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# Mandel on Broué : Understanding Trotsky

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*Until now, Isaac Deutscher's Prophet trilogy has been the seminal work on the life of Leon Trotsky. Now it has been overtaken by Pierre Broué's masterly book (Fayard, Paris 1988), writes ERNEST MANDEL, in an extended review (originally published in Quatrième Internationale magazine) [note by editors of Socialist Outlook].*

I

Infallibility does not exist in this world. Trotsky was mistaken more than once in his analysis and especially in his political decisions, just like Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Engels and Marx before him. There were chinks in his armour – as with all men and women. But his was still a golden armour inspiring our admiration. It will continue to do so for successive generations of activists, intellectuals and ordinary readers. This great revolutionary steps out from the pages of Broué's biography as an extremely attractive, human personality – much more so than in the legend presented both by his enemies and his unconditional admirers. He was not at all the authoritarian, arrogant martinet of a leader portrayed by his friend Lunacharsky, even though he was a man completely absorbed by his successive political/organisational projects. Trotsky was very sensitive, often inclined to compromise, and his reserved manner hid a capacity for expressing deep affection. His ability to communicate with huge crowds reached heights rarely equalled in this century. But he also knew how to win and keep long-lasting individual friendships and affection, the best-known being that of Christian Rakovsky.

Like all the classic Marxist thinkers, his interests were not limited to politics and economics but were universal. He was keen on literature, philosophy, history, the natural sciences, military theory, technology, psychology and painting. One of Marx's favourite Latin dictums "I am a man and nothing human is foreign to me" certainly applied to Trotsky. One of the less obvious merits of Broué's book is to bring out Trotsky's deep humanity and get it across to the reader.

II

Trotsky was a weaker tactician and politician than Lenin, the born leader. Lenin was better at drawing around him broad teams of capable collaborators, keeping their specific contributions but integrating them into an increasingly effective collective. This was one of the fundamental reasons for Vladimir Ilyich's spectacular success in building the Bolshevik Party. On the other hand Trotsky was the boldest revolutionary theoretical thinker and strategist produced by the workers' movement in the twentieth century. Even today one is dazzled by the depth of the analysis in **Results and Prospects**, written in 1906. All the history of our century is summarized in this analysis.

Alone among Marxists, Trotsky foresaw that in the imperialist-determined framework of uneven and combined development, the proletariat was going to lead the first socialist revolution to victory (we might say today the first socialist revolutions) not in the most advanced industrial countries, where it was already numerically hegemonic and culturally stronger than elsewhere, but in a relatively less developed country, Russia, where it was politically the most advanced, and where the correlation of social-political forces was most in its favour due in particular to the weakness and decrepitude of the ruling class.

This victory was going to unlock a process of international revolution which would eliminate the subjective weakness of the workers' movement in the most advanced industrial countries. If that did not happen, then holding on to proletarian power in Russia would become practically impossible. We can see that all the success and tragedy of the Revolution over the last 70 years was thus anticipated.

However the loss of direct power by the Russian proletariat following the defeat of the first wave of international revolution did not take the form of capitalist restoration but the usurping of power by the bureaucracy. Trotsky had not predicted that variant in 1906. It haunted him already in 1922, as it did Lenin from the same period. This is why the idea of "Thermidor" dominated Trotsky's thought and action for 15 years, if not right up to his assassination by a Stalinist agent. [The use of the term "Thermidor" refers to the French 1789 Revolution, being the month of the new French calendar in which the revolutionary Jacobins, led by Robespierre, were overthrown by a wing of the revolution which was reactionary but which did not restore the old feudal regime. Incidentally this analogy and concern was raised by Lenin before Trotsky – **S.O.** note].

But like the forecast of the October victory as early as 1906 and the intuition of the universal value of the permanent revolution strategy for all the less developed countries, the Thermidor concept is not simply a transposition of the French revolution experience to the Russian revolution. It only has any sense within the framework of the internationalization of history and therefore of the class struggle that has been definitely opened up by the imperialist epoch.

As a class the Russian bourgeoisie had been smashed and to all intents and purposes eliminated by its defeat in the civil war. It could not return to power. Capitalist restorationist forces could only emerge from the new society created by the October revolution. They could only win out in an alliance with, and totally subordinated to, imperialism. But imperialism had itself gone into a profound, irreversible crisis with the First World War. It was challenged by successive waves of proletarian struggle in the industrial centres, by severe economic crises, by exacerbated inter-imperialist conflicts and by increasingly extensive uprisings by the colonial and semi-colonial peoples.

The fate of the remaining gains of the October revolution is therefore necessarily linked to the outcome of the class struggle – more precisely of all social-political conflict on a world scale. The question of Thermidor is inextricably combined with the process of world revolution and counter-revolution. Practically alone among communist leaders, Trotsky understood this as early as 1923. It is correctly one of the leitmotifs of Broué's book. This is also one of the reasons for what Trotsky saw as the decisive importance of building the Fourth International during the final period of his life. Nevertheless the significance and content of the Soviet Thermidor remained a central question in the factional struggles of Russian communists between 1923 and 1933. On this Broué's book gives us more details and some important conclusions compared to Deutscher's trilogy.

The Left Opposition from 1923 had a correct idea of the danger of bureaucratic degeneration in the party and state. As Marx and Engels put it : there was a risk of the full time officials of the working class becoming its oppressors. That is what obviously happened and can be summarised by Trotsky's later formulation of the political expropriation of the proletariat (which brings with it many consequences on the economic level).

But such a counter revolution is not a social counter-revolution, and does not involve the restoration of capitalism, just as the French Thermidor did not imply the restoration of the Ancien Régime (the power of the semi-feudal nobility and absolutist monarchy). It was a political counter revolution on the basis of a society created by the victorious revolution.

For the Opposition this key distinction was not clear in the first period of its struggle. For a quite a lot of its leaders Thermidor and capitalist restoration were seen as the same thing, or at least were put together in an over-mechanical way. Then in the struggle on three fronts against the bureaucracy, the Nepmen (the new medium scale urban

bourgeoisie) and the Kulak danger, the Opposition was subjected to a stern test when Stalin and his faction made a brutal ultraleft turn in 1929 with forced collectivisation of agriculture and breakneck industrialisation. One sector of the Opposition, Piatakov then Preobrazhensky, Smilga and Radek, saw this turn at least partially as a vindication of their ideas. They used it to justify their capitulation. The other sectors of the Opposition who kept fast to the fundamentally proletarian, anti-bureaucratic and internationalist reasons for the struggle against Thermidorian degeneration, continued their battle under Trotsky's leadership. This meant they had to clarify the content of the Soviet Thermidor. Broué takes us step by step through the development of the thinking of the Opposition and of Trotsky on this. It is a key part of his work.

Deutscher's hesitant and contradictory analysis on this does not hold up to an overall historical examination. How can one speak of a "revolution from above," as he describes the forced collectivisation, when the counter-revolution was carrying all before it in all areas of society ? Trotsky illustrates this in a striking way in **Revolution Betrayed**, and his general analysis is backed up even more pungently by the radical criticism of this period in the glasnost of the Soviet Union today. The great development of French industry, made possible by the Jacobins, did not really begin until the Consulate and the Empire. But does that justify calling this period the "second revolution" ? Were the Five-Year Plans the product of October or of Stalinism ?

Today, when we can draw up a final balance sheet, little doubt remains. Anything positive built during the 1929-39 period was the product of the October revolution. But the mass assassinations, the famine, misery, oppression, wastage, and absurd inequalities which accompanied what was constructed were the product of Stalinism, the bureaucratic dictatorship and the power of a definite social layer. Deutscher seriously underestimated all this. The proletariat and true communists do not claim any co-responsibility for all those disasters. We have to relentlessly struggle against such crimes, as Trotsky and the Trotskyists did.

The victorious political counterrevolution in Russia can only be overthrown by a political revolution. However there has always been a debate about the possible self-reform of the bureaucracy. Also on this question Broué is generally right against Deutscher. The falsely defined "revolutions from above" like those of the archtypical Emperor Joseph II of Austria or the abolition of serfdom by Tsar Alexander II of Russia are characterised by the fact that they do not radically eliminate all vestiges of the decrepit regimes, which have to be swept away if progress is to be guaranteed. Such "revolutions" can be radical. They can liberate important progressive forces. But their function is through certain changes to prevent popular revolutions. Precisely because they cannot be as radical as real popular revolutions they can at the most hold these back (sometimes they even facilitate the development of a popular revolution). In the long term they cannot stop popular revolution. What was true for Alexander II or Bismarck will prove to be true in the light of history for Khrushchev and Gorbachev – whatever the differences with our historical examples.

It is important to understand the particular dialectic between radical reforms initiated from the top and the mass struggles below. This dialectic is even more important and specific in post-capitalist societies, where the bureaucracy is not a class, unlike the nobility of the Austrian court with their civil service, or the Prussian Junkers. This dialectic is more accentuated due to the fact that the proletariat has an enormous potential socio-economic hegemony in the USSR, beyond comparison with that of the popular classes in the societies of our historical examples. It would have been useful if Broué had made this point clear.



Despite all its weaknesses, Deutscher's trilogy (which has reached an audience far greater than Broué's ever will) did have the historical merit of breaking the wall of silence and slanders that Stalinist and bourgeois historians, as well as fellow travellers and opportunists of all sorts, have tried to erect for a quarter of a century around the leader of the October insurrection and the founder of the Red Army. Outside the small Trotskyist movement and its periphery,

where this book was obviously not necessary, it marked out a path to the truth for hundreds of thousands of readers. Far from being, as Broué at one point suggests, an apology for Stalin, it was an essential stage in the demystification of Stalin for this part of world opinion.

The same comment applies to the Khrushchev report at the CPSU Twentieth Congress. It would be quite irrational and historically blind to define it as a "subtle apology for Stalin". For millions of communists throughout the world it marked the end of the Stalin cult and not the subtle continuation of his authority. Ninety-nine percent of people at the time saw it this way too – even the strongest defenders of Stalin understood it.

The unjustified and unjust attempt by Broué to systematise his criticism of Deutscher comes apart in two chapters where the polemic is strangely absent : the chapters dealing with 1920-21, tellingly entitled *The Crisis of the Revolution* and *The Retreat*. We entirely agree with Broué's judgment on the Kronstadt events – it is nuanced and solidly backed up by documents from the imperialist archives which Trotsky himself was not aware of at the time. But we think Deutscher explains the tragic role of 1921, the watershed year of the revolution much better than Broué does.

The historical background is well known : there was a catastrophic fall in production ; famine ; numerical decimation of the proletariat ; downturn of the first revolutionary wave in the West with the capitalist counter-offensive ; but also the definitive defeat of the White armies in the Civil War and the end of imperialist military intervention against Soviet Russia. This is the context in which the Bolshevik Party, with Lenin and Trotsky at its head, decided on the New Economic Policy, organised the retreat, and took a position in the Comintern against ultra-left adventurism and the theory of the "offensive" put forward by Zinoviev and Bukharin. Against them, Lenin and Trotsky supported a united front policy giving communists a line for the masses and a way of winning a majority prior to any struggle for power. All this was logical, coherent and based on a correct understanding of reality, the relationship of forces and the tendencies of the situation. Broué (like Deutscher) correctly highlights all this.

But at the same time the Bolsheviks' attitude to the forms of exercising political power in Russia took an absolutely unjustified and illogical turn. Instead of saying "the civil war is over, and the class enemy has received a decisive blow and will not recover quickly so we must derisively broaden soviet democracy, particularly in the party, in the trade unions and in the Soviets," the Bolsheviks, in their great majority, including Lenin and Trotsky, made a turn in precisely the opposite direction, saying : "since the civil war is finished the proletariat's political energy and dynamism will ease up, along with its idealism and commitment, so there is a mortal danger that the economic retreat will grow into a political retreat ; hence we must step up discipline, control from above and centralisation. Political democracy must be radically reduced."

Furthermore this schema of analysis served as a model – we should say a justification – for generally accompanying measures of economic liberalisation with a political tightening up. This went on for decades, contradicting all the forecasts and predictions of Western liberal dogmatists.

In fact the analysis was false. It led to disastrous political conclusions. It is hard to show that the threat to Soviet power of the NEP men was worse than that of Kolchak or Wrangel. It was even more difficult to explain how a working class that was absent from political decision making and increasingly reduced to the role of a passive supporter of the apparatus, was more capable than an active, consciously intervening one of struggling against the "rampant" and "underground" counter-revolution. Again, given the economic context the Bolsheviks should have understood that the number one danger was not the bourgeois counter-revolution but the alienation and political passivity of the working class, which in turn would open the door to the political counter-revolution, to Thermidor. The upturns and downturns of the revolution in the last analysis depend on the correlation of social forces and not on what happens in the two main political camps. Within this correlation, what happens inside the working class is at least as important if not even more important than what happens among the bourgeoisie and its allies.

In a period of enormous material difficulties for the working class, institutionalising the apparatus's power and its methods of command, reducing and then snuffing out workers' democracy, means contributing to a sharp decline in working class political activity and to its political weakening, therefore changing the relationship of forces at its expense. Trotsky and Lenin did not understand this in 1921. They understood it one year later. But meanwhile the damage had been done (we are not saying it was irreversible). The one-party regime was made official. Factions were banned inside the single party (a nearly inevitable consequence of the one party principle since each faction is a potential second party). Stalin became general secretary of the single party. At the same time there was an ultra-rapid, monstrous growth of the party apparatus – a few hundred full-timers just after the October revolution but 15,000 in August 1922.

Deutscher's book has the merit of showing the radical, decisive nature of this turn. This is not reflected in the pages of Broué's book. Moreover, Trotsky, in **Revolution Betrayed**, did not mince his words. In one of the most important self-criticisms of his political life this is what he said :

"The prohibition of oppositional parties brought after it the prohibition of factions. The prohibition of factions ended in a prohibition to think otherwise than the infallible leaders. The police-manufactured monolithism of the party resulted in a bureaucratic impunity which has become the source of all kinds of wantonness and corruption." (New Park, 1967, pp.104-5)

How in the world can a writer like Deutscher, who gives over a chapter of his book to this mechanism, the analysis of which has been confirmed by history and repeated by many people today in the USSR although not by Broué (yet), be characterised as a veiled apologist of Stalin ? Obviously the accusation just does not hold water.

There is another argument that goes along the following lines. While Lenin and Trotsky made the same political error of the bans in 1921 and while Lenin did in fact nominate Stalin for the post of general secretary, nevertheless Trotsky is more blameworthy because of his anti-democratic positions on the trade union question. By doing this he opened the way for Stalin. The latter's new post meant the removal of Trotsky's supporters Preobrazhensky, Krestinsky and Serebriakov as party secretaries following the Trotsky/Bukharin bloc's defeat on the trade union question.

However we should nuance the judgement made of Trotsky's error on the trade union question. Here Broué tends to follow Deutscher's incomplete position on the matter. In fact the trade union question as discussed in 1920 cannot be reduced to the problem of the (relative) independence of the trade unions from the state, or of the extent of working class action autonomous from the managers of industry (who were more and more bureaucratic). Lenin was right and Trotsky/Bukharin were wrong on this issue. But the trade union question also involved the form of management, the problem of "who manages".

On this aspect of the trade union question, Lenin defended the principle of management alone being in charge. Trotsky/Bukharin, while not clearly raising the question of self-management (the Workers' Opposition were for management by the trade unions, as stated in the official party programme) did propose decisive moves in this direction in documents that Broué, like Deutscher, does not take into account or is unaware of. We already referred to them in 1955. [\[1\]](#)

With hindsight it is clear you cannot stop the process of bureaucratisation by simply defending trade union autonomy against the managers who were separate from the mass of producers. Struggle against bureaucracy must be carried out on at least three fronts : defence of workers' immediate economic interests ; socialist democracy (working class and soviet), and its institutionalisation ; and workers' management of the workplaces and the economy as a whole. On this last point at least Trotsky was in advance of Lenin in 1920.

### IV

Broué's hesitations on the central question of political pluralism and on the watershed year of 1921 are particularly surprising, since one of the main merits of his book is precisely the way he brings out the continuity of Trotsky's thought and action as the intransigent defender of working class self-activity and self-organisation.

Trotsky was the first theoretician of soviet organisation, from 1905-6. He foresaw even then that Soviets would spring up all over Russia in the next Russian revolution. Lenin only took up this key idea, which also comes from Marx and Engels, with his book **State and Revolution**, in 1917. The Comintern generalised this idea in 1919-1920. It was made into a universal principle applicable to all revolutions with a predominantly proletarian character, all over the world. Rosa Luxemburg, Gramsci and other revolutionary Marxist thinkers further elaborated this concept in 1918-1920. So Trotsky had already made a theoretical "breakthrough" with such an idea in 1906.

While he was the theoretician and practical leader of working class self-organisation, Trotsky had to refine his conception of the organised workers' movement, especially after the division between communists and social democrats crystallised after 1919-20. Lenin had come down the same road in his fight for the united front, starting with **Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder** and then the Comintern's Third Congress. Trotsky's more precise focus on the workers' movement led to the concept of the organic nature of this movement as a contradictory whole. On the one hand there are political differentiations, conflicts and sometimes quite hard struggles, and on the other hand there is a continued reflex of class solidarity, common struggle, unity of action against the class enemy against common dangers and in pursuit of common interests. If this is obvious from the economic point of view and fully justifies the line of a single mass trade union confederation, it is equally true on the political level.

Trotsky's analysis of fascism, his definition of the vital role of the workers' united front to stop the rise of the Nazis in Germany, his tactical proposals and his tireless campaign around the mortal danger which Hitler's taking of power would represent for the German and international workers' movements, are among the most brilliant contributions of Trotsky to revolutionary marxism. Broué shows an intimate knowledge of his subject here. Trotsky's writings on fascism are an indispensable complement to the general theory of working class self-organisation. Through them it is possible to understand how the Soviets (workers' councils) are both the most effective and natural instrument for unitary struggle and the most effective instrument for the exercise of power by the working class. In one of those breathtaking insights that crop up regularly in Trotsky's writings – Broué does not like to call them "prophetic" which sounds a little religious when it is really a case of combining scientific analysis with intuition – he predicted, years before the event, that the Soviets would emerge in Spain first in the form of anti-fascist militias. This is exactly what happened in 1936.

This obviously does not mean that the intransigent defence of the principle of workers' self-organisation, which is at the heart of all Trotsky's political activity – with the tragic exception of 1921 – was absolutely without any weaknesses. Broué relates in passing how Trotsky, like Lenin, was an ally of Kautsky against Rosa Luxemburg around 1910, when the latter campaigned in favour of the mass political strike. Her success would have been of supreme importance for the future of the German workers' movement and the class struggle of that country. The question is closely linked to that of workers' self-activity and self-organisation.

History confirms that the workers' "average" class consciousness is very much connected to their experience of concrete struggle and therefore to the concrete forms of struggle they have lived through. It would have been useful if Broué had emphasised this point more.

We should be thankful to Broué for having the courage to lift, at least partially, the taboo that still exists in our tanks on the writings of the young Trotsky – **Our Political Tasks**. It is a very uneven book, very unfair to Lenin. However to find there, as certain historians have done, the seeds of Stalinism and the bureaucratisation of the party and Soviets

is to make a mockery of a whole concrete and complex historical process that produced Stalinism stretching over two decades, involving three revolutions and two counter-revolutions, the fluctuating activity of millions of men and women, the varying relationships of forces of colossal social forces and their inevitable repercussions on the thinking of leaders including Lenin. This is particularly misguided, since **Our Political Tasks** is a declaration of war against such bureaucratisation.

It is hard to deny that the Lenin of 1905-7 or of 1917-19 had rectified some of the excessive formulations of **What is to Done ?** concerning the radical, centralising, leading "jacobin" role of professional revolutionaries. He had obviously bent the stick too far in one direction, and he rapidly bent it back the other way when he insisted, notably in the Preface to the collection **In Twelve Years** on the broadest application of democratic principles, the need for the election of leaders, for public, transparent debates in a legal and public mass party. On a more theoretical level he stated :

"Of course the primary reason for this success [of the party of professional revolutionaries] resides in the fact that the working class, whose best elements are in the Social Democratic party [i.e. the marxists], is different for objective economic reasons from all other classes in capitalist society by having a greater aptitude to organise itself. Without this condition the organisation of professional revolutionaries would have been a plaything, an adventure, a mere facade. The pamphlet **What is to Done ?** on many occasions emphasises that this organisation's only reason for existence is its liaison with the really revolutionary class which goes spontaneously into battle." **Collected Works**, Vol.13 [translated from French], our emphasis.

This seems to us to be the correct formulation of the problem of the relationship between the vanguard organisation (as a specific task to be achieved), mass spontaneity and working class self-organisation, although Lenin's term "in liaison with" could be further developed.

Having said all that it is nevertheless the case that **Our Political Tasks** does voice concern and warn against the risks any party runs where one of the components of this doctrine, and especially the practice of democratic centralism, is developed in a one-sided way, particularly when the party exercises state power and there is a decline of the masses' self-activity. Broué has done a good job in bringing this out into the open. The taboo needed to be lifted.

Our conclusion is self-evident. Real working class self-organisation, a network of Soviets with effective power involving the whole of the working class or at least its great majority, is only possible on the basis of party pluralism.

This is not only true because the working class in practice follows different parties and political currents. Stifling or banning them is not the same as restricting the rights and powers of the bourgeoisie or imperialism but is rather an attack on the rights and political initiative of important sectors of the working class. Without free political debate and struggle working class political education and activity will rapidly degenerate. First you get a system of passive tailending and then bureaucratic obedience. The masses' consciousness and intelligence decline. Finally generalised indifference and cynicism replaces a living workers democracy.

The great Rosa Luxemburg first understood this problem, despite her passionate support for the Russian revolution and despite the fact she was not informed of the particular circumstances of the civil war raging in 1918-20. From 1921 on, her warning (issued three years earlier, before she was brutally murdered) was shown to be legitimate and alas confirmed by historical experience :

"If political life is suffocated throughout the country then paralysis will necessarily take hold of the Soviets. Without general elections, without freedom of the press, of unlimited right of assembly, without a free battle of ideas, then life



will wither and vegetate in all the public institutions, and the bureaucracy will remain the only active element."  
**Russian Revolution**, October 1918 (Maspero, Paris 1969) [translated from French]

### V

Broué's book : helps us answer a question that arises from the history of the USSR in the 1923-1940 period, which historians and young people (not to mention the workers' vanguard) ask (and will increasingly ask in that country) – how do you explain Stalin's persistent hatred, the implacable persecution against Trotsky, his family and friends ?

We can leave on one side the purely psychological aspect of the phenomenon – personal rivalry, jealousy, envy, feeling of intellectual inferiority feeding a strong sense of guilt, endemic paranoia developing finally into a universal and monstrous paranoia. All that is true. But it is absolutely insufficient to explain how an individual with such traits was able to express them in a nearly unlimited way in a big country that had emerged from a spectacular revolutionary experience, which had not only liberated economic energies but also the potential moral and cultural emancipation of millions of human beings.

We get closer to a scientific, coherent explanation if we focus on the political role of the two protagonists in this drama as the representatives, in an almost concentrated way, of the interests, traditions and "values" of the two antagonistic social forces – the proletariat and the bureaucracy.

Stalinist hatred was shared by a good part of the bureaucracy for a long time. Trotsky's anti-bureaucratic struggle was seen as basically correct by a good part of the workers' vanguard, to varying degrees and at different times – that is the tragedy – by nearly all the old Bolsheviks, including those who had first supported Stalin.

As the powers accumulated evolving towards "personal power", and as Thermidor led to the bonapartism and Stalin's dictatorship, so the survival of anything or anyone who incarnated the programme or ideals of October, or even the emancipatory tradition of marxism, became unacceptable to the lackeys and spokespersons of the political counterrevolution. Since it was a political and not a social counter-revolution the umbilical cord with Marx and Lenin could not be totally cut, so the regime cloaked itself in the monstrously deformed mask of "Marxism-Leninism". It presented itself as the legitimate follower of a tradition that it desecrated increasingly each day. Hence it was not enough just to suppress the main person speaking out against it : all potential opponents also had to be condemned to permanent silence.

Among these opponents only Trotsky presented not only a denunciation of Stalinism but also an explanation, based on the marxist tradition, of the bureaucratic dictatorship. Inevitably this made him the main enemy of the regime since his writings undermined it from the inside, albeit only in a theoretical way. Consequently the systematic persecution, the attempt to totally wipe out Trotsky's memory and ideas, corresponds to a reflex of self-defence and self-justification of a privileged caste made up of hundreds of thousands of individuals. Stalin was only the most effective and most unscrupulous executor of such criminal acts. Already this is a more credible explanation.

This explanation is still insufficient. It does too much "honour" to the bureaucracy in general and to Stalin in particular if we present them as obsessed with ideas, programmes, denunciations, critical analyses or even of the need for self-justification or identity. All of this played a role in the persecution of Trotsky, of trotskyism and then of the whole Bolshevik party. But there is more to it than that.

What made Trotsky and the Bolshevik-Leninists of the Opposition public enemy number one of Stalin and the

bureaucracy was the unshakeable capacity and will of Lev Davidovich (Trotsky) and his comrades to translate criticism and denunciation of Stalin, Stalinism and the bureaucracy into political activity oriented to the working class. These were revolutionaries, educated, hardened by two experiences of activity in a non-revolutionary period, before 1905 and between 1907 and 1913, where they had learned, in smaller groups than the 1928 or 1932 Opposition, to look out for the least sign of revival of working class activity. They had learned how to intervene and to insert their ideas into the most limited and moderate struggles. They had learned the art of underground organisation, patiently building up the links, even if with only two oppositional workers in a workplace or three rebellious students in a university or two hundred workers involved in protest action or a small scale strike.

Stalin had gone through the same school and knew the same techniques and he was obsessed by the idea that what Trotsky and the Bolsheviks had succeeded in doing against the Tsar they would sooner or later do against him. He could find some compromises with everyone on certain conditions (look how he dealt with the successive waves of capitulationists between 1928 and 1934). He could find no compromise with propagandists and agitators with an intervention aimed at the working class and youth.

He was not wrong, at least from the long term historical point of view. One just has to consider the question – What would have been the destiny of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, what would have happened with Solidarnosc if there had been in these countries a nucleus of organised Bolshevik Leninists ? Even if they had been only a thousand strong, even without a "Trotsky," they would not only have been able to represent and concretise the communist tradition of that country but also be identified with every popular protest and workers' demand over the last 10-15 years. In this way we can understand the difference the life or death of Trotsky and trotskyism in the USSR represented for the long-term chances of survival of the bureaucratic dictatorship. Stalin's hatred and persecution of Trotsky and trotskyism was therefore not only hatred and persecution of ideological enemies. It was a hatred and persecution against the only communists capable of helping the Soviet working class to undermine and overthrow the privileges and power of the bureaucracy.

What Stalin and the bureaucracy hated in Trotsky is what the Russian workers and youth are going to admire and imitate in the years to come : his intransigent defence of workers' political and material interests ; his identification with the anti-bureaucratic struggle, for socialist democracy ; his persistent struggle against social inequality, against privileges, against untrammelled power, against injustice, for the rights of women, young people and minority nationalities against discrimination and oppression.

Broué helps us relive in a meticulous way, month by month, year by year, one of the lesser-known aspects of Trotsky's life as the inspirer and leader of the Opposition after his expulsion from the CPSU. It is one of the greatest contributions of this remarkable book. Thanks to Broué this impressive political-organisational continuity is not excessively personalised around Trotsky.

There was not just Trotsky and his son Sedov. There were numerous other outstanding activists who are brought to life again by Broué. He gives them a name and a political identity. They are among the purest heroes and heroines of our century. They never bowed or gave in to the "inevitable". They never lost faith that this nightmare would end. They were killed to the last person. As one eyewitness said : They were felled like great oaks, with a curse for Stalin and a slogan for soviet power and the world revolution on their lips. We are proud of them. In the future all the workers of the USSR will be proud of them. Thanks to them our current is the only one who can look the Soviet people in the face without a sense of guilt, without shame or complexes. These heroes saved the honour and continuity of communism.

In his final speech before his "judges" at the Third Moscow Trial, the unfortunate Bukharin said (perhaps covering up some regrets) that one had to be a Trotsky to propose and do all that. Indeed. You had to be Trotsky to tirelessly continue the fight for the emancipation of the Soviet and international working class in midst of Hitler's and Stalin's

terrors, when it was midnight in the century. Thanks to Broué's book thousands of contemporaries will better understand it now and understand it was not at all a lost cause.

## VI

Broué's book covers a half-century of world history. It is inevitable that he could not cover everything. We can all have our ideas on what should have been developed more, on what could be left out and what could not.

We regret that Broué does not mention Trotsky's role as a precursor in the analysis of the black minority in the United States. [2] We also regret he did not mention the fact that alone among marxists, Trotsky predicted in 1938 that if there were a new World War, all the Jews of Europe risked being physically liquidated. Broué also does not mention the first important political defeat of Stalinism, the trial of the Spanish POUM, whose representatives were at first accused of collaboration with Franco – a vile lie – but were finally sentenced for having tried to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

We are sorry that after emphasising the role of comrade Badovsky in introducing Trotskyist ideas in Poland in the 1950s, he does not mention the role of our comrade Petr Uhl, the most respected figure of the Czech opposition, continually attacked by the bureaucracy for his Trotskyism and who spent six years in a Stalinist prison.

We are particularly surprised about the way Pierre Broué dealt with the question of Trotsky's rehabilitation and the ongoing campaign on this, not just among Western journalists looking for a scoop, but among important currents of the international workers' movement.

We have never asked for USSR governments – the political representatives of the bureaucracy – to politically rehabilitate Trotsky. We concede no competence to them on this matter. The judgment of Trotsky's political role and his ideas is a question of history and of the Soviet and international working people. We have never doubted their verdict. At the end of the day it will reach into the CPSU itself.

On the other hand we have demanded the penal and judicial rehabilitation of Trotsky and we must continue to do so. Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov were accused of terrible crimes by the prosecutor and judges of the first Moscow Trial. They were found guilty in their absence in the sentence of this trial. The verdicts at the second and third trials confirmed this judgment. This is the basis on which Trotsky is judged to be an "enemy of the people" and has had his writings banned in the USSR.

Moreover the USSR supreme court has solemnly rescinded the verdicts of the three Moscow Trials. It has rehabilitated the old Bolsheviks who were sentenced on the basis of totally fabricated accusations. Is there to be an exception made for Leon Trotsky ? What else but a Soviet tribunal can judicially rehabilitate him at this time ?

The question also exists on a more directly political level. Thousands of courageous men and women are campaigning in the USSR for the judicial rehabilitation of all the victims of the Stalinist purges, including Trotsky. Isn't it our elementary internationalist duty to support this struggle ? Broué has probably already changed his position on this. If he has not yet already done so let's hope he will do so soon.

But all this scarcely alters our overall judgment on this book. It is a great, a very great book because of its objectives, the verve it conveys, the scholarship and the conclusions it comes to which we share. It is and will remain an indispensable instrument for the education of cadres and for the recruitment of sympathisers. We will have to wait a

long time for a better one, perhaps after all archives in the USSR are opened, and possibly a while after that.

*"Isaac Deutscher is a more brilliant writer than Pierre Broué. His language is more striking, he has a more lively style that is easier to read and he has a gift for summarizing ideas and events in an original way. But Broué is a better historian. He uses quotes and backs up his sources. He avoids ready-made judgments. And now, unlike the time when Deutscher was writing, he has been able to have access to and use supplementary documentary sources and a secondary literature.*

*Above all Deutscher's third volume was marked by the author's over-polemical approach to his subject on all the questions in dispute between the two men in the 1930s. An objective examination of these questions with the information we have today leads us to the conclusion that it was Trotsky's analysis and not Deutscher's that was right on most of them. Two important examples bear this out. First of all the scope of the social/political crisis in France in 1934, culminating in the June 1936 General Strike and the subsequent defeat of the 1938 General Strike. Deutscher clearly underestimated this, even if Trotsky's June 1936 formulation 'The French revolution has begun' is debatable. Then there is the question of the foundation of the Fourth International in September 1938, recognizing the necessity to continue the work begun in 1933 of patiently building new revolutionary nuclei both nationally and internationally and of consolidating this work as far as possible against the pounding it would receive from the effects of World War.*

*On these questions and on many more, Broué, who is obviously politically closer to Trotsky than Deutscher was, is also a more objective historian. He writes as a supporter of Trotsky but not as an a-critical or awestruck admirer. He never hides his immense admiration and love for his subject – sentiments we understand since we share them. But he does not mythologise some guru or infallible politician." [didim escort](#), [marmaris escort](#), [didim escort bayan](#), [marmaris escort bayan](#), [didim escort bayanlar](#), [marmaris escort bayanlar](#)*

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[1] E. Germain : The discussion on the trade union question in the Bolshevik party (1920-1), in **Quatrième Internationale** 1955, No.1.

[2] George Novack has correctly emphasised Trotsky's contribution on this to the development of marxist thought, clarifying a central aspect of the political tasks of revolutionaries in the United States (George Novack : *Leon Trotsky's Contribution to Marxism* in **Proletarian Politics**, Baroda/India 1980, No.1/2). The same article contains a succinct and lucid presentation of the law of uneven and combined development that Trotsky first formulated, and a defence of the theory of permanent revolution which is based on this law. George Breitman developed the marxist (trotskyist) conception of the black question in the United States in more detail.