not only when it was written, not only in the period between the 1905 and 1917 Revolutions, but also in the period of actual workers' power.

Above all — and that is the most telling and authentic manifestation of its failure to undergo objective-subjective dialectical development, that is, meet the challenge of new times and new problems — the theory of permanent revolution was never used as foundation for the establishment of an independent political tendency, grouping or party. That was true when Trotsky was a Menshevik, when he considered himself "above" all "factions," and tried to "unify" all tendencies, when he became a Bolshevik in 1917, and even when he finally did call for the creation of a new Fourth International against the Stalinized Third International. When he lost out to Stalin the struggle for the mantle of Lenin, and wrote *My Life* on the island of Prinkipo, he said:

"Finally, I never endeavored to create a grouping on the basis of the theory of the permanent revolution. My inner-party stand was a conciliatory one and when in certain moments I strove for groupings, then it was precisely on this basis. My conciliationism was derived from a certain Social Revolutionary fatalism. I believed that the logic of the class struggle would compel both factions to pursue the same revolutionary line . . ."⁵

He quoted and accepted Lenin's characterization: "Conciliationism was represented most consistently by Trotsky, who, almost alone, endeavored to lay a theoretical foundation for this current."⁶

²See Leon Trotsky's *Our Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1918). Also see *The Permanent Revolution* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1931) and "Historic References on the Theory of Permanent Revolution," which is Appendix Three to Vol. II of *The History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937).

³For a biography on the life of Parvus as well as his role in the elaboration of the theory of permanent revolution, see *The Merchant of Revolution* by Z. A. B. Zeman and W. B. Scharlau (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). Also see Deutscher's *The Prophet Armed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 104, ff.

⁴G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J. B. Baillie (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 81.

⁵Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 20.

⁶V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. IV (New York: International Publishers, 1943), p. 93.

Was the dualism then only between the decisive, "correct" theory and "derivative," "organizational" questions? Didn't it rather characterize the theory of revolution? Lenin's remarks on conciliationism were limited to the organizational question, were written before World War I, while the pivotal, objective, shocking, all-determining question became philosophic: why did the Second International collapse at the very moment when the imperialist war broke out? The simultaneity of the two events could not be answered only by pointing to the all-too-obvious betrayal of established Socialism. They demanded a re-examination of the very mode of thought which led those who did not betray not to have anticipated such a development, much less prepare in a totally new way now (1914) "to meet destiny," that is, to assure the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war.

Or so Lenin, who felt a compulsion to return to the origins of Marxism in the Hegelian dialectic, thought. As not only the **Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic**⁷ but all that he wrote and did between 1914-1924 showed, Lenin had singled out two dialectical principles — "transformation into opposite," and "Cognition not only reflects the world but creates it" — to theoretically prepare himself for revolution as he worked out a new relationship of the movement from theory to the movement from practice, the experiences of the masses. This is not the place to deal with what I consider the Great Divide in Marxism⁸ — Lenin's break not only with the Second International but with his own philosophic past and philosophic preparation for both the Russian Revolution and the world revolution, to enlist "all the toilers to a man in the government of the state" since "socialism cannot be introduced by a minority, a party."⁹

HERE what is of concern are the consequences of Trotsky's failure to do any re-examination, or application for that matter, of his theory of permanent revolution. This was so in 1914-17, and 1917-24. In 1919 (and again in 1923) when his **Collected Works** began being published in Russia, and 1905, which included of course the theory of permanent revolution, was reproduced, the volume also included his wild 1909 attack on Bolshevism: "While the anti-revolutionary aspects of Menshevism are already expressed in full force today, the anti-revolutionary features of Bolshevism threaten to be of great danger only in the event of revolutionary victory." This was footnoted as follows: "As is known, this didn't take place for Bolshevism, which under the leadership of Lenin (though not without internal struggle) accomplished ideological re-armament in this most important question in Spring of 1917, that is, before the seizure of power."¹⁰

It is true that except for Lenin, the Bolsheviks were found wanting on the question of putting the struggle for proletarian power on the order of the day in October, that Lenin had to "re-arm" the Party and did so from the moment he returned to Russia in April, 1917. It is not true that Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was "proven correct" or that the rearming was "belated" because Lenin was not armed with the theory of permanent revolution. What Lenin was "armed" with, and Trotsky was not, was having faced the reality of 1914 with a totally new concept of Hegelian dialectics as self-developing "Subject." Naturally Lenin at once "translated" Subject as the masses — proletarian and peasant.

⁷It was the first to translate this into English and it appears as Appendix B to **Marxism and Freedom**, first edition (New York: Bookman, 1958). In 1961 it finally appeared in "official" translation as "Conspectus of Hegel's Book *The Science of Logic*" in Lenin's **Collected Works**, Vol. 38, pp. 85-238.

⁸Elsewhere I have developed this fully. See Ch. 3, "The Shock of Recognition and the Philosophic Ambivalence of Lenin," in **Philosophy and Revolution** (New York: Dell, 1973) pp. 95-120.

⁹V. I. Lenin, **Selected Works**, Vol. VIII, p. 320.

¹⁰Leon Trotsky, **Collected Works**, Vol. I, "War and Revolution," second Russian edition, Moscow, 1923.

Where Lenin called for "transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war," Trotsky called for "a struggle for peace," "peace without annexations." Where Lenin called for the approval by name of Liebknecht who alone voted against granting war credits to the Kaiser, Trotsky led the "internationalists" at Zimmerwald to reject that as "a personification of tactical evaluations, conformable to German conditions alone" as "inappropriate in the given documents." And where to Lenin "self-development of the Idea" imparted a new urgency to the "principle" of self-determination of nations by the "dialectic of history" which makes it possible for small nations to become "the bacilli" for proletarian revolution, Trotsky concentrated his fire on calling for an "end to circle exclusiveness," "factional insulation."

Now, even if we were willing to "skip over" the differing theories as to how to fight against the imperialist war as not necessarily related to any preconceived theories of revolution, and held that what counts is 1917 and 1917 alone, how does that "prove" Trotsky's conclusion that the November Revolution "liquidated" all differences between him and Lenin?

Much later he was to claim "correctness" for his theory, not only as it concerned Russia, 1917, but China, 1927: "The conception of the permanent revolution was confirmed once more, this time not in the form of a victory, but of a catastrophe."¹¹ The defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution by Chiang Kai-shek's counter-revolution was related to Stalin's mistakes vs. Trotsky's "correct" estimation of the peasantry as incapable of "an independent role and even less a leading one." This integrality of the lowly role of the peasantry in his concept of the theory of the permanent revolution was so all-pervasive that as late as 1937 Trotsky continued laughing at Mao's claim of having established peasant Soviets.

Up to the very end (1940) he reiterated: "I repeatedly returned to the development and the grounding theory of the permanent revolution . . . the peasantry is utterly incapable of an independent political role."¹² We cannot but conclude that it is not only a question that Trotsky's words speak louder than any of Stalin's allegations about Trotsky's "underestimation of the peasantry," but, above all, that a theory so far removed from the realities of the age of imperialism and state-capitalism had to collapse of its own hollowness.¹³

Dialectics takes its own toll of theory and theoreticians: the dualism in the theory of permanent revolution resides not alone in the artificially impenetrable division between proletariat and peasantry, nor between theory and organizational "conciliationism," but in uniting at one moment what the previous moment had been declared impossible of unification. At the same time, the lack of a dialectical unifying force is best seen within the theory, precisely on the level which gave it the greatest authority — world revolution vs. nationalism. I'm not here referring to the struggle against Stalin's concept of "socialism in one country," but to the National Question within the context of the U.S.S.R.-to-be-created as outpost of world revolution which totally preoccupied Lenin on his deathbed.

Clearly, by now "conciliationism" was not the issue. Quite the contrary, Lenin had called Trotsky "the best Bolshevik," and Trotsky himself, now that he

¹¹Leon Trotsky's Preface to the original 1938 edition of Harold Isaacs' **The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution**. Mr. Isaacs, who eliminated this from subsequent editions, also took liberties with later editions of his own work.

¹²Leon Trotsky, **Stalin**, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1941), p. 425. For that matter, directly in **The History of the Russian Revolution** and directly after Trotsky himself shows that the Land Committees were being transformed "from chambers of conciliation into weapons of agrarian revolution," he still repeats "This fact that the peasantry as a whole found it possible once more — for the last time in their history — to act as a revolutionary factor testifies at once to the weakness of the capitalist relations in the country and to their strength," Vol. I, p. 407.

¹³See the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection at the Wayne State University Library of Labor History and Urban Affairs, Detroit, Michigan, which has all my documents available on microfilm.

accepted the 1903 concept of the vanguard party, did so without any of the modifications Lenin had introduced through the two decades 1903-23.¹⁴ It had become a veritable fetish. Moreover, Lenin had fully entrusted him to conduct the fight against Stalin who acted the Great Russian chauvinist against the Georgians. Lenin was too ill to appear at the Congress and Trotsky was asked to act out for him, as Lenin put it: "I am declaring war against Russian chauvinism . . . It is said we need a single apparatus. From where comes such assertions? Is it not from the same Russian apparatus . . . borrowed from Tsarism and only barely anointed with a Soviet chrism?"¹⁵

To Lenin, the National Question was inseparable from internationalism, from proletarian internationalism, and what he was writhing in agony about was that now that the Communists were in power, they were acting as imperialists: "scratch a Communist and you'll find a Great Russian chauvinist." This bomb he was going to release against Stalin, and indeed it formed the very ground for which, in his Will, he was to ask for "the removal of Stalin," once again ended in "conciliationism," that which Lenin feared and warned against most — "a rotten compromise." Here is Trotsky's explanation: "I do agree with Lenin in substance. I want a radical change in the policy on the national question, a discontinuance of persecutions of the Georgian opponents of Stalin . . . The last thing I want is to start a fight at the congress for any changes in organization. I am for preserving the status quo . . . I am against removing Stalin . . . There should be no more intrigues, but honest co-operation."¹⁶

Whether that fatal compromise was bound in part, as Professor Lewin holds, by "magnanimity,"¹⁷ or was the inescapable result of the dualism in theory not grounded in philosophy, will be put to the severest test at the time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact after "Trotskyism" reached its peak both in the proclamation for world revolution and the establishment of the Fourth International, and yet also clung to the defense of Stalin's Russia as a workers' state! Thus had Trotsky, who proclaimed the "higher truth" to be world revolution, stopped dead, as Kant had on a different level, at bare appearance — the very "socialism in one country" he fought so bitterly and correctly for two long decades.

II. The Fourth International and Leadership, Leadership, Leadership

WHETHER TROTSKY could not or did not wish to fathom the phenomenon of the workers' state being transformed into its opposite — a state-capitalist society¹⁸ — the point is that his theory, unrooted as it was in philosophy, had him face reality stuck in the fixed particular of nationalized property, as if that equalled socialism. In any case, he denied the fact. Yet, clearly, just as everything had changed in the private capitalist world once the Depression caused its collapse and it had to accept state intervention, state planning (be it in the form of the so-called "combined development" as New Dealism or as total statism as

¹⁴Marxism and Freedom, Ch. XI, "Forms of Organization: The Relationship of the Spontaneous Self-Organization of the Proletariat to the 'Vanguard Party,'" pp. 177-193.

¹⁵The latest edition of Lenin's Collected Works, Vol. 45, as well as Vol. 36, finally have reproduced both the Will and the disputes on the National Question. The original information and reproduction of these documents were first published by Trotsky in *The Stalin School of Falsification* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1937).

¹⁶Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), pp. 485-6.

¹⁷Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 140-1.

¹⁸I was the first to analyze the three Five Year Plans in my study of state capitalism in *The New International, 1942*. This series of articles has since been reproduced as *Russia as State-Capitalist Society* (Detroit: News & Letters, 1973).

in Nazi Germany), so had it in Stalin's Russia. Though he himself entitled his most comprehensive economic analysis of Russia *The Revolution Betrayed*; though he knew of the most oppressive conditions of labor, including forced labor; though he had written against Stalin's fantastic scheme of "liquidating" the peasantry; though he fought the Moscow Trials, 1936-38,¹⁹ which had decapitated the whole "General Staff of the Revolution" as the greatest frame-up trials in all history; and though with a non-existent "socialism in one country" and existing Big Power politics, Stalin had reduced the Third International to nothing but outposts of defense of national Bolshevism, still Trotsky denied any change in the class structure of Russia. He denied the very theory: "The first concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state to occur in history was achieved by the proletariat with the method of social revolution, and not by capitalists with the method of trustification."²⁰ The role of the totalitarian bureaucracy was defined as that of policeman arrogating to himself a greater share of wealth.

And because to Trotsky Stalinist Russia was still considered to be a workers' state, he held that the Moscow Trials had weakened Stalinism. Actually, they consolidated that rule. But to Trotsky the macabre Kremlin purges only proved that "Soviet society organically tends toward the ejection of the bureaucracy"! Like all fetishisms, the fetishism of state property blinded Trotsky from following the course of the counter-revolution in the relations of production. The legitimization of the counter-revolution against October — the Stalinist Constitution of 1936 — Trotsky viewed merely as something that first "created the political premise for the birth of a new possessing class." As if classes were born from political premises!

The struggle against Stalinism had the air of self-defense, not because he was subjective, but because, objectively, he saw nothing totally new in world capitalist development except that it continued to be in "death agony." Nothing had changed since Lenin's death except leadership. Stalin was the "organizer of defeats" — and he, Trotsky, could organize victories, if the proletariat followed him. This is not meant sarcastically. He certainly was a leader of the only victorious proletarian revolution in history. Whether as Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Committee, which had planned the actual insurrection, builder of a Red Army out of raw peasant recruits that withstood all counter-revolutionary attacks from Tsarist generals as well as all foreign militarists who attacked the newly born workers' state; whether as Commissar of War or Foreign Minister or fighter against Stalin, History will not deny him his victories.

But that is not the mark of a revolutionary Marxist theoretician whose philosophic perspective charts the course of actual historical development on the basis of the most profound analysis of the objective situation, in strict relationship to the subjective development, the new form of workers' revolt, and on the basis of the objective and subjective, working out dialectically of a new relationship of theory to practice, in a way that the philosophy of revolution and the actual forces of revolution do not get separated. But Trotsky, since he never moved away from that fixed particular, nationalized property (any more than Kant from the thing-in-itself), stated in nothing less fundamental than "The Imperialist War and Proletarian Revolution," the manifesto of a new Fourth International: "To turn one's back on the nationalization of the means of production on the ground that, in and of itself, it does not create the well-being of the masses, is tantamount to sentencing the granite foundation to destruction on the ground that it is impossible to live without walls and a roof."²¹

¹⁹See *The Case of Leon Trotsky* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937) and *Not Guilty: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made Against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1938).

²⁰Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1937), pp. 247-8.

²¹*The Founding Conference of the Fourth International*, published by the Socialist Workers Party, New York, 1939.

THE MAN OF OCTOBER couldn't have fallen any deeper into the mire of the ideas and methodology of the Russian bureaucracy which, instead of theory, was presenting an administrative formula for minimum costs and maximum production — the true gods of all class rulers. Empiricism does indeed wreak its greatest vengeance on Marxist revolutionaries whose universalism sinks to abstract revolutionism disconnected from the self-developing Subject, and they get stuck in a fixed particular like nationalized property. Ever since the rise of Nazism and the capitulation to Stalin of the greatest (except, of course, Trotsky himself) Left opposition theoretician, Christian Rakovsky, Trotsky faced a historic What Next? but answered it as if what is required is "five years of uninterrupted work to insure succession."²²

If only Trotsky had developed a theory to measure up to the challenge of the times, even if the "cadre" had not. But, no, as the world crises moved from Depression to War and the Hitler-Stalin Pact signaled a green light for that holocaust, Trotsky operated on the basis of the Fourth International Manifesto, once again reducing the whole question to a matter of leadership: "The world situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat." And again: "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership." And once again, for the last time in his lifetime, the organization he founded was not founded on the theory of permanent revolution, either as he conceived it in 1905-06, or without further development, he had seen it "proven" in 1917 in victory and in 1927 in defeat, or throughout the struggle against Stalin's "socialism in one country," or when he finally broke away from being a "Left oppositionist" to something as total as founder of the Fourth International.

The duality between the concept of world revolution and that of defense of Stalinist Russia; between socialism as a classless society that can only realize itself as a world society, and socialism = nationalized property isolated from the world economy; between workers as the vanguard and workers who need to submit to "the militarization of labor"; between "Party" as leader of the proletarian revolution and "Party" as ruling over workers' own instincts and demands — all these dualities were compounded by, but not limited to, the contradiction between the dialectics of the revolution and the specific Subject who constituted the majority of "the masses," when they happened to be peasant rather than proletarian. No wonder Trotsky ended up by tailending Stalinism both on the question that he himself first articulated — the State Plan — and on the "vanguard party to lead."

The greatness of Leon Trotsky as revolutionary, as historian and pamphleteer will far exceed his conceptual perceptions, the cognition which gives action its direction. Leon Trotsky as man will tower above Leon Trotsky as theoretician.

²²Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky's Diary in Exile, 1935* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 46-7, states "After his [Rakovsky's] capitulation there is nobody left . . . and still I think that the work which I am engaged in now, despite its insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work in my life. More important than the period of the Civil War, or any other. For the sake of clarity I would put it this way: Had I not been present in 1917 in St. Petersburg, the October Revolution would have taken place on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. The same can, by and large, be said of the civil war period . . . Thus I cannot speak of the indispensability of my work even about the period from 1917-21. But now my work is indispensable in the full sense of the word . . . There is now no one except the 2nd and 3rd Internationals. I need at least five years of uninterrupted work to insure the succession."

Studies in Contemporary Communism submitted the preceding essay on Trotsky to Ernest Mandel for his critique, which is printed below with Raya Dunayevskaya's rejoinder.

Mrs. Dunayevskaya's contribution touches on some key questions. She does it from the standpoint of a particular shibboleth ("Trotsky was theoretically wrong, because he didn't study Hegelian philosophy"), which, to say the least, is rather peculiar. Needless to say, I cannot agree with her assessment.

I will single out a series of points, where, it seems to me, most students of Marxist thought, or at least of the writings of Trotsky and Lenin, will agree with me that she is wrong.

She holds against Trotsky (and against his theory of the permanent revolution, which is his main theoretical achievement) his statement that "the peasantry is utterly incapable of [playing] an independent political role." She adds to that that "Trotsky's words speak louder than any of Stalin's allegations about Trotsky's underestimation of the peasantry," and above all, "that a theory so far removed from the realities of the age of imperialism and state-capitalism had to collapse of its own hollowness."

To this I would reply (besides the point that "state-capitalism," in Mrs. Dunayevskaya's sense, far from being a "reality," is a concept which doesn't correspond to any social reality anywhere in the world; where you have capitalism, it isn't state capitalism; and where you have statified planned economy, you don't have capitalism, as the present world slump should again convince anybody who is not blinded by prejudice):

1. That Trotsky, in his theory of permanent revolution, explicitly states that the peasantry will play the major role qua number of combatants in any revolution in a backward country, which isn't exactly "underestimating the peasantry";

2. That his point about the impossibility of an independent political role of the peasantry means simply that there have never existed, will never exist or cannot exist in the bad world in which we live since the capitalist system spread globally, any "peasant state" or "peasant government," and that therefore, whenever the working class and (or) its revolutionary party does not establish hegemony over the rebellious peasant masses, even the broadest peasant uprisings and revolutions will only lead to capitalist counter-revolution and to a bourgeois state.

Now far from this being a "hollow" theory "far removed from the realities of the age of imperialism," I would contend that it explains what happened in all revolutions in all backward countries in the 20th century, positively and negatively. And I would cap my argument by reminding Mrs. Dunayevskaya that Lenin, who supposedly in opposition to Trotsky had understood Hegelian dialectics, came to exactly the same conclusion at the end of his life as Trotsky had formulated on the "independent political role of the peasantry." He wrote in his speech to the transport workers congress of March 27, 1921: "Notre expérience nous a appris — et nous en trouvons la confirmation dans le développement de toutes les révolutions du monde, si l'on considère la nouvelle époque, disons les 150 dernières années — que partout et toujours il en a été de même: toutes les tentatives faites par la petite bourgeoisie en général, et les paysans en particulier, pour prendre conscience de leur force, pour diriger à leur manière l'économie et la politique, ont abouti à un échec. Ou bien ils doivent se placer sous la direction du prolétariat, ou bien sous celle des capitalistes. Il n'y a pas de milieu. Ceux qui rêvent d'un moyen terme sont des rêveurs, des songe-creux" (*Oeuvres Choisies* en deux volumes, p. 839, Moscou, Editions en Langues étrangères, 1947).

Mrs. Dunayevskaya holds against Trotsky that he "equalled nationalized

property with socialism." Nothing was further from his mind. He thought (correctly so) that the suppression of private property of the means of production was a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for a socialist society. But he never for one minute defended the idea that you had "socialism" in Russia; that was one of the main contents of his fight against Stalin, to deny strongly any such utopia. For Trotsky Russia was a society in transition between capitalism and Socialism, which could fall back towards capitalism (if private property was restored and a new class of buyers of labor power would become a ruling class) or advance towards socialism (if the revolution spread towards large parts of the world and the monopoly of power of the bureaucracy in state and economy was abolished). Mrs. Dunayevskaya, by eliminating all these nuances, eliminates transition, i.e. mediation, from her thinking, which is not very suitable for a student of Hegel, who, after all, saw in mediation one of the key characteristics of dialectics.

Mrs. Dunayevskaya takes up against Trotsky the slander of his being in favor of "militarization of labor," whereas the concrete measures this refers to were taken by a unanimous decision of the Bolshevik Central Committee in 1919, in the midst of a civil war (including the vote of the later "workers opposition" leaders). She then goes on to make Trotsky's defense of the Leninist theory of organization equivalent with the defense of the "party ruling over workers' own instincts and demands," without explaining: (1) why Lenin who in opposition to Trotsky had studied Hegelian dialectics, clung to these concepts till the end of his life; (2) why workers, in innumerable massive revolutions throughout the 20th century, showed themselves unable to overthrow capitalism through spontaneous actions, "basing themselves on their own instincts and demands."

Two of the most difficult problems of contemporary Marxism, if not sociology and social sciences in general, the problem of the formation of proletarian class consciousness in a society hostile to socialism and dominated by the enemies of the workers, and the problem of bureaucracy, beginning with that of the bureaucratization of the workers' organizations, are dismissed with the sleight of hand as nonexistent or irrelevant, and all evil is brought back to the wrong ideas of a single person. This doesn't sound very "dialectical," not to say "materialist" or "Marxist," to me.



Ernest Mandel has devised several straw men, grouped under a single wifely designation, Mrs., whom he accuses of slandering Trotsky: "Mrs. Dunayevskaya takes up against Trotsky the slander of his being in favor of 'militarization of labor' whereas the concrete measures this refers to were taken by a unanimous decision of the Bolshevik Central Committee in 1919, in the midst of civil war . . ." In the process of his expose of "Mrs. Dunayevskaya" as "blinded by prejudice," Mandel achieves some remarkable feats:

One, the revolutionary role of the peasantry does a disappearance act, first by being reduced "qua number of combatants," then by claiming that Trotsky's thesis of the impossibility of the peasantry's playing a political role "means simply that there have never existed, will never exist . . . any 'peasant state' or 'peasant government'," and, finally, by proclaiming that "Mrs. Dunayevskaya" needs "reminding that Lenin came to exactly the same conclusion at the end of his life as Trotsky had formulated . . ." If even we leave aside the fact that this flies in the face of Trotsky's own pronouncement that, on the question of the peasantry, he was Lenin's "pupil," how could we disregard the irony of Mandel's choice of speeches from which to quote? It was the speech delivered to the very union that initiated the fight against Trotsky's "militarization of labor," demanding the return of the union to their own control, and Lenin referred to the disagreement by citing the fact that the Ninth RCP Congress had dealt with "the mistakes that required rectification" and did so "by subordinating the upper ranks to the lower

ranks." That part of Lenin's speech Mandel does not quote; what he does quote was not the point at issue between Lenin and Trotsky for some two decades.

Two, "the slander." It was not I, but Trotsky, who used the expression, "militarization of labor." He held that each worker must feel himself "to be a soldier who cannot freely dispose of himself . . . That is the militarization of labor."* The "concrete measures" this referred to were not what the CC approved; rather it referred to the merging of the trade unions into the state which not only the CC but the whole Congress rejected. It was not proposed "in the midst of civil war," but at the end of it. The Congress, instead, approved Lenin's Resolution because it agreed with his analysis: "Taken as a whole, Trotsky's policy is one of bureaucratically nagging the trade unions . . . There is valuable military experience, heroism, zeal, etc. There is the bad experience of the worst elements of the military: bureaucracy and conceit."

Three, "the particular shibboleth" attributed to "Mrs. Dunayevskaya": "Trotsky was theoretically wrong, because he didn't study Hegelian philosophy." Although Mandel enclosed the sentence in quotation marks, I not only never made any such ludicrous assertions, I was taking issue with Trotsky's concept of "belated" (April, 1917) "rearming of the Party," with its underlying assumption that by then it was somehow anchored in Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution. In arguing that "what Lenin was armed with and Trotsky was not, was having faced the reality of 1914 with a totally new concept of Hegelian dialectics as self-developing Subject . . . 'translated' as the masses — proletarian and peasant," I held that the decisive test came after 1917, at a time when Lenin launched his last struggle against "great Russian chauvinism" (Stalin), asked Trotsky to present it to the Congress he himself was too ill to attend, warning against any "rotten compromise." I wrote: "Whether the fatal compromise was bound, in part, as Professor Lewin holds, by 'magnanimity,' or was the inescapable result of the dualism in theory not grounded in philosophy will be put to the severest test at the time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact after 'Trotskyism' reached its peak in the proclamation of the world revolution . . . and yet also clung to the defense of Stalin's Russia as a workers' state!"

Now, Ernest Mandel, evidently not totally satisfied with his economic-political-sociological feats, wanders also into the philosophic field where he is at his most ambitious. At one and the same time, he empirically reduces Hegel's concept of mediation to transition and ties "transition" to that totalitarian state-capitalist monstrosity, Russia, which he calls "a society in transition" as if the concept of Stalin's Russia as a "workers' state, though degenerated," which had split the Trotskyist party into smithereens during World War II, had never existed. Of what use is all that when one can point a finger at "Mrs. Dunayevskaya [who] by eliminating all these nuances ["society in transition between capitalism and socialism"], eliminates transition, i.e., mediation, from her thinking, which is not very suitable for a student of Hegel . . ."

Whether or not Ernest Mandel will ever stoop to becoming "a student of Hegel," I do hope he will grapple with Marx's concept of mediation, specifically on the question of Communism, specifically when Marx discovered his own unique continent of thought and revolution, and wrote: "Only by the transcendence of this mediation (Communism) . . . does there arise positive Humanism beginning from itself."

It is, after all, a question of nothing short of a totally new, classless society, which alone can also re-establish the greatness of Trotsky as revolutionary, if not as great theoretician.

*I had not footnoted the phrase, but this and all other quotations cited here can be found in The Stenographic Report of the 9th RCP: the English quotations (which include the Lenin speech Mandel quotes) can be found in Lenin's Selected Works, Vol. IX.