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# Leon Trotsky – The Man and His Work

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"Lenin is the reflection, the image of the (Russian) working class, not only in its proletarian present, but also in its still more recent proletarian past ... He absorbed from the national milieu all that he needed for accomplishing the greatest revolutionary action in all history ..." Thus Trotsky characterized the founder of Bolshevism, and it is thus that Lenin appears today. Lenin and Bolshevism could not have been born except as an outgrowth of the whole of Russia's ancient past. An imperialism that combined the defects of autocracy with its own special defects, developed so as not to breed the illusion of pacifist evolution, which gripped the workers' aristocracy of the Western countries. There wasn't a trace of fatalistic passivity in Lenin, and it could not have been otherwise ; the leader of the Russian revolution from his youth was oriented toward action. In fact, Lenin's life is a most striking example of the concentration of all the forces of a personality toward the realization of the historical objective of the class. The leaders of the Western working class movement were unable to view Lenin before 1914 as anything but an incomprehensible trouble-maker ; after 1914, for the most part, they hated him as an implacable enemy.

Trotsky was different. In spite of a childhood spent on a farm, he was influenced not so much from the peasant forces of his people as from the living forces of the imperialist world's great capitals to which his first two emigrations took him : London, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Madrid, New York. Of all the great Russian revolutionists he was without doubt the most "European," the one who absorbed Western civilization most thoroughly, who impregnated it with that revolutionary dynamism which existed intact within the Russian working class ; and thus succeeded in giving it its highest expression in this century.

With Lenin, action is the natural expression of his being and, starting from the concrete, inscribes itself on a body of ideas from which it remains inseparable. With Trotsky, action is the natural fulfillment of thought which seizes the concrete on the wing without ever letting it go. There is here only a shade of difference but it is this nuance which gives a finished maturity to their collaboration beginning with 1917.

These two giants did not live the simple life of legendary heroes. "Only incurable philistines imagine Lenin as a saint who never made a mistake," said Trotsky on this subject. Their faults and errors are closely linked with their profound natures. There is in Lenin, in his writings of 1905, in his ideas before 1917 on the nature of the Russian revolution, a reticence to leave the realm of the immediate, to push to its end the concept of the proletariat as the motivating force of the revolution. Not to exclude in advance the possibility of a revolutionary alliance between the proletarian party and an eventual party resting on the peasantry, meant for Lenin not to eliminate in advance the most immediate, direct, and least hazardous way of achieving the overthrow of the autocracy. This error, however, remains at all times within the framework of his revolutionary temperament. He could not have anything in common with Menshevism, which likewise characterizing the Russian revolution as being confined at first to the boundaries of the bourgeois revolution, surrendered to the "liberal" bourgeoisie (nonexistent, said Trotsky, and events proved him to be right !) – the leadership of the historic process. His will, rigorously turned toward the solution of every "theoretical" problem was still too hidebound to be able to conceive of the immediate conquest of power by the proletariat. Twelve years later, when Trotsky's theory was realized, thanks to the leadership of Lenin, he did not hesitate for a single instant to make the necessary turn in ideas as in action, but did he not say at the decisive moment that "this gave him vertigo ?"

Trotsky, for his part, standing politically at the opposite pole from Menshevism, was for a long time led astray by a too great confidence in the possibilities of uniting divergent political currents by purely intellectual persuasion. It is true that with a stroke of genius, he formulated, while still very young, his concept of the Permanent Revolution, which served as a key to an understanding of most of the revolutions of the twentieth century, thus distinguishing himself not only from the Russian revolutionists, but also from those of all Europe. Nevertheless, he remained too attached to

the "traditional" and inadequate organizational forms of Western social democracy to understand the necessity for the split which appeared so brutal in the eyes of the European leaders of the workers' movement. The application of Bolshevik organizational methods was needed for all Europe ; even Lenin himself had not yet grasped this. Trotsky, who all his life had a horror of fatalism, and could not rest content with the empty hopes of the German leaders that the process of "evolution" would "automatically" eliminate the "extravagances" of Lenin, nevertheless struggled in practice for organizational reconciliation. That is why he permitted himself to embark on the notorious "August bloc," which was entirely hostile to his political concepts. This is the explanation for the paradox that Lenin, guided by his fierce will to achieve his goal, for a long time remained an admirer of Kautsky, although the first in his own party to break sharply with the organizational concepts of centrism. While Trotsky, whose more profound knowledge of the European working class movement enabled him to understand long before Lenin the bankruptcy of Kautskyan ideology, remained for many years the defender of centrist organizational principles in Russia.

But what is characteristic of truly great men is that quality which permits them at decisive moments to go beyond their own particular limitations, raise themselves to the height of the tasks which history in a burning fashion presents to their class. This transformation was brought about "naturally," without any clashes or internal conflicts, both in Lenin and Trotsky in 1917. The same Lenin who all his life clung with superhuman obstinacy to a once-adopted position on principles, abandoned from the first day of the Russian revolution his formula of the "democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants," which was "by-passed by events," as he said, and became the fiercest partisan of the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Trotsky, the "conciliator," understood at the same moment and with the same quickness, that "unity" between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks "was no longer possible" (Irony of history, it was Stalin who drove him to that) and thus became, in Lenin's own words, "the best Bolshevik." Only the revolution could bring about this two-fold transformation with a minimum of difficulty, because both of them, true revolutionists that they were, felt and understood that the revolution was necessary to open the way to the victory of their class.

Trotsky has often been accused of having been too ambitious, too "personal" in his attitude toward the party, too haughty in his attitude toward the comrades. These accusations are absurd. Lenin, who possessed a psychological insight of rare quality, saw much more clearly when he revealed the weakness as a "too pronounced attraction" on Trotsky's part "toward the administrative side of things." But even the elderly Angelica Balabanov, who too often simply takes tidbits of corridor gossip and transforms them into the motive forces of history, made this penetrating remark : During the Revolution, at the very moment when the crowd was bearing him on their shoulders, Trotsky was able to efface more than ever before the pronounced "personal" traits of his character. Never was the arrogance of the "leader" more foreign to him than when all the threads for unleashing the revolution were gathered together in his hands. "With his natural tact," said Angelica, he knew how to impose the severest self-criticism when that was most necessary, and when it is nevertheless most difficult for the majority of mortals. It is here that we see the real strength of character which is at the base of every great action.

There was nothing in Trotsky of that vulgar "Marxism" which thinks it can read the historical process in statistics just as the palm-reader reads the future in the lines of the hand. Going far beyond "economics" or "sociology" as separate studies, he sought to capture human reality in all its aspects. That is why he was without question one of the greatest historians who have ever lived, the one who succeeded more than any other in that "integrated resurrection of the past," which has been only dreamed of since the time of Michelet. With his penetrating eye he encompasses, in a moment, the great movements of the masses and the personalities of the political leaders, the price of bread and the tone of the literary gazettes, the movements on the stock exchange, as well as piquant anecdotes overheard in the salons. His powerful brain is like an immense crucible in which are remoulded once again all the constituent elements of history. The subjects treated in his works range from philosophy, through political economy, applied economics, sociology, political polemics, history, biography, military technique, to journalistic essay and art criticism. How sum up a work so vast ? Is it simply political journalism ? Or is it "applied Marxism ?" It is that, but it is much more besides. It is a tremendous and continuous effort to understand and interpret man in his entirety, in order to be able to preside over his transformation. It is an unceasing effort to subject all phases of human activity to conscious criticism, so that they may be transformed under the direction of man's critical consciousness.

# Universal Interests

Although he had universal interests, Trotsky was at the opposite pole from dilettantism and eclecticism. This universality of interests, in order to be real and effective, requires their fundamental unity, their integration in a concept of the world which never stops "becoming," but which remains no less a unity, and which at the same time possesses precise outlines. More preoccupied than any other contemporary thinker with the many-sidedness of human reality, Trotsky is precise and careful in his documentation to the point of pedantry, and at the same time broad in his perspectives, capable of breaking away from the immediate in order to grasp the fundamental direction of events. Starting from the reality of the thousand and one aspects of human activity which are observed directly, he traces with the hands of a magician-sculptor a majestic panorama in which the essential outlines stand out with perfect clearness.

The "leitmotif" which links all his works is the materialist conception of history. This "leitmotif" he employs with a mastery that is unequalled ; sometimes going from the "essential reality" which is the class struggle, to the most "far-removed" manifestations of intellectual life ; sometimes digging the soil, with a science confident of itself, in order to probe the profound class roots of political and ideological phenomena. To each of these tasks he brought too much passion to be able to tolerate a negligent, superficial, or blasé attitude toward Marxist theory. It was for him an indispensable key to the understanding of history. Thanks to this key he always made history live for us in his works. He was at one and the same time its severest critic and its most eloquent herald. But he was able to be both of these only because he understood history so well.

There is in Trotsky a complete unity of theory and practice, of thought and action. Lenin poured on the renegade Kautsky the indignation of the proletariat toward one who is a traitor to their interests and their struggle for emancipation. Trotsky castigated with his contempt and bitter irony Kautsky's thinking which was in decay because divorced from action, a practice which was truly corrupt because divorced from principle. This unity between his own thought and action was most clearly revealed in revolutionary strategy and attains its highest form in the military strategy of the victorious proletariat. The revolutionary leader shoulders an overwhelming responsibility when he finds himself at the head of the masses ; the military chief has the same responsibility, plus the added responsibility for the very short lives of the thousands of soldiers who battle under him. Apart from the cynics, the morally deranged, or the luminaries, who are mentally deranged, men, in the face of such responsibilities, remain for the most part exposed to their doubts, their convictions, their wills, their capacity for making decisions. Trotsky, the outstanding military leader, possessed the additional resources of Trotsky, the revolutionary leader of the proletariat. Just as he understood how to feel the pulse of history, so with a penetrating glance he could take up a military map and determine the decisive place where all efforts should be concentrated. The resolution, the power, the steel-sharpness of his actions, spring from a clear understanding and an unshakeable conviction in the justice of the cause of the proletariat. Addressing the Red Army soldiers was for him the same as speaking on September 1917 in the Cirque Moderne in Petrograd. Directing the work of the staff office of the Southeastern front was only the logical continuation of his direction of the Revolutionary Military Committee ; and this, in turn, logically flowed from his work on the Central Committee of the Party.

One would seek in vain in his speeches to the Army, or in his attitude at the front, for a trace of the arrogance of the saber-rattler, or of that sinister "military spirit" which betrays an absurd discipline, a sterile routine and a bureaucratic approach, the whole combined with a "strategy" which makes sport of men as it does of the cheapest material. As against all the usual generals – Stalin's present Marshals included – who see no other means of preserving the cohesion of their troops than by appealing to their lowest instincts and by the threat of the knout, Trotsky never ceased to appeal to the revolutionary consciousness of the oppressed. To pseudo-revolutionary romanticism, with its opposition to centralized coordination in battle – only the counter-balance to bourgeois discipline – he counterposed the conscious and voluntary discipline of the proletariat. On this subject he declared twenty years later : "Even during the civil war I tried within the army – even in the midst of campaigns – to give full opportunity to the Communists to discuss all military decisions. I have even discussed these decisions with the soldiers and, as I have explained in my

autobiography, even with deserters." Who could reproach him for not always being able to realize this completely, since it was necessary to improvise everything in the midst of a world of enemies, and so many enemies even that he had to utilize ? The essential consideration is that unity of thought and action involves a comprehension of that dialectical interaction between the means and the end which guides every true revolutionist in his acts, by his desire above all to achieve the raising of the consciousness of his own class.

# Soldier of Revolution

This soldier of the Revolution differed very much from the image drawn of him not only by his enemies, but also by not a few of his admirers. The Hungarian White Guards in a celebrated caricature have represented him as a Red Lion, seated on a gigantic pyramid of skulls. On the other side, Karl Mayer tells us that at bottom he had in him a certain gentleness whose origin undoubtedly was an intelligence which seemed capable of understanding everything. This gentleness is seen again in his last words where, after expressing his confidence in the victory of our movement, he adds that all his life he has struggled for a society which would be free of all violence.

And how could it be otherwise ? In the heart of every true Marxist is a belief in man, without which all revolutionary activity is devoid of meaning. Throughout the last 20 years of his life, years of battling in retreat, of struggle against infamy, calumny, the growing degradation of humanity, he maintained that unshaken faith, without being ensnared by illusions, and retaining to the end his magnificent clear-sightedness. He liked to repeat that man's climb from the semi-ape stage has been long and arduous but that nevertheless no little progress has been achieved. And how well he knew how to scorn professional pessimists who are always trying to avenge themselves on humanity for their own illusions. All life ends in death, he said, but nevertheless statistics are constantly proving that men do not for this reason stop coming into the world. ...

At the foundation of all human activity there is, in reality, an indestructible optimism which is only another expression of the instinct of preservation. Marx's favorite adage was the Latin one : "Nil human ! a me alienum puto" (Nothing human can be alien to me). Trotsky understood that a revolutionary leader must be a man among men, and through his best works there runs the thread of this optimism, which is only an attachment to life, and which will always constitute a supplementary attractive force for all healthy men : "To love life with open eyes, with a critical spirit which never surrenders, without illusions, never embellishing it, but always taking it as it is, for whatever it may have to offer us and even more for what it may sometime become – that is an achievement of the highest order !" This achievement he realized better than any other.

But his faith in man has nothing in it of the mystic or irrational, it is only the highest form of consciousness. To love man is to grasp the alienation in one's own nature ; it means to rebel against the social inequality which has produced this frustration ; it means to struggle for man's integration into a classless society. In Trotsky there is not only complete unity of thought and action, but also of thought and feeling. The sharp sword of aggressive reasoning is animated by the fire of artistic sensibility ; and this formidable combination imparts to his speeches and writings, at one and the same time, that majestic cadence and that menacing spirit of warning which characterizes the multitudes in their march toward the revolution ! The workers who heard him immediately felt his complete communion with them, and they instinctively put confidence in him because they felt that he not only defended their interests but also that he hated, loved, struggled, suffered, and rejoiced with them. Trotsky did not idealize the proletariat, but he understood it perfectly, for he knew that none can lead the workers to victory without understanding them, and that no one will ever completely understand them without truly uniting with them.

His whole past and his whole character thus predestined him to become the standard-bearer of the opposition against the nascent bureaucracy in the USSR. Even when he was living at the Kremlin, the thick stone walls never separated him from the life of the masses. Even while in power, his ear was attuned to all the expressions of humor,

criticism, and dissatisfaction of the workers. With that conspicuous gift for generalization characteristic of him, he was able, beginning with 1923, to discern underneath that murmur of dissatisfaction, the beginning of a gigantic realignment of historic forces. In this realignment of forces, his place was predestined in advance. How he must have scorned those who ceased to be conscious builders of history in order to become transmission belts for hostile social forces. And how pitiful must have appeared to him the conservatism of those who satisfied their ambitions by driving to their offices in a limousine ! His own "ambition" embraced a vaster purpose : The revolutionary emancipation of the world proletariat ! When the political orientation of the Kremlin began to deviate from that aim, he parted company with it in the same natural manner with which all his life he has known how to attune his actions to his convictions. "The error" with which so many superficial critics reproached him, of having "hesitated" to "struggle for power" in 1923, is in reality an additional expression of that inherent quality ; never to act contrary to his convictions. The usurpation of power by the bureaucracy was by itself an indication for the Left Opposition of the ebbing forces of the Revolution. To struggle "for power" in a period of the passivity of the masses, is the work of adventurers and standard-bearers of reaction ; even if these people occasionally hide themselves in the folds of a revolutionary flag of the past. For those who conceive of "power" only as deriving from the revolutionary assault of the masses, the tasks in the period of reaction were determined as those of preserving the revolutionary traditions, of maintaining contact among the advanced elements of the party, of analyzing the developments of Thermidor and thus preparing the future revolutionary wave on the world arena as well as in the USSR. These are the tasks which the Left Opposition, and the world cadres of the Fourth International which have sprung from it, have without respite tried to accomplish under Trotsky's leadership.

Thus was Trotsky : every one of his acts was completely conscious ! Replying to a question of the French novelist Tatayans who was questioning him regarding his "idea on happiness," Trotsky replied : "To think – to write – to realize one's ideas." It is thus that he lived in his hotel rooms in Paris, in the salons of the Kremlin, in the semi-prisons of his third emigration, and in that sunny field where death finally felled him. Indifferent to the vicissitudes of the material conditions of life, his genius ripened, his thought clarified, his style was enriched and simplified along a straight line. His life in itself is thus a monument of conscience, a monument to the future man, the man who will be set completely free of material servitude, and who will no longer live alienated from his own nature.

## Authentic Marxism

Marx denied that he was a "Marxist" and Lenin scorned the word "Leninist." He merely considered himself a "consistent revolutionary Marxist." In his turn, Trotsky in his works has carefully placed the term "Trotskyism" between quotation marks and for years characterized this term as the designation on the part of Stalinist bureaucrats for Bolshevism. As one cannot doubt the authentic Marxist character of Leninism, so little can one doubt, after an objective examination, the authentic Leninist character of Trotskyism. Moreover, just as Leninism possesses no less its own physiognomy and constitutes a definite stage in the development and enrichment of Marxism, so Trotskyism appears today with its own specific traits, as a broadening of the teaching of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Trotskyism is the Marxism of our epoch, and that in the profoundest sense of the word.

The chief merit of Trotsky from the point of view of the history of ideas consists in this : He has literally preserved Marxism in the midst of a general recession in the workers' movement and of a complete degeneration of the traditional parties and ideologies. Without yielding an inch, he has preserved the Leninist heritage, on the theoretical as well as the tactical plane, against the enveloping movements of the epigones of Lenin and the scribes of Stalin. With the same tenacity, he defended this heritage against the feeble yet incessant frontal attacks of reformism and centrism.

The ideological decline of the great traditional movements was much more rapid and profound than their organizational decomposition. In its turn the actual break in practice with class politics on the part of European social

democracy had in 1914 preceded its complete theoretical rupture with revolutionary Marxism. German Social Democracy adopted a party program that was officially "reformist" only in 1921 (program of Görlitz) and definitively so only in 1925 (Heidelberg program). But one can state without exaggeration that beginning with 1914, the Social Democracy ceased paying any attention to theory. The rare "theoretical" writings which appeared after this date consist entirely of empirical rationalizations of successive phases of party "tactics." "The ideological efforts" of the degenerated Social Democracy consisted of an occasional attempt to "justify" theoretically the criminal passivity of their leaders confronted with the decay of capitalism, their cynical rejection of all revolutionary activity, their avowed incorporation into bourgeois "democracy," their cowardice before the attacks of the bourgeoisie, and their bad conscience with regard to the rebels in their own ranks. The result was a mixture of mechanistic fatalism and evolutionary cretinism. Hilferding "foresaw" several months before the outbreak of the 1929 crisis a "long period" of soaring capitalist prosperity ! – which left the reader only the choice between ennui and pity.

The ideological decay of the Stalinist bureaucracy came about with still more overwhelming rapidity. "Theory" became the abject servant of a "tactic" which was inspired by the appetites of the bureaucrats, just as in the Middle Ages philosophy was the servant of theology, a necessary covering for the temporal power of the Church. Never had it fallen so low, from the height of Lenin's genius, down to the heavy feet of the professional apologists of the Great Leader. The servility of the Stalinist "theoreticians," whose only function consisted of garnishing with "classical" quotations the spicy dishes which the too-famous cook prepared for the proletariat of Russia and the entire world, robs them of all esteem, even that of their own masters. But this complete ideological impotence is armed with the most powerful material apparatus that history has ever known, and the mass of inept and lying books, manufactured in chain fashion, combined with opportune raids by the GPU, is a social reality which has proven devastatingly strong. Theory becomes a power when it takes hold of the masses, Marx said. The lie has been proven a no less terrible power in the hands of an unscrupulous apparatus, so long as the masses do not surge back upon the political arena.

One trembles at the thought of what would have happened had Trotsky died in 1923. Of course, Marxism, the expression of contemporary social reality and its internal dynamics, would have been preserved by others. Tens, later hundreds and thousands of young theoreticians and tacticians of five continents, would have striven to arrive by common effort at a Marxist conception of actual events. But the balance of these efforts, in proportion to the positive results attained, would have witnessed a striking amount of wasted effort and lost time. Within his own person, Trotsky filled the gap created in the history of the working class movement by the disappearance of one whole generation, which was corrupted and physically broken by Stalinism, demoralized by the dismal succession of defeats, and annihilated by the mounting waves of reaction and fascism. The polemical works of those who had materially "vanquished" Trotskyism have passed into oblivion. Was it not because the authors themselves were for the most part executed as "Trotskyists ?" But the works of Trotsky dating from this period continue to be studied by thousands of young workers and intellectuals throughout the world, because these works alone represent the Marxist tradition in this black period in the history of humanity. The education of new revolutionary Marxist cadres is possible only thanks to the works of Trotsky. In preserving Marxism during the years of retreat and reaction, he has built the springboard for the ascending period which is just beginning. In the face of Stalinist victories, Trotsky used to rely upon the verdict of history. Seven years after his death, this verdict is already clear in the sphere of ideas – as Trotsky never doubted that it would be !

Like any method of investigation and systemization of the facts of experience, Marxism can be maintained only on condition that it be continually enriched. Any attempt to fall back defensively on "tradition," without any effort to encompass the new developments which are continually taking place through the sieve of the materialist dialectic, is certain to bring about a fatal ossification of the theory and to end in its certain death. Trotsky's represents the only serious effort to interpret in the light of Marxism those disconcerting phenomena of the last three decades, namely : The development of fascism, the usurpation of power in the USSR by the bureaucracy, the zig-zag evolution of soviet economy, the monstrously accelerated decay of the capitalist world, and the general crisis in the revolutionary leadership of the proletariat. Lenin had advanced and enriched the heritage of Marx by his study of imperialism, of the world war, and of the first revolutionary wave. His work is Marxism in the epoch of the rise of imperialism and of

the October revolution. On Trotsky has fallen the heavy task of enriching the heritage of Marx and Lenin in the epoch of reaction and triumphant counter-revolution. He has thus continued the tradition with the same implacable clarity, the same breadth of vision, the same sharpness of analysis possessed by those who preceded him.

The instinct to preserve privileges, except in the case of individuals who consciously break with this, imparts to thought a narrow and insurmountable framework, against which every effort at "objective" social study comes to grief. The dynamism of revolutionary proletarian thought lies precisely in its "emancipation" from every social privilege ; its "material interests" coincide with a "disinterestedness" from the social point of view. But the workers' bureaucracies, both reformist and Stalinist, have in their turn become privileged and conservative social forces in contemporary society. Just as they have debased ideology in general to the level of serving their material greeds, so have they-rendered their own thought sterile and impotent for the new investigations which history is constantly demanding. The betrayals of the traditional leaderships during the Spanish Civil War, which were historic expressions of their own material interests as opposed to those of the world proletariat, took the form of a total incapacity to understand the significance of fascism, the decay of capitalism, and the revolutionary strategy of the proletariat that could vanquish these additional obstacles. It is not by chance then that for two decades not a single work has appeared by a Stalinist or reformist "theoretician," except as an isolated or secondary phenomenon. All the enrichments of Marxism in the field of history, sociology, the study of art, literature, or psychology, are in works by the disciples of Trotsky, or by those who have been educated in his spirit. Certainly, the period of reaction, which has barely ended, is not favorable for the flowering of a large generation of Marxists. This generation is only beginning to knock at the door. Nevertheless, the interest in theory which is to be found in the ranks of the sympathizers or partisans of the Fourth International, their efforts to study the most pressing ideological problems – the materialist conception of important aspects of history not yet clarified ; the relationship between Marxism and psychology ; the investigation of the subjective factor in history ; the study of the materialist dialectic ; the attempt to elaborate a materialist conception of art and literary criticism – all these efforts, begun by young theoreticians in France and China, in India and the United States, in Argentina and Palestine, have been done under the sign of the works of Leon Trotsky. In these works themselves is to be found an endless treasure of fertile ideas and outlines of new methods of investigation. An entire generation will be required to elaborate on the suggestions interspersed through his works. This generation will work and succeed only thanks to the school which was built by his efforts.

But the preservation of Marxism and its enrichment through the study of the new phenomena of our epoch – that alone does not demarcate the place which Trotsky occupies in the development of Marxist thought. There is an essential part of Marxism which could not have been systematized before his time.

Marx's work in its entirety is only the scientific interpretation of the world and of the tendencies inherent in its transformation. As for the conscious realization of this transformation, and the actual proletarian revolution, of that he was able to leave us only general considerations and numerous isolated remarks, but no systematic study. On the contrary, the tenacity with which he resisted the elaboration of any "advance plan," the formulation of any "general rule," arose precisely from his clear understanding that the detailed study of proletarian strategy and tactics for the conquest of power must be based on a broad revolutionary experience. He lived to see only the initial effort of the Paris Commune in this scheme of ideas. That is why he had to leave to his successors, the task of completing Marxism, in this sense.

Lenin, for his part, made a tremendous effort to state precisely and demarcate the role of the subjective factor : the importance of the party, the formation of the vanguard, its relationship with the class. These efforts, combined with a precise and systematic tactic of struggle, which was principled, realistic, and revolutionary, are considered by us today, and deservedly, to have a universal application ; Lenin, however, at least up to 1914, limited his vision to the Russian Social Democracy. Beginning with the downfall of the Second International, however, his field of action rapidly broadened. He became the educator of the whole world proletariat. His writings on the strategy of revolutionary defeatism, on the building of revolutionary parties, on the tactics of the united front, on national and colonial questions, as well as the whole of his practical activity during and after the Russian Revolution, constitute the



most precious teaching that the proletariat possesses for the elaboration of a revolutionary policy. Nevertheless, Lenin's experience was limited to the Russian revolution and to the first stage of the German revolution. Subsequent experience has shown that the general study of the subjective factor, of the role and policy of the revolutionary party – which constitutes Lenin's contribution to contemporary Marxism – has to be completed by a special study of the internal laws of the development of the proletarian revolution, of the mechanism of revolution, and of the tactic of the revolutionary party with a view to the conquest of power. This indispensable complement to Marxism, this "science of revolution" in the double sense of the word, could be systematically elaborated only on the basis of a wider revolutionary experience than that of 1917. Trotsky made a brilliant beginning in *Lessons of October* and *The Communist International after Lenin*. He has more precisely elaborated it to the point where it now exists in exact outline form, in his *Permanent Revolution*, his *History of the Russian Revolution* and his writings on the subject of Germany, France, and Spain between 1930 and 1938. The substance of this historically important work is to be found in the programmatic writings of the Fourth International. Thus these represent not only the heritage of Marx and Lenin, the teachings of the Communist Manifesto, of *Capital*, of *What is to be Done?*, *Imperialism and the First Four Congresses of the Communist International*, but also of 30 years of proletarian victories and defeats in an epoch when the world was constantly swinging between revolution and counter-revolution.

Lenin educated three generations of Russian worker-militants in the art of building the revolutionary party and the principled development of its political tactics. But only in 1917 did he arrive at a clear understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Most of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party were unable for their part to assimilate the lessons of October 1917. No more did the revolutionary militants who came to the Comintern in 1919 have an understanding of these lessons on the basis of their own individual development, heavily handicapped as they were by the "peaceful" development of the prewar years, their isolation during the hostilities, the too rapid and tumultuous unfoldment of the post-war revolutionary wave. The subsequent development of this vanguard was completely blocked by the degeneration of the Third International beginning with 1923 – the most nefarious crime of Stalinism against the world proletariat. In place of a selection of a revolutionary leadership on the basis of its political maturity, there occurred a reverse selection, on the basis of servility and obedience to the Kremlin. When the Trotskyists were excluded from the CI, everything had to be started all over again. The building of a new revolutionary vanguard was begun, one that was capable of acting in accordance with the lessons of the October victory and the subsequent defeats. It was to this task that Trotsky devoted most of his time. It is the accomplishment of this task which will have the greatest influence on the future course of history.

This building of a new revolutionary vanguard was undertaken under the most difficult conditions, at a time when the world working class movement was dragged into a long series of defeats. Thus of necessity, it was a movement "against the current." Around the living Marxism, personified by Trotsky, were gathered above all those elements who had not been discouraged by the defeats. These were always the most fearless, but were not always the best. Those, who because of their more intimate ties with the proletariat, reflected the illusions and discouragements of the class, did not enter our ranks. Those who never succeeded in integrating themselves in the mass movement came with less hesitation to the small handful of outcasts. The education of this vanguard too often took the form of a literary and academic exercise, for the only real school of revolutionary strategy is in active participation in the revolutionary movement of the masses. The vanguard, due to its isolation, developed a number of defects, characteristic of a whole period of recession : excessive factionalism, sectarianism, the presumptuousness of the intellectual with its inevitable corollary, professional proletarianism. Work was directed inward and political discussions, indispensable to any healthy organization, took on a too abstract character, rarely consisting of a critical review of tactical concepts in the light of their concrete application to the workers' struggle. Moreover, in Europe as well as in the USSR and the Far East, Fascist, Stalinist, and Imperialist terror implacably mowed down the most courageous and capable of our cadres, thus destroying at each turn the continuity in education and experience of this new vanguard. All these factors which expressed themselves differently in different countries, can be summed up thus : Since a genuine revolutionary vanguard can be built only in close contact with the activity of the class, and a genuine revolutionary policy can only be elaborated in contact and under the critical eye of the masses, we possessed in most countries at the close of the period of recession only groups of cadres, only skeleton organizations. But the first test, that of the war, has shown how effective was this necessary preparation. Some

people may have deserted ; here and there human material may have shown itself to be too weak ; new groups of revolutionists have had to take up the torch in not a few countries, but everywhere the basic policy was formulated, a common line was elaborated, the same method of organization was applied, thanks to the program, tradition, and the cadres which Trotsky had created in the years before the war. On the basis of the program he elaborated are gathered together all those who desire to build genuine revolutionary parties. The tradition which he first began in the history of the working class movement is that of a genuine world leadership which is more than merely the sum total of the national leaderships, or the authority of one organization leading in its wake all the others. Thereby, one of the essential causes of early Comintern weakness might have been avoided and supplementary guarantees provided for the harmonious development of our movement.

At the time that the Fourth International was founded, Trotsky predicted that it would count millions of partisans within ten years. Sarcastic critics maliciously enjoy citing this prognosis and asking where these millions are. But historic predictions are not payable on a certain date like bills. The historic process has developed more slowly than Trotsky anticipated but it has developed along the same line. In countries like France, India, United States, Bolivia, we count tens of thousands of workers and poor peasants who sympathize with our ideas, and on the world arena, there are already, without doubt, several hundreds of thousands. They are still few enough compared with the forces necessary to bring our work to fruition ; but it is even now an impressive army compared to our feeble forces of 1938. The first important wave of worker's struggles in France was sufficient for organs as diverse, but equally hostile to our movement, as the Stalinist L'Humanité and Henry Luce's Time magazine, to discover "Trotsky's shadow" projecting itself upon events. This alone is sufficient to imbue us with confidence.

We very strongly doubt that we shall meet our critics again in the next stage !

## Slower Tempo

All of us have erred in our immediate perspectives ; in drawing too-mechanical analogies with 1918. We were not sufficiently impregnated with Trotsky's fundamental concept that we had to "prepare for long years, if not decades, of wars, uprisings, brief interludes of peace, new wars and new insurrections." It is now clear, however, that we are not passing through a brief period, analogous to that of 1918-1923, in which the revolutionary energy of the proletariat was rapidly exhausted by the extreme violence and the rapid succession of decisive struggles. Such a period can no longer be repeated in Europe because the bourgeoisie is incomparably weaker and its economy incomparably more shaken ; and decisive decisions on the part of the proletariat have been impossible because it started from a much lower level of consciousness and organization than that of 1918 ; it did not have behind it 30 years of progress, making it confident of its own forces, but instead 25 years of continual defeats, which have left a dangerous heritage of skepticism and discouragement. This paradox must be understood, that the rhythm will be slower in the stage of the atomic bomb than in that of the first bombing planes. But it will be precisely this slower rhythm of development which "will provide the young revolutionary party with opportunities of testing itself, of accumulating experience and of maturing." We no longer have the living brain of Trotsky, who with his incomparable clarity of thought, would have made easier the task of discovering under the surface of an apparently little disturbed sea, the powerful currents which are already proclaiming the next tempest. But we have his method as a guide and his teachings on the subject of the nature of our epoch which permit us to confidently repeat today what he himself said in the past :

« History is a powerful machine in the service of our ideas. It works with merciless deliberation and insensibility, but it does work ! We believe in it. It is only in those instants when its greedy mechanism absorbs the very hot blood of our hearts ; that we have the urge to cry out : 'This thing you are doing, do it more quickly !' »