

Trotsky and Marxism II

By Max Shachtman

TROTSKY was a warrior of internationalism. He did not conclude his analyses with the tired yawn of a dilettante who has just turned out a literary essay and has nothing further to do. The organisation of groups of intelligent, devoted, and zealous men of action to carry out a programme of struggle was not the least of his preoccupations.

In this field Trotsky has been criticised, not only by enemies but also by friends, more than he had perhaps been in any other. But rarely has such criticism been objective, or made with a sense of proportion. What Trotsky did and tried to do in the building of the Fourth International — and we date this work back at least to the time of his expulsion and exile by Stalin — he was compelled to do under unprecedented handicaps, virtually single-handed, and in the most complicated situations imaginable. Marx had not only an Engels to work with, but others who also attained a certain significance in stature. Lenin had about him, even in the period of the 1906-16 reaction, to say nothing of the following period, a group of distinguished collaborators. Moreover, both Marx and Lenin, however difficult the circumstances under which they worked, never suffered anything like the fetters and gags imposed upon Trotsky. Trotsky, from the moment of his expulsion down to the day of his death, was deprived of the highly-qualified and experienced collaboration to which he had been accustomed. The ravages of Stalinism, on the one side, and of the official labour bureaucracy on the other, plus the hammer-blows of defeat then descended on the head of the working class, one after another, year in-year out, wiped out a whole generation of revolutionists. Probably ninety-five percent of the international Trotskyist movement was made up of young militants, with comparatively little experience in the revolutionary or labour movements. They were primarily disciples, avidly absorbing the brilliant teachings of an incomparable leader; they were not yet collaborators.

In such a situation, the burden that Trotsky cheerfully assumed was colossal! It is only slightly exaggerated to say that he was an International, a general staff of the world revolution, all by himself. What malicious adversaries set down as his "lust for power", was nothing more than a courageous determination to promote the cause of the working class, a keen appreciation of the need of imbuing as large a section of militants as possible with the revolutionary doctrine of Marxian internationalism, and a perfectly objective awareness of the historically important role he had to play.

Did he make errors? More than one! The wonder is, however, that under the circumstances he made so few. And in judging his life and work as a whole, all his errors put together occupy a pretty small corner of the picture. Our comrades, the writer included, had more than one difference of opinion with Trotsky, not only while the split was taking place in the American section of the Fourth International, but often before it. But what weight in the scale have even our differences on the question of the Soviet Union in the war compared with all that Trotsky taught us about the principles of the Russian revolution, about the course of its development and its decay? What weight

in the scale have our differences with him on the estimation of the regime in the Socialist Workers Party and of the merits of the respective groups, compared with what he taught the whole revolutionary movement about bureaucratism and workers' democracy, beginning with *The New Course* in 1923 (and even earlier), compared with the truly titanic and uncompromising struggle he conducted for almost twenty years against the most vicious and most powerful bureaucracy the labour movement, and perhaps society as a whole, had ever seen?

Trotsky understood better than anyone else that internationalism meant nothing without a world organisation of internationalists. Trotsky was the founder, the guide, the heart and brain, the motor of the Fourth International. Not even death can deprive that International of the heritage he left. It would be idle to deny that the International was dealt a murderous blow when the assassin's mattock pierced the lion's head, a blow it will be long in recovering from. But the rock the International was founded on cannot be pierced; there is no axe powerful enough to break through that solid system of ideas which Trotsky's genius incorporated into its foundations.

TROTSKY was the author of the programme of the Fourth International, as well as of its principal programmatic documents both before and after its formal founding. It is not only the programme of the world party of the social revolution. It is the fighting programme of workers wherever they engage in class struggle. Wherever that struggle is effective, it is fought along the lines sketched in the programme of the International. Wherever the workers take up the struggle for their class interests, they follow the lines of that programme whether they have read it or not.

Trotsky's revolutionary optimism was irrepressible. The fatal sicknesses of capitalism and the permanent social eruptions it is heir to, were no secret to him. He preserved his revolutionary perspectives to the last, right in the midst of the blackest period the movement has ever known. Scoffers and faint-hearts there are a-plenty to dismiss Trotsky's revolutionary ideas and perspectives today as "fantasy." They are not more numerous today than they were between 1906 and 1917, when he outlined the course the Russian revolution would take, and they are not wiser.

Under the banner of the First International, Trotsky liked to say, the foundations were laid. The Second International mobilised the masses into independent political movements. The Third International was the banner under which the Russian workers and peasants triumphed. The Fourth International will lead the struggle for world victory! The Fourth International — that was Trotsky's crowning work. Its ideas are his heritage to the proletarian socialist movement. Its victory will be his great vindication, the victory of the permanent revolution.

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