

Lenin and Trotsky: the anatomy of a relationship

Sungur Savran

*This article was originally written in Turkish to be published on the 75th anniversary of Trotsky's assassination in Mexico in 2015 by an agent of Stalin. This year is the 80th anniversary of the death of the great revolutionary, so we thought it would be meaningful to publish the same article in English on this occasion. However, this year also marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Lenin. While thinking about what could be prepared for Lenin, we realised that this article is in fact perfectly appropriate for thinking about both Lenin and Trotsky and most importantly their relationship. This is in fact what the article is about. So we are publishing this article in **Revolutionary Marxism 2020** in remembrance and celebration of the great lives of both Lenin and Trotsky. The translation into English is the author's own work. We have omitted an occasional detail here and there that we thought would be of no interest to the international reader, especially in footnotes citing Turkish translations of Trotsky's works. Otherwise the article here is identical with the Turkish version published five years ago. (Author's note of 2020)*

Before going into a detailed discussion on Lenin and Trotsky, we would like to draw the reader's attention to a significant fact: we are here face to face with two geniuses with whom it would be difficult to compare any other revolutionary figure of the 20th century. Strangely enough at first sight, these two geniuses were the products of the same country in the same period. In a certain sense, these two are the Marx and Engels of the 20th century, only transposed from Western Europe

towards that extraordinary country that one is hard put to situate exactly on the Eurasian land mass.

This is no coincidence. If these two geniuses appeared in turn-of-the-century Russia, it was because the 1917 Russian revolution, to this day the greatest of all proletarian revolutions, solicited their services. What do we mean by “solicit”? The very few people in a certain space and time who are so talented as to be called “geniuses” are attracted towards certain life activities depending on the characteristics of the historical epoch they find themselves living in. The Russian proletariat roared and soared with such ferocity from the end of the 19th century all the way up to 1917 that it was able to draw these two geniuses into its orbit.

Trotsky himself narrates the intensity of the revolutionary fervour of the Russian proletariat around this time in his autobiography, *My Life*. “In 1896,” he says, “the famous weavers’ strikes broke out in St. Petersburg. This put new life into the intelligentsia.” Then he explains what impact this had on the courses of political education that he and some other youthful revolutionaries organised (he is only 18 years old). “The workers streamed toward us as if they had been waiting for this. They all brought friends; some came with their wives, and a few older men joined the groups with their sons. We never sought them out; they looked for us. Young and inexperienced leaders that we were, we were soon overwhelmed by the movement we had started. Every word of ours met with a response.”¹ Anyone who has been involved in revolutionary activity will comprehend immediately what a dizzying picture this is. If such a picture presents an almost uninterrupted continuity for more than two decades (with interludes such as the period of reaction between 1907 and 1912) and if three revolutions occur in the space of these two decades, then even the greatest genius will remain anchored to this movement! Once again, the subjective factor turns out to be subordinate to the objective. The determining element is class struggle as a material factor.

Had the Russian proletarian and revolutionary movement not been able to display such strength, Lenin and Trotskiy would each have proved to be towering figures, we have no doubt, in other spheres of human activity. It might be an intriguing exercise to speculate what sphere each would separately develop their talents in. It is our conviction that Lenin would have turned out to be an expert in the more rigorous and austere spheres of mental activity, from philosophy to law to mathematics. That a Russian professor said of Lenin, after a series of lectures the latter had given at a university in Paris, that he was “a perfect professor”² is no superfluous occurrence. The systematic nature of his thinking, which meticulously wove its arguments so as to leave no loopholes, is enough to show, we think, that Lenin might easily have been one of the foremost names in any branch of science, social or natural. Who knows, he might even have turned into a Russian competitor of the great Einstein, more or less his contemporary (although the latter was really born in the same year as not Lenin but Trotsky).

Trotsky, on the other hand, displays the disposition of an artist, or more

¹ Leon Trotsky, *My Life*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970, pp. 104 and 106.

² *My Life*, op. cit., p. 149.

specifically of the literary artist, rather than a man of science, a “professor”. Had the revolution not taken up the better part of his life activity, perhaps the Russian novel, dear to literary fans the whole world over, might perhaps have produced a twentieth-century Tolstoy. This is not to say that Trotsky was any less systematic in his work than Lenin. But the imagination plays a much greater part in his *oeuvre* than the former. With large brushstrokes, he recapitulates decades, roams continents, and pictures the past and the future at once. He possesses an almost supernatural prescience, but as he himself admits from time to time this is the product as much of intuition as of the intellect: it is as if the artist has mobilised his imagination towards the future. His pen is at times excruciatingly emotional and so fiercely incisive at others as to rip the enemies of the proletarian cause to pieces.

Leaving the world of speculation behind and setting our feet on the ground of lived history once again, we would further like to draw the reader’s attention to a second detail. We said above that Lenin and Trotsky were the Marx and Engels of the 20th century, so to speak. But it is impossible not to realise at once the striking contrast between the two pairs of revolutionary geniuses. Having met in 1844 and spent a ten-day period together exchanging ideas in the fall of that year, Marx and Engels thereupon developed a lifelong companionship both personally and intellectually. Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, despite remaining members of the same party in the broad sense of the word all their lives,³ nonetheless were engaged in constant political and intellectual conflict for years, excepting the first year of their acquaintance, after the young Trotsky, still 23, having escaped from his first Siberian exile, broke into Lenin’s bedroom in London at dawn one day in the fall of 1902. They remained political rivals until the great rage and fury of the working class brought them together on the barricades of the revolution in 1917. To the extent that the subjective factor, or, in other words, the human factor, the will, consciousness, the organisation influences the course of history, and there is no doubt that history is not a blind process that is determined in advance, it must be admitted that the development of 20th century socialism and revolution was deeply marked by the relationship between these two bigger-than-life figures not only in Russia but internationally as well. This relationship is what constitutes the final object of this paper and also the sole reason why Lenin and Trotsky are dealt with together in the same article, otherwise quite a daunting task.

It would be well to indicate that this approach to Trotsky is the product of an outlook that is rather specific, that this sets us apart from many Trotskyist movements and thinkers. This is even an understatement: it removes us light years away from Trotskyism as it is generally conceived. For the majority of Trotskyists, the great revolutionary is a historic figure that is to be taken up separately from Lenin, on

³ Although the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) had split into two in 1912 after a nine-year faction fight, even in 1917 Lenin was trying to win over not only those like Trotsky who remained independent of both wings, but also internationalist Mensheviks such as Martov. However, formally speaking, there were two parties after 1912. That is why we say “in the broad sense of the word” in the text above. Of course, from 1917 on, Trotsky, as well as Lenin, were members of the same, Bolshevik Party.

the basis of the merits of his theory and practice. Some would go even further and counterpose Trotsky to Lenin. We aim to show in this article that such an approach to Trotsky is without foundation and contradicts historical fact and, moreover, harmful for the construction of the communist movement of the future, a movement to which both of our protagonists felt they belong to without any reserve. Let us say it clearly and loudly from the outset: for us, *there is no Trotsky independently of Lenin* nor can there be.

We are *not* asserting thereby that Trotsky was simply an ordinary loyal disciple of Lenin. Trotsky was of such a calibre, so independent and creative in his thinking and as a revolutionary that he could not have behaved as a “disciple” of anyone, even of Marx, let alone of any other revolutionary. He may perhaps be characterised as having gone too far in his quest for independence, as we shall presently see, but a disciple, never! As we shall have occasion to point out below, Trotsky has made contributions of his own to Marxism in the spheres of theory, programme and practice, contributions that have changed Marxism and proletarian revolutionary practice forever. Yet these represent only one aspect of Trotsky’s significance in history (and we shall see that there is close kinship between some of these contributions and those of Lenin). But Trotsky’s work as a thinker and revolutionary *in its entirety* cannot be taken up and assessed in isolation from his relationship to Lenin. The method of this article is adapted to this view and the conclusions reached strive to demonstrate this point, one of the fundamental constitutive elements of revolutionary Marxism in our age in our opinion.

1. Trotsky’s contribution to Marxism and proletarian revolution

It would be folly to try to squeeze into the framework of a single article the entire contribution of figures such as Lenin or Trotsky. We should point out that the themes raised in this section are confined to those aspects of Trotsky’s contributions that we see as the most significant and indispensable.

Permanent revolution

The most important original contribution that Trotsky made to Marxism is, in our opinion, his approach summed up in the concept of “permanent revolution”. Until Trotsky, Marxism took up the development of modern society under two clearly distinct stages, both theoretically and programmatically. In the beginning, the seeds of capitalism growing in the bosom of feudal or otherwise pre-capitalist societies prepared, albeit at different paces, the dynamics of the transition to capitalism culminating in the explosive processes of bourgeois revolutions. The English revolution of the 17th century and the American and, most significantly, French revolutions of the 18th had created enormous upheavals, bringing in all classes and strata of society in a decisive battle and ending up by paving the way to the unfettered development of capitalism. The simultaneous eruption of revolution across Europe in 1848 made the tremors of bourgeois revolution felt all the way to the eastern fringes of the continent. Then came the age of proletarian revolutions, starting with the more modest June 1848 revolution in France and the epoch-making

experience of the Paris Commune in 1871.

In an *oeuvre* that extended from the *Paris Manuscripts* through the *Communist Manifesto* all the way to *Capital*, Marx (in collaboration with Engels) had studied the process through which the dynamics of capitalism created the bases of a socialist, classless society. Now, therefore, it was time for Marxism to develop the theorisation and strategy of this new type of revolution. By the turn of the century, these two types of revolution, i.e. bourgeois and proletarian, had been clearly conceptualised as two different historical formations.

However, history does not proceed in pure fashion. Phenomena that are necessarily separated and studied in isolation from each other interpenetrate, change locations, substitute for each other. At the turn of the century, many a society (from Russia and China to Turkey) that had not yet undergone bourgeois revolution had seen a certain level of capitalist development, ushering in the formation of a proletariat, albeit to a divergent degree, and leaving deep traces and scars on the traditional life conditions of the peasantry. It certainly could not be assumed that this new situation would not have any impact on the modality of the formation of the bourgeoisie in these countries and its political attitude, particularly in times of political upheaval.

Trotsky, at the age of 26, taking the 1905 revolution in Russia as his laboratory, came to the conclusion that, under the new conditions of world capitalism, the two revolutions conceptualised by Marxism would henceforth develop in interpenetrating fashion. On the basis of a tendency observed most clearly in Russia, the democratic revolution would be victorious only if it grew over to a socialist revolution. This was because the bourgeoisie had gradually lost its earlier revolutionary character and abdicated from the leadership of the revolution to abandon it to the proletariat. It was only possible to complete the tasks of the democratic revolution by effecting the rise to power of the proletariat supported by the peasantry. Once in power, the proletariat would necessarily have to make inroads into the rule of capital and thus set off the process of transition to socialism.⁴ Hence, the communist programme had to be shifted from the perspective of two distinct revolutions in two different stages towards that of permanent revolution, i.e. the growing over of the bourgeois revolution into the proletarian revolution. The history of the 20th century has verified this outlook not only in Russia, but also in subsequent revolutions, from the Chinese to the Yugoslav and from the Vietnamese to the Cuban.⁵

We need to touch upon briefly two other aspects of the question of permanent revolution. The theoretical-methodological aspect involves a contribution of Trotsky to the concept of uneven development. Many people today refer to a certain “law of uneven and combined development” without even mentioning its original author. This law (in the more correct form of “combined and uneven development”) is the brainchild of and a contribution to Marxist dialectics by Trotsky. The dynamics that lead to the rise of permanent revolution as a historical category is due to

⁴ This original vision was laid out most succinctly in the book *Results and Prospects*, which drew the conclusions of the 1905 Russian revolution, written in prison in 1906.

⁵ For a useful source on this see Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development. The Theory of Permanent Revolution*, London: Verso, 1981.

the fact that precisely because societies that are living in different ages (uneven development) are now, under the rule of capital, more and more linked to each other on the world scale (combined development), which leads in contradictory fashion to a situation where each society develops within its bosom the coexistence of different ages (combined and uneven development). This law also sheds light on the so-called phenomenon of “underdevelopment” within the framework of the interdependence within world capitalism of economies that display different degrees of the development of capitalism and of productive forces, a phenomenon that both mainstream bourgeois, Stalinist and petty-bourgeois “dependency” theory have failed to explain in its dynamic development in satisfactory fashion.

The second aspect has to do with the further development and enrichment of the concept of permanent revolution after its initial formulation in 1906. In a book written during his internal exile in Alma Ata (today’s Almaty in Kazakhstan) in 1928, titled precisely *Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky both generalised the theory to other countries that shared Russia’s predicament and further refined the concept to include three different processes at once: the growing over of the democratic revolution into socialist revolution; the constant revolutionising of social relations in post-revolutionary transitional societies between capitalism and socialism; and the fundamental idea, present in Marxist theory and programme from the very first moment, that revolution can only be completed and irreversibly victorious if, having started at the scale of a nation or a full region, it develops and extends around the globe to become world revolution.

The originality of the revolution of the 20th century

It is of course impossible to elaborate on the rich implications of the concept of permanent revolution in this brief treatment. However, one implication seems to us of special importance when taken up in conjunction with Lenin’s contributions to Marxist theory and strategy. These two great leaders of the international revolutionary movement presented, pursuing each the path dictated by his own intellectual and practical achievements, a radiography of the revolution of the 20th century in ways that surprisingly share many commonalities. Régis Debray, a pro-Castro French intellectual in his prime, wrote a book after the Cuban revolution that defended the so-called “*foco*” strategy with the appealing title “Revolution in the Revolution”.⁶ There is no need to go into the vacuity of the claim save to remind the reader that the “*foco*” strategy can be implemented successfully only under very special conditions⁷ and to point out that the author of this “revolutionary” idea himself went over later to the bourgeois republican camp and acted as an advisor to the president of the French imperialist republic. The real “revolution in the revolution”, in our opinion, was effected at the dawn of the 20th century by the shared contributions of Lenin and Trotsky.

6 Régis Debray, *Révolution dans la révolution*, Paris: François Maspero, 1967.

7 We have taken this up in an article (in Turkish) in which we assessed Che’s Marxism: “Che Guevara’nın Marksizm İçindeki Yeri” [“The Place of Che Guevara in Marxism”], *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 5, Winter 2007-2008, pp. 102-143.

Thanks to his theory of imperialism and, in particular, his emphatic idea that imperialism was a new stage of capitalism that was its highest, on the one hand, and his great programmatic stride forward very early on in the area of the national question with the promotion of the concept of the self-determination of nations into the status of a principle, Lenin reached the seminal conclusion that revolution in the 20th century would be the combined product of the struggle of the international proletariat *and* the rise of the oppressed nations fighting against imperialist enslavement. Within the framework of this combined development⁸ of world revolution, the solution to the national question now becomes the most important task of the democratic revolution in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. The most urgent priority of the revolution in such countries is to throw off the yoke of imperialism and wrest the peoples of those countries from the abasement and humiliation they suffer under colonial rule. It is precisely in the same context that Lenin makes a priority of the struggle against bourgeois or petty-bourgeois socialism (social democracy) in the imperialist countries, a political current whose social roots lie in the labour aristocracy that emerged as a result of the sharing out of the extra profits made possible by imperialism. All of this means that the new circumstances of the 20th century have burdened revolutionary parties with a new set of programmatic tasks.

Proceeding along his own trajectory, Trotsky has reached, by the end of the 1920s, the conclusion that in all countries where the democratic revolution is on the agenda, including those enslaved by imperialism, the tasks of this revolution, starting from that of national liberation, now falls to the young proletariat and its communist vanguard party. Everywhere the revolution will either transmute into permanent revolution or stop halfway: for instance, even if the colonial countries achieve their independence in formal terms thanks to a national revolution, they will subsequently fall back to the status of semi-colonies, unless the proletariat and its revolutionary party march at the head of the revolution to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and put an end to colonial servitude once and forever.⁹

In our opinion, these two visions of 20th century revolution are complementary in nature. While Lenin points to the indispensability of the alliance between the international proletariat and the colonial and semi-colonial peoples in revolt against servitude and thus makes clear that social emancipation and national liberation must march *arm in arm*, Trotsky shows that when transposed into individual countries these tasks *interpenetrate* to become a single revolutionary process with a multitude

8 We deliberately and purposely use Trotsky's concept while talking about Lenin.

9 That the revolution was moving towards the East as a result of the imperialist servitude was perceived by Trotsky independently of Lenin. One can see this starting with the "Manifesto of the Communist International" that Trotsky drafted in 1919. See "Manifeste de l'Internationale Communiste aux prolétaires du monde entier!", *Manifestes, Thèses et Résolutions des quatre premiers congrès mondiaux de l'Internationale Communiste*, 1919-1923, Paris: La Brèche-Sélio, 1984, pp. 30-34 or "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World", *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestoes of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, 2nd Printing London: Pluto Press, 1983, pp. 27-36.

of duties to be achieved. A brief comparison can show us how significant are the original contributions of both Lenin and Trotsky. Gramsci, no doubt a great Marxist theoretician, another follower of Lenin as opposed to the preposterous liberal image that many have depicted him in, in his youth greeted the October revolution with an article ironically titled “The Revolution Against *Capital*”. This is what he had to say:

It's a revolution against Karl Marx's *Capital*. In Russia, Marx's *Capital* was the book of the bourgeoisie, more than of the proletariat. It was the crucial proof needed to show that, in Russia, there had to be a bourgeoisie, there had to be a capitalist era, there had to be a Western-style of progression, before the proletariat could even think about making a comeback, about their class demands, about revolution... The Bolsheviks renounce Karl Marx and they assert, through their clear statement of action, through what they have achieved, that the laws of historical materialism are not as set in stone, as one may think, or one may have thought previously.¹⁰

Thus, in contrast to the grasp that the young Trotsky developed in his theory and programme of permanent revolution, telescoping different historical periods into the same contemporaneous space, the young Gramsci¹¹ concludes that a whole historical period to be lived under capitalism in Russia is necessary and hence that the Russian revolution is a challenge to the laws of historical materialism. If Gramsci, with his superior intellectual capabilities thinks this way, then it becomes easier to understand how lesser socialists got lost in the labyrinthine complexities of 20th century history.

Had Lenin and Trotsky not been able to develop their impressive visions of the nature of 20th century revolution, the revolution would not have arrived even so far as it had done. If, on the other hand, humanity was not able to go all the way described in those visions, this was because the processes of permanent revolution that so many countries experienced in the course of the 20th century were frustrated by the historic destruction and ravage brought upon these countries by the distinct national bureaucracies that came to control these post-revolutionary societies. We will have opportunity to come back to this question in due course.

The architect of the first victorious proletarian revolution

The greatest success that Trotsky achieved in his life not as a Marxist theoretician but as a practical revolutionary was, without any doubt, the extraordinary part he played in the establishing and maintenance of proletarian power in Russia. It should be underlined without fear of exaggeration that although the number one leader of the October revolution was (as Trotsky was adamant in pointing out) Lenin, the revolution in effect had two major leaders, the other being Trotsky. All historians

¹⁰ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/1917/12/revolution-against-capital.htm>.

¹¹ Let no one try to take refuge in the excuse that Gramsci was 26 when the October revolution occurred. Trotsky was exactly the same age when he formulated the theory of permanent revolution!

who refuse to bow to the distortions and falsifications of the Stalinist bureaucracy, as well as contemporaries of the revolution and the Russian working class, are aware of and reflect this truth.

As young as 26, Trotsky started to contribute immensely to the revolutionary traditions of the Russian proletariat when he served as the chairman of the workers' soviet of Petrograd, the capital of the country and the heart of the Russian working class of the time. When the Tzar dissolved the soviet, had its leadership arrested and prosecuted it for armed insurrection, Trotsky mounted an impressive political defense in court. He did not whine and complain of the repression and did not retreat to a defense of democratic rights, but simply relied on the historical legitimacy of the revolutionary orientation of the soviet. For him, the workers' soviet is "an autonomous governmental organisation of the revolutionary masses". It is confronted by that other organ of power, the army, which is the most horrible expression of the despotic and criminal nature of the Tzarist state. To arm the workers against the violence of the army is an indispensable method for the defense of law and the rights of the people. In any case, revolutions are not provoked but are the fruit of the violent eruption of social contradictions. To quote a brief passage from Trotsky's defense would be useful in order to learn from an exemplary act of political defense:

Mark this well, Honourable Judges. We never *prepared the insurrection*, as the prosecutor says, *we prepared for the insurrection*. ... to enlighten the people's consciousness, to explain to the people that conflict was inevitable, that everything that was given to us would soon be taken back, that only force could protect law...¹²

After having tested Trotsky in 1905, the revolution once again made him the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in 1917. This time, no longer was Trotsky the independent revolutionary that he was in 1905. He had joined the Bolshevik Party in June 1917, to be coopted to the Central Committee immediately. Here he played the part of a valuable ally to Lenin in the face of those members, such as Zinoviev and Kamenev, who refused to support insurrection and those, such as Stalin, who prevaricated. He contributed to the revolution by revolutionising workers in countless factories thanks to his legendary talents as an orator and by instilling consciousness and courage in thousands and thousands of ordinary people and youth in the speeches he made night after night to a packed hall at the Winter Circus. The position he gained in the Soviet thanks to his reputation of 1905 proved to be an immense gain for the Bolsheviks. As the chairman of the Soviet, Trotsky was also appointed as the head of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet, which was established for the defense of the revolution. While Lenin was hiding underground in Finland because of the repression of the Kerensky government, it was Trotsky who planned down to its most minute details the insurrection that opened the way to the victory of the October revolution. As well as managing the military aspects, he contributed greatly to the political dimension of the art of

¹² Pierre Broué, *Trotsky*, Paris: Fayard, 1988, pp 114-116. The quotation is from page 116. Our translation from the French original.

insurrection by aligning its date to the convening of the All Russia Congress of Soviets, thus augmenting its legitimacy.

In the wake of the victory of the revolution he first served as the Commissar of Foreign Affairs on the Council of People's Commissars (*Sovnarkom*) and during the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations both displayed a fine example of the advanced intellectual capacity of Bolshevism and before the diplomatic sessions started distributed, in his capacity of revolutionary, leaflets to German soldiers calling for fraternisation between the rank and file of the two armies at war. He also exposed the machinations of imperialist powers by disclosing a host of secret diplomatic documents and thus humiliated them in the eyes of the peoples of colonial and semi-colonial countries. Then when the civil war waged by the Whites and supported by the imperialist countries started, he was appointed to the post of War Commissar, founded the Red Army from scratch, lived in an armoured train for almost three years, crisscrossing the vast country to both supervise and spur on the troops and thus played a unique part in the winning of the war and the survival of the Soviet state.

It seems quite evident to us that when discussing the contributions of Trotsky to Marxism, one needs to open an altogether separate chapter for the themes of war and military art. Within classical Marxism, Engels was an adept of military matters and was a specialist in that area, so much so that he gained the moniker of "Marx's general". From him to Che and other experts of the guerrilla war, military strategy and war have had a respectable place in Marxist practice and literature. Within this succession of experts, Trotsky surely deserves pride of place. If we are not engaging in a discussion of his achievements and views in this area, this is because we do not think we are sufficiently equipped in the area to do so. The military writings of Trotsky have been translated into English and are awaiting critical study by revolutionary Marxists. We will nonetheless not abandon the topic before mentioning one of his main contributions to war and military strategy: Trotsky always insisted politics plays a major role in winning wars and, in particular, civil wars. He analysed different situations in this light from the Russian civil war to the Spanish revolution of the 1930s and he also acted accordingly in his practice as military strategist.

Let us then cite some instances of this briefly. First, in building the Red Army from scratch, Trotsky prepared a strategy rooted solidly in class-political bases. He started out by recruiting vanguard workers first, later to drafting workers at large, all in order to lay the groundwork in a robust proletarian core and only then opened up to the peasantry, still distinguishing between the poor peasants, who were drafted first with the middle peasants being brought in later.¹³ The class attitude that is embodied in the formation of the army also manifests itself in the approach to the army they are fighting against. The Bolsheviks never approached the armies they are confronting as enemies pure and simple and never forgot that the rank of file of that army is also composed of workers and peasants (professional armies are a

¹³ Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed. Trotsky: 1879-1921*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 408-9.

phenomenon of the recent period). It is thanks to this conception that Bolshevik agitation among the sailors of the French navy occupying the Ukrainian port of Odesa on the Black Sea incited them to a mutiny, as a result of which the French had to withdraw their forces from the area somewhat later.¹⁴ This priority accorded to the proletariat as the human element of the war also found its expression in the political and ideological formation of the army. The Red Army Oath is a document that deserves to go down in history:

I, a son of the toiling people and a citizen of the Soviet Republic, assume the title of a soldier of the Workers' and Peasants' Army. Before the working classes of Russia and of the whole world I undertake to bear this title with honour, to learn conscientiously to wield arms... I undertake to observe revolutionary discipline strictly and unflinchingly... I undertake to abstain and restrain other comrades from deeds which might harm and lower the dignity of a citizen of the Soviet Republic, and to direct all my actions and thoughts towards the great goal of the emancipation of all working people. I undertake to come forward in the first call of the Workers' and Peasants' Government to defend the Soviet Republic... In the struggle for the Russian Soviet Republic and for the cause of socialism and of the brotherhood of the peoples I shall spare neither my own strength nor my own life. If by evil design I should depart from this my solemn promise, let general contempt be my lot and let the severe hand of the revolutionary law punish me.¹⁵

Even after Lenin's death and his own forced exile from the country by the bureaucracy, Trotsky defended the Soviet workers' state unconditionally and without compromise by every means he disposed of. We will return to this matter below.

A leader of the international proletariat

From a rather young age, Trotsky earned himself a significant place in the Second International, the international umbrella organisation of all the socialist parties before the Great War and made important contributions to imbuing the Russian working class with an internationalist consciousness. Among Russian Marxists, Trotsky was probably the one who was most at home culturally within international circles. He knew two languages (German and French) well and two (English and Italian) at a more modest level (and later learned to read in Spanish during his exile in Mexico). He had visited many European countries during his first exile of 1902-1905. When he escaped from Siberia a second time, he would be forced to live in Europe (and in the US where he was deported) overall for ten long years. The fact that he was one of the heroes of the 1905 revolution brought him a high level of prestige (undeservedly at the expense of Lenin) among international socialist circles in spite of his youth (he was only 28 when he settled down in Vienna in 1907). That he was working to unite the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks made him

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 429.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 409n.

a convenient interlocutor in the eyes of the leaders of the Second International, who were themselves trying to unite the Russian movement.

However, this interest neither spoiled Trotsky nor brought him a conformist mindset. It did not draw him into the cohort of the reformists of the Second International, nor could it have. When World War I broke out, Trotsky took his stand with the minuscule internationalist camp and engaged in a fight against the social patriotic currents. He not only participated in, but was the author of the manifesto of the Zimmerwald Conference of the internationalist current convened in 1915, which in a certain sense paved the way to the Third International.¹⁶

In the aftermath of the October revolution, when Russia was going through a bloody civil war and extreme economic hardship, the two leaders of the revolution, Lenin and Trotsky at the head of the Bolshevik Party undertook the foundation and construction of the Third (or Communist) International. That Trotsky was one of the two founding leaders of the Comintern can be gauged from the following simple facts: it was he who penned the “Manifesto of the Comintern”;¹⁷ it was he who, while he was touring the vast country in his armoured train visiting and electrifying all fronts, nonetheless was given the task of drafting several of the main documents at each congress of the Comintern and was the rapporteur who presented several points on the agenda; most importantly, although Zinoviev was given formally the job of acting as the president of the Comintern (until he was later dismissed by Stalin), the Comintern elected *two honorary presidents*, who were none other than Lenin and Trotsky!

After the Soviet Union succumbed to bureaucratic degeneration and the Comintern was made into an instrument of the foreign policy of the bureaucracy rather than the party of world revolution, this indefatigable defender of proletarian internationalism dedicated the last effort of his lifetime to the founding of a new International, the Fourth International. We will return to this at the very end of this article.

Defender of the Marxist programme against bureaucratic degeneration

To put it very bluntly, despite his many other achievements in the theoretical and practical-revolutionary spheres, Trotsky’s main contribution to the historical cause of the proletariat is his uncompromising struggle against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet state born of the October revolution. The bureaucracy is a privileged social stratum that was born within the pores of the first victorious proletarian revolution (roughly the first part of the 1920s), rose to power after a fierce struggle within the party and the state (roughly the second part of the 1920s) and thereupon consolidated its power by recourse to ferocious methods (the 1930s).

¹⁶ The positions of Lenin and Trotsky diverged in Zimmerwald. We will touch upon this briefly later.

¹⁷ The Comintern did not have a proper programme until its 6th Congress held in 1928 (when it was already coming under the control of the bureaucracy). The closest it gets to a general programmatic text is this Manifesto drafted by Trotsky for the First Congress.

In place of the programme of world revolution of the Bolshevik Party in power, it substituted the programme of “national communism” (a contradiction in terms), which made possible peaceful coexistence with imperialism for the long haul, thus guaranteeing the stability of the system of domination of the bureaucracy. Additionally, it went back to Great Russian chauvinism in place of the Leninist programme of full and real equality of nations within the Soviet Union and substituted a brutal bureaucratic dictatorship in place of the orientation towards proletarian democracy based on the soviets.

In the wake of Lenin falling prey to a stroke first (March 1923) and then succumbing to death (21 January 1924), there arose an opposition with Trotsky at its centre, first the 1923 Opposition, then the Left Opposition, later the United Opposition (Trotsky-Zinoviev-Kamenev), and then the return to the Left Opposition and later, in 1929, the International Left Opposition. As the foremost opponent of the bureaucracy, Trotsky was expelled from the party in 1927, sent into forced internal exile in 1928, and then deported to Istanbul at the beginning of 1929. All of the political leaders that raised the banner of opposition to the bureaucratic stratum represented by Stalin in the second part of the 1920s and the entire decade of the 1930s capitulated to Stalin at a certain stage and recanted. (Some, like Zinoviev and Kamenev, turned against Stalin three times and then composed with him again.) Despite this capitulation, almost all of them were tried and executed during the infamous Moscow Trials. Alone among the opposition figures, Trotsky never composed with the Stalinist bureaucracy and defended the world revolution, proletarian democracy, the self-determination of nations in the face of the onslaught of the bureaucracy and its programmatic formula of “socialism in a single country”. This is why he was assassinated in 1940 in his Mexican exile by an agent that was given the duty under the personal orders of Stalin.¹⁸ This last struggle of Trotsky is a unique and irreplaceable fight for the future of Marxism and of international proletarian revolution. Not a single historical figure has since waged such a struggle that even comes close to this. It also occupies a special place in Trotsky’s own life.

Three aspects of this struggle of Trotsky’s deserve special mention. First, he laid out a fully materialist analysis of the Soviet state and society on the basis of the Marxist method. The most mature and comprehensive product of this effort, *Revolution Betrayed* of 1936, is, in our opinion, the **most important book of the 20th century**. This is because **world history**, and not only the history of the Soviet Union, cannot be understood unless one understands the impact of the Russian revolution and its eventual demise on the rest of the world. Trotsky’s work presents an incomparably higher level of perceptiveness with respect to the dynamics of Soviet society than that of any of his contemporaries and has remained unequalled to this day. Although it certainly cannot match the scientific precision of Marx’s *chef d’oeuvre*, it would nonetheless not be wrong to characterise *Revolution*

¹⁸ See Pavel Sudoplatov, *Özel Görevler, Sovyet İstihbarat Şefinin Anıları*, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2015, pp 88-91. This is the Turkish translation of Sudoplatov’s memoirs, published in English under the title *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness, a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994).

Betrayed as the *Das Kapital* of the 20th century. Marx's masterpiece laid bare the secrets of capitalism for all to see. Trotsky's work, on the other hand, unravelled the complexities of the contradictory nature of Soviet society and state, thus making the 20th century and the failure of the first wave of the socialist construction process intelligible. Those socialists who have not had the good luck of bathing in the light of *Revolution Betrayed* are now lost souls wandering in the desert of agnosticism, constantly groping for an answer to their questions about what went wrong with 20th century socialism, questions unanswerable since they shun the only serious Marxist analysis of the glory and misery of the first and most advanced workers' state.

To summarise very briefly, *Revolution Betrayed* tackles the thorny theoretical question of the relationship of the state and socialism and finds that every revolution will necessarily develop bureaucratic tendencies, but concludes that because of the poverty and isolation of Soviet society, these tendencies reach unmanageable proportions. As Trotsky puts it in a memorable metaphor, where scarcity and queues are the rule, the policeman has an indispensable part to play. In Soviet society, these dynamics have led to the formation of a bureaucracy in the pores of the state, the economy, and within the party itself, a social stratum whose material life conditions diverge from those of the working class and the peasantry. Because this social stratum receives its privileged position in society from the centrally planned economy that is predicated on the abolition of capitalist private property, it attributes great importance to the preservation of the new relations of production whose bases have been established by the revolution. This, in a nutshell, explains *that seemingly inexplicable contradiction between the immensely progressive organisation of society and the rapid economic growth that the Soviet Union provides for the people and the extremely retrograde forms of despotism and bureaucratic primitivism that go alongside it*. This contradiction remained inexplicable to other socialists. *Revolution Betrayed* provides the key to the understanding of this living contradiction.

But no society remains frozen in its relationships. The very contradiction embodied in the existence of the bureaucracy as a privileged guardian of the socialist forms of the economy pushed in time that very stratum to seek ways of creating guarantees for its privileges and a certain continuity, necessarily putting the return to private property and succession rights in the means of production on the agenda. This proves to be the major dynamic that leads to the restoration of capitalism when circumstances are propitious for this. The programme of "socialism in a single country" is but the road to stability for the bureaucracy, which sheds it when the opportunity for capitalist restoration under its own control finally presents itself. In terms of Trotsky's analysis, a political revolution led by the working class, political only and not social because the socio-economic structure of the country is ruled by the forms brought about by the October revolution, is the only historical method of conserving the gains of the revolution.

It might be superfluous to remind the reader that history has in fact followed almost in precise form the prognosis of *Revolution Betrayed*. When political revolution failed after many different attempts (East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Poland (1956, 1970, 1979-81), and China (1989))

capitalism was restored from 1989 on under the leadership of the communist parties, having in the meanwhile been transformed into the political instruments of bureaucratic rule. This was the gist of the demise of socialism towards the end of the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, Albania, China, Vietnam etc.

The second aspect of Trotsky's struggle against the bureaucracy is his tireless effort to establish a new International and revolutionary parties in each country affiliated thereto in the face of the bureaucracy's wilful gradual destruction of the Comintern and the transformation of the national communist parties into its own foreign policy instruments. As a result of an uphill struggle, Trotsky finally succeeded in establishing the Fourth International only two years before his death. It was also he who wrote the so-called Transitional Programme of 1938, an immensely important political document in its own right in the history of revolutionary Marxism.

The third and last point is the fact that Trotsky waged a titanic battle against the ideologues of the bureaucracy, those he called the "epigones", in trying to salvage Lenin's true thinking from distortion, falsification and outright suppression, from under the rubble that was heaped on it. We will elaborate on this further on.

The theoretician of fascism and a guide for fighting it

If some asked for less controversial evidence for the capacity for analysis, gift for prediction and tactical finesse of Trotsky as a revolutionary leader despite everything that has been presented up to now, it would be convincing for anyone if we were to explain to them the unmatched insights of Trotsky into fascism and the ways to combat this scourge. With the exception of Gramsci, the Italian revolutionary who languished in the prisons of Mussolini until months before his death, and the Lenin of the early 1920s, who drew attention to the dire importance of the rise of fascism, none of the leading Marxists of the time really grasped in its full import the threat posed by fascism and the greater menace of Nazism¹⁹ and even less provided the correct method of fighting this plague. From his isolated abode on the Island of Prinkipo in Istanbul, Trotsky insisted, for four years between 1929 and 1933, on the enormity of the danger posed by fascism, stressed the fact that it brought humanity to the doorstep of barbarism, pointed to the importance of the suffering of the petty-bourgeoisie in the context of the economic crisis and how this made it a prey for fascism, advocated the tactic of the United Workers' Front, a tactic that he had developed hand in hand with Lenin during the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Comintern (1921-1922), and warned that the whole of Europe and even the survival of the Soviet Union would be gravely menaced were fascism able to rise to power, all this in the face of the ludicrous theory of the "Third Period", which attributed social democracy the role of the "twin of fascism", dictated a course to the Communist Party of Germany that relied on a competition with the Nazis in the sphere of nationalism, and failed to even comprehend the tremendous danger posed

¹⁹ In all fairness, we need to draw attention to the contributions of Clara Zetkin ve Karl Radek as well.

by fascism, going so far as to say “after Hitler, us”, thus betraying an unforgivable underestimation of the fascist phenomenon.²⁰

His critique levelled both at the “ultra left” policies of the Third Period and of the policy of Popular Front that replaced it in the wake of the German debacle, which acted as a barrier not to fascism but to proletarian revolution definitely in Spain and possibly in France after 1936, is of the highest Marxist calibre. If the younger generations of Marxist theoreticians are today, in this age of rising proto-fascism, still ignoring Trotsky’s theory of fascism, it is not Trotsky’s heritage nor his followers that suffer from this but Marxist theory in general and the workers’ movement!

2. Why was Trotsky defeated in his struggle against the bureaucracy?

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a ruthless struggle in the land of October and within the Comintern. In this struggle, revolutionary Marxism fighting for the long-term general emancipation of the proletariat, not only of Russia but also of the world, lost the battle face to the “national communist” wing representing the interests of the bureaucracy. Both the revolutions that triumphed or were defeated in the remaining part of the 20th century and the experience of socialist construction undertaken in those countries that underwent socialist revolution bear the mark of this defeat. In a certain sense, then, the fate of 20th century socialism was sealed in the 1920s and the 1930s. The collapse or elemental transformation into capitalism of practically all the bureaucratic workers’ states save a few at the end of the century, the loss of credibility that socialism suffered as a consequence of this, and the sustained attack of the bourgeoisie on the working population during the last three decades of what has proved to be the longest lasting capitalist assault in modern history, all of this remains unintelligible unless one understands correctly what really transpired during the first quarter of a century following the October revolution.

So the question of why Trotsky at the head of the revolutionary Marxist movement lost to the bureaucratic forces is of much broader import than being of personal interest for him or a party interest for his followers. In trying to answer this question, one surely needs to address two different orders of factors, those of an objective nature and those of a subjective one. We should hasten to add that the distinction itself is volatile: what is objective and what subjective depends totally on the context one is working in and upon. Most importantly, even parties or their leaderships may need to be taken as objective factors depending on what one is discussing.

When one is discussing Russia in the 1920s and the 1930s and posing the question of why revolutionary Marxism was defeated, one should take only the subjective will power, consciousness and decisions of the revolutionary Marxist movement, in this case its leader, as the subjective factor and everything else as objective factors.

²⁰ The writings of Trotsky from this period, some prophetic in their insight, have been brought together in a book: Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971.

German social democracy and the choices made by its leadership, for instance, are subjective factors in other situations, but need to be taken as objective factors in the current context.

The objective conditions of the defeat

Since the subject matter of this article is not a general analysis of the formation and rise to power of the bureaucracy, but is the place of Lenin and Trotsky in history, we will only quickly touch upon the objective factors and move on to a more detailed discussion of those that are of a subjective nature, which are directly relevant for our purposes.

Among the objective factors, four need to be brought out in summary form. The first has to do with the socio-economic backwardness of Russia. It is for this reason that Lenin and Trotsky constantly reiterated from the February revolution on their shared idea that unless the European revolution came to its help, the Russian proletariat was doomed to lose power. Let us content ourselves with a comprehensive quotation from Lenin. This is how Lenin characterises in 1922 the outlook of the Bolsheviks on the October revolution in 1917:

Our thought was: Either the international revolution will come to our aid, and in that case our victories are wholly assured, or we will do our modest revolutionary work in the consciousness that in case of defeat we have nevertheless served the cause of the revolution and experiment will be of help to other revolutions. ... In spite of this consciousness we did everything to preserve the soviet system in all circumstances and at whatever cost, since we knew that we were working not only for ourselves, but for the international revolution.²¹

Their prediction proved erroneous from a timing point of view, but each of the problems that lay underneath this prediction is very genuine. Unless the revolution spread to Europe, socialist tasks would come into conflict with the weight of the small peasantry. And conflict they did. It was precisely in the context of crises that were a product of such conflicts that the bureaucracy managed to take the upper hand.

The second objective factor follows directly from the first: the absence of a victorious revolution in the West. It was not that Lenin's and Trotsky's expectation that the triumph of the Russian revolution would fire the revolutionary fervour of the European proletariat proved erroneous as such. Quite the contrary. A revolution broke out in Germany quite similar to the Russian revolution only a year after the latter, in November 1918. Short-lived Soviet republics were even established in Hungary and in Bavaria in Germany. From Finland to Italy and Scotland a working class radicalisation swept Europe. If all this came to nought, the main burden falls on the shoulders of social democracy. This, then, is an objective factor on the scales of history from the point of view of Russian revolutionaries.

²¹ Cited by Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, London: Pluto Press, 1979, p. 1250.

When revolution failed to conquer Europe, the latter engaged in an attempt to quash the revolution in Russia in alliance with the Whites (i.e. the counter-revolutionaries). The three-year civil war left Russia bleeding. Beyond the generalised misery into which the dire economic conditions dragged the entire society, the impact of this situation on different classes was decisive. The working class was in a state of decomposition. The main force of the revolution, vanguard workers, lost their lives on the battle field in their thousands or even tens of thousands. More generally, the difficulty of providing food to the cities and the decline in industrial production down to one eighth of the pre-war period sent many workers running to the countryside, where for obvious reasons food supplies were more abundant. While the working class and its vanguard thus entered a process of dispersion and loss, the peasantry, while aware that their newly won land was obtained thanks to the protection the Bolshevik government afforded them from landowners, nonetheless started to moan and groan as conditions became more and more unbearable. More generally there was increasing exhaustion within the populace. After a state of war that lasted from 1914 to 1921, with an interruption of barely six months, it became a yearning for people to be fed properly and to live in peace and stability. Under these circumstances, the programme of the bureaucracy, “socialism in a single country”, found much more support among the people than that of Marxism, world revolution, which sounded rather distant and unnecessarily messianic to the ears of the poor.

After the retreat of the European revolution in the 1920s, the situation only deteriorated in the 1930s: with the rise of Nazism to power, reaction took hold of almost all countries gradually. This was followed by the defeat of the revolution in Spain, another victory for international fascism. In all of this, the criminal action of the Soviet bureaucracy is now to blame. But there is no doubt that a more objective set of circumstances played their part as well. Let us put it in the following way: if, in spite of the suicidal policy pursued in Germany by the Stalinist movement, Hitler were not able to climb to power or if, despite the treachery of Stalinism, the revolution won in Spain (as a result, for instance, of the supremacy of the more revolutionary wing of the anarchists, that wing led by Durruti, and/or the adoption of a more revolutionary policy on the part of the POUM), then revolutionary Marxism would have increased its strength internationally and the course of the revolution could perhaps be shifted again.

It is then clear that objective factors did play an almost decisive part in the defeat of Trotsky in his struggle against the bureaucracy. When assessing his role in this struggle, Trotsky, as a materialist, rightly refers to the importance of objective factors, but this he does at times in order to cover up his own misjudgments and prevarications. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, as revolutionary Marxism is again preparing to take over the leadership of the proletariat, we need to keep our distance to taking the same kind of attitude and admit frankly the mistakes of our historic leaders. Let us then delve into the subjective factors.

The subjective factors

Among the subjective factors, the one which is by far the most important is the fact that because Trotsky came to the Bolshevik party very late in the day, a rift developed very early on between him and the “old Bolshevik guard”. This resulted in a situation in which Stalin, to become in time the political leader of the rising bureaucracy, had a head start against Trotsky. No organisation easily and willingly yields its leadership to a newcomer. Many leaders and cadres, such as Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin etc., all close colleagues of Lenin, fought at different times against Trotsky on the side of Stalin, only to be annihilated themselves at the time of the Great Purge of 1936-1938, which saw the absolutist consolidation of the rule of the bureaucracy. The question thus becomes one of why Trotsky came so late to Bolshevism. This is such an important and many-faceted question that we will have to take it up separately in the next subsection. Let us first look at the other subjective factors that played a role in Trotsky’s defeat.

One personal factor, no making of Trotsky himself, is related to his family background. Trotsky is a Jew. In Russian society, notorious for the rabid anti-Semitism of a sizeable portion of its population and the pogroms intermittently directed against Jews, this is a clear disadvantage for the popularity of a leader in the eyes of the masses, in particular the peasants, if not among the vanguard of the working class, imbued though it is with an internationalist culture. When the government was being formed in the immediate wake of the revolution, Lenin proposed the position of the chairman of Sovnarkom, the counterpart of prime minister, to Trotsky, himself meaning to concentrate on party affairs. Trotsky, however, refused, advancing the reason of his Jewish ancestors. “Prime Minister Trotsky” would surely be a great position from which to fight Trotsky’s otherwise uphill battle.

More to the point are the mistakes that Trotsky committed in this period. Given the length of this article, we will not go into details here but only cite some typical examples of major categories of mistakes.

For one thing, at the same time as Stalin was made secretary of the party in April 1922, Lenin proposed to Trotsky the position of deputy prime minister. Although the proposal was repeated several times throughout the year, Trotsky kept refusing the post. Whatever the reason for refusal, this was a serious mistake. If Rykov was made the president of Sovnarkom, i.e. prime minister, after Lenin’s death, the most important reason for his choice was that it was so to speak “natural”, since he had been Lenin’s deputy in this post.²²

Then comes the question of the alliance between Lenin and Trotsky against the bureaucracy at the beginning of 1923. (We will not go into every aspect of this alliance at this stage, as we will return to it subsequently.) The settling of accounts was planned, as it was only natural, for the 12th Congress of the party to be convened in April of that year. But in the month of March, Lenin had a new stroke and never recovered. Although Lenin had warned him about a “rotten compromise” with

²² Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky: 1921-1929*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 134.

Stalin,²³ Trotsky nevertheless refrained from advancing their shared views during the 12th Congress and contented himself with a limited operation under the pressure of which Stalin temporarily retreated partially. This was despite the fact that the latter had put himself in a real bind at this stage. Lenin had dictated a very important and explosive text to his secretary in the last days of 1922 and at the very beginning of 1923. This text, titled “The Question of Nationalities and ‘Autonomisation’”, ripped to pieces the policy of Stalin as the Commissar of Nationalities marked by Great Russian chauvinism, most clearly observable in the case of Georgia, but visible elsewhere as well. Trotsky simply refrained from disclosing this text to the delegates to the Congress. As if to prove that this was a bomb ready to explode, the text would later be kept secret from the party and the people for 33 years, only to be made public in 1956, after the 20th Congress!²⁴

Trotsky’s errors continued in the wake of Lenin’s death. The day Lenin passed away, Trotsky was in the Caucasus because of a serious health condition. The telegram from Stalin said that the funeral ceremony was to be held on Saturday. The date was in all probability decided so as to prevent Trotsky from joining the ceremonies. Trotsky did not lift a finger and lingered on in his Caucasian surroundings. However, the ceremonies were held in effect not on Saturday but on Sunday. Trotsky could have made it for Sunday. During the funeral ceremonies, even Trotsky’s wife Natalia Ivanovna did not understand how he had not tried to make it to the burial. “Our friends”, she wrote in her diary, “were expecting L.D. to come to Moscow, and thought that he would cut short his trip in order to return... I remember my son’s letter, received at Sukhum. He was terribly shocked by Lenin’s death, and though suffering from a cold, with a temperature of 104, he went in his not very warm coat to the Hall of Columns to pay his last last respects, and waited, waited, and waited with impatience for our arrival. One could feel in his letter his bitter bewilderment and diffident reproach.” This is Trotsky’s own son. One can imagine how the rank and file of the party and the masses at large would feel about Trotsky’s absence.²⁵

Trotsky repeated the same mistake he had committed during the 12th Congress when Lenin’s testament came on the agenda after his death. Feeling he was nearing death, Lenin had at a certain moment dictated a testament to his secretaries, in which, after having assessed all the prominent leaders with great acumen, he advised that Stalin be removed from the post of secretary general. When Zinoviev and Kamenev, already part of a bloc of three with Stalin (the “Triumvirate”) against Trotsky, defended at a Central Committee meeting the non-disclosure of the testament, Trotsky did not even mutter. On the basis of this decision, against which only Lenin’s widow Krupskaya would raise her voice in protest, Lenin’s testament would be kept a secret! The testament had in fact been addressed to the congress of the party. In other words, Lenin’s wish was being infringed. Trotsky thus became unwillingly complicit in the crime of the Central Committee in trampling upon

23 Ibid, p. 91.

24 Ibid, p. 93.

25 Quoted by Trotsky, *My Life*, op. cit., p. 511.

Lenin's explicitly expressed will!

Error begets error. When, one year later, in 1925, the American communist Max Eastman, close to Trotsky, paraphrased Lenin's testament in a book he wrote on the Soviet Union, a brawl broke out at the Central Committee. When Stalin pointed a finger at Trotsky, the latter was compelled to write a statement in the *Bolshevik*, that the rumours about Lenin's testament were "malicious inventions".²⁶ In effect, this is quite consistent with what Trotsky has already said in 1923, drawing upon the English adage on one's country: "My party, right or wrong".²⁷ This is doubly wrong: For one thing, it is difficult not to conclude that Trotsky has backslided into the same mindset of making a fetish of unity on the basis not of a clear vision but of lax compromises. In a certain sense the old disease has relapsed, this time within the Bolshevik Party. For another, Trotsky is simply disregarding the changes in the party, to which he clings "right or wrong". The Bolshevik Party was now the single party in the country, not as a result of Bolshevik schemes, but as the end product of a long drawn out process of conflicts with other socialist parties. It had thus become the target of all kinds of opportunists and careerists that wished to be close to the levers of power, a tendency amplified by the corrupting atmosphere of the market-oriented New Economic Policy adopted in 1921. The campaign to recruit massively that the opponents of Trotsky started in the wake of Lenin's death added insult to injury. Hence, behind the mistakes that Trotsky committed also lay his attitude of ignoring the changing nature of the Bolshevik Party, although he had, parallel to Lenin, already come to the conclusion that the tendency towards bureaucratisation was advancing rapidly. This is the major error of timing he made, over and above all the other timing mistakes he committed, only some of which are being taken up in this necessarily summary catalogue of mistakes.

Trotsky also made serious mistakes with respect to the constellation of groups within the party. He first unnecessarily dissolved the 1923 Opposition established by cadres that were close to him. Then he would act with considerable delay when the Triumvirate Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev fell out and only tie up with the latter two against Stalin in the United Opposition after they were defeated by Stalin.²⁸

Beyond these tactical errors, the fact that Trotsky and the Left Opposition defended certain ideas that may very well have been rational and logical, but which were nonetheless couched in a terminology without due regard for the sensibility of the masses led to the formation of powerful alliances of concrete interests against them. Take the case of the "militarisation of labour" and the policy on trade unions that Trotsky advocated in the period 1920-1921 (something we will have to come back to later). It is an established fact that Bukharin's close colleague and president of the Congress of Trade Unions Tomsky became alienated from Trotsky because this policy seemed to be a hostile attitude to the unions.²⁹ There goes a whole section

²⁶ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, op. cit., p. 202.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 139.

²⁸ Compare this with the astute tactics that Lenin adopted during the Second Congress of the RSDLP. See Broué, *Trotsky*, op. cit, p. 73.

²⁹ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, op. cit., p. 82.

of the labour movement! Evgeny Preobrazhensky, for his part, adopted a callous attitude towards the peasantry. This bright economist of the 1923 Opposition and later the Left Opposition, talked of “socialist primitive accumulation” and even at times of the “exploitation” of the peasantry for the purposes of industrialization. This naturally played directly into the hands of the Stalin-Bukharin alliance, providing them with material they could use for constantly harping on Trotsky’s supposed “underestimation of the peasantry” and the Left Opposition’s tendency to destroy the *smychka*, the worker-peasant alliance. The terminology naturally alienated the representatives of the peasantry. There goes another whole section of the population! True, Trotsky himself never adopted this conceptual framework put forth by Preobrazhensky. It is most probable that behind this lay such political concerns. But the very fact that he did not come up against this terminology (*not* the substance of the theory) although he should have known full well that this would create a heavy burden for the Left Opposition in its relations to the peasantry is itself a mistake on its own.

At the root of these questions of relations with classes lies in effect a problem with Trotsky’s politics that Lenin addresses in his testament. Lenin claims that Trotsky shows “excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work”. We must personally admit that when we first read Lenin’s testament as a young man in his 20s, we were unable to grasp this criticism, felt at a loss to understand why Lenin would fuss over such a minute detail, and were somewhat disappointed. It is much later, with experience in revolutionary politics, that we came to understand the full import of Lenin’s wisdom. He is in fact saying here that Trotsky designs plans very aptly and implements these plans with impeccable rationality and discipline, but all this in somewhat mechanical fashion, without taking into consideration the consequences of what is being done on relations with other actors, in particular relations within the party and relations with entire classes. In other words, *even if* Lenin had shared Trotsky’s assessment on the functions to be attributed to trade unions, which he did not, he would not have advocated his plans for the militarisation of labour. To put it slightly differently, under the assumption of the continuation of the policy of “War Communism”, Trotsky has concluded that to assign any other tasks to trade unions apart from regulating production is a logical contradiction. This leads him to disregard all other political aspects and to alienate, if necessary, the union cadres because he has an obsession with the “purely administrative side of the work”. Lenin would not have acted so recklessly.

The discussion in this subsection does not imply the assertion of the proposition that if Trotsky had not committed these errors he would have won the battle against the bureaucracy. No, objective conditions were skewed too heavily against him for us to assert this. Victory was too difficult to attain for revolutionary Marxism and might not have been won under any circumstances. But it would be too simplistic to say that there was a retreat in the consciousness and the will power of the masses and that therefore the battle was *already* a lost cause. The masses may have retreated to a certain extent. But so powerful a revolution was the October revolution that it continued to throw some robust forces on the stage of history over and over again, albeit with certain lags. Having been defeated at the end of the decade of the 20s,

the movement revived once more at the beginning of the 30s. There is the “Bloc of Oppositions” and the Ryutin Platform in 1932.³⁰ After the failure of this initiative, the bankruptcy of the strategy of the Communist Party of Germany in the face of Hitler’s rise to power leads to widespread talk of Stalin’s imminent demise.³¹ Even after the Moscow Trials have started, the ranks of the Trotskyist Opposition grow once again. Thousands, even tens of thousands of Trotskyists resist heroically in the labour camp of Vorkuta, only to be executed by firing squads.³² So the fire of resistance did not dwindle easily. A correct line may have paid off.

Having raised these mistakes, we ought to, nonetheless, give Trotsky his due. We said above that Trotsky at times displays the tendency to hide his mistakes and shortcomings behind the compelling nature of objective factors. But the opposite is also true. Trotsky is aware that he has made great mistakes, although he does not anywhere, to the best of our knowledge, go through these in systematic fashion. But this is what he has to say on the matter in his autobiography:

I must add here that the errors which I have committed, however important they may have been—and *some of them were of extreme importance*—always referred to questions that were not fundamental or strategic, but dealt rather with such derivative matters as organization and policy.³³

“Derivative questions of organisation”: whether derivative or essential, we now come to the question of organisation.

3. The young Trotsky or the Bolshevik Trotsky?

We said above that among the set of subjective factors that decided the fate of the battle between Trotsky and the political representatives of the bureaucracy, the most important was that Trotsky came to the Bolshevik Party very late in the day. It is now time to deal with this decisive matter.

Trotsky’s Marxism displays a creativity, breadth of horizon and profundity at times far beyond those of his contemporaries. But on one question, that of organisation, it is, up to a certain stage, vitiated by a tremendous weakness. As a result, from his break with Lenin in 1903 up to 1917, Trotsky committed serious mistakes within the Russian Marxist movement as well as, less vitally for our present purposes, within the international movement.

30 Broué, *op. cit.*, p. 700 ff.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 734-35 and 742.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 880-82.

33 *My Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 185, emphasis ours. Let us play the devil’s advocate to draw attention to the fact that even in 1930 (when he wrote his autobiography) Trotsky still considers matters of organisation as “derivative”. In our opinion no such sentence would have flowed from Lenin’s pen, nor to the best of our knowledge it ever did.

The maverick

Because Stalinism has willfully distorted, even falsified the factual aspect of the question, let us say clearly from the outset: Trotsky was no Menshevik. In fact, his strategic view of the Russian revolution (permanent revolution) sets him even farther away from the Mensheviks than the distance between the latter and Bolsheviks. Save for the first year after the split in the RSDLP (the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party), Trotsky remained outside of both Bolshevik and Menshevik structures and waged a constant uphill battle for the unity of the party. As is well-known, Russian Marxism first organized as a party in 1898. However, this party did not yet exercise authority over the circles of workers around the country. That is why Lenin, after having settled abroad, took the initiative to publish the newspaper *Iskra*, which aimed at a centralization of the party on the basis of a new programme and statutes. In order to ground this orientation, Lenin published his rightly famous *What Is To Be Done?* in 1902. Having fled his exile in the autumn of that same year, Trotsky quickly rose to prominence and was to become an important element in the publication of *Iskra*. The aim of the Second Congress convened in 1903 was to consummate this process of centralization that *Iskra* had been working towards.

Lenin insisted that only those militants that agreed to work under the strict discipline of party organs should be admitted as members while the Mensheviks wished to make do with a much looser tie between the party and the members. Thus were born the two wings of Russian social democracy, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. It was this division that provoked Trotsky's split from Lenin. Officially, Trotsky had participated in the congress as a delegate of Siberia. He would attack Lenin violently in two documents consecutively: in his *Report of the Siberian Delegation* immediately after the congress and in a pamphlet penned in 1904, *Our Political Tasks*. ***What we are about to discuss is of extreme importance for the later Trotskyist movement*** for many are those in that movement who agree with what Trotsky had to say in these two documents whereas we cannot disagree more with the young Trotsky on this matter.

Trotsky opined that Lenin acted as a “disorganiser” in the congress.³⁴ He contended that the criterion Lenin put forth as an instrument against “opportunism and intellectual individualism” amounted to a hopeless attempt to find a “statutory remedy” that smacked of a “bureaucratic dream”.³⁵ What was achieved, in his opinion, was “not centralism but ego-centralism”.³⁶ He accused Lenin of harbouring dictatorial tendencies in the manner of Robespierre, the leader of the Jacobins in the French revolution.³⁷ He finished off with a prediction: Leninist “centralism” would rapidly and inevitably collapse.³⁸ For someone whose prescience is, most of

34 Leon Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation (1903)*, London: New Park Publications, n.d., p. 18.

35 Ibid, p. 21.

36 Ibid, p. 35.

37 Ibid, p. 37-38.

38 Ibid, p. 38.

the time, impressive, to say the least, this must be the one that turned out the most inaccurate!

These views, in our opinion, are the product of a *tragic error*. First of all, Trotsky was totally mistaken on the question of the internal regime of the party. He had perceived the debate on the constitution of the party as well as on other matters we have no space to take up even in the most schematic manner. He had not been able to grasp the fact that Lenin was fighting to make the party a real party and not a talking shop, a plaything of chatter-happy intellectuals. The preposterous idea that the question could in any way be linked to Lenin's ego and that Lenin was in pursuit of a personal dictatorship in the party bore a degree of superficiality that was unbecoming of Trotsky even at this early age (he was 24 during the congress).

However, behind this mistake concerning the party regime lay, in fact, an even more serious methodological error. Trotsky's grasp of the relationship between the party and the class itself was vitiated. When standing up against this type of party regime, Trotsky, just like Rosa Luxemburg, pontificated that the struggle against opportunism could not be waged through provisions of the constitution.³⁹ He did not deny that opportunism or reformism were menaces that threatened the working class movement. It is just that he thought Lenin's solution to the problem was too mechanical and too despotic. What did he (and, independently of him, Rosa Luxemburg) propose instead? A big nothing. Thus they both relegated the problem to spontaneous processes. The revolutionary instincts of the working class would inevitably overcome opportunism at the end of the day. Lenin's answer to this contains an argument worth quoting at length:

To this category of arguments... belongs in particular Comrade Trotsky's statement... that "opportunism is produced by more complex [or: is determined by deeper] causes than one or another clause in the Rules; it is brought about by the relative development of bourgeois democracy and the proletariat..." The point is not that clauses in the Rules may produce opportunism, but that with their help a more or less trenchant weapon against opportunism can be forged. The deeper its causes, the more trenchant should this weapon be. Therefore, to *justify* a formulation which opens the door to opportunism on the grounds that opportunism has "deep causes" is tail-ism of the first order.⁴⁰

History has confirmed Lenin's viewpoint and falsified that of Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg by repeated examples of workers' parties to whose building millions contributed over a period of decades, but which in the end were offered to the services of the bourgeoisie by opportunist or reformist leaders. The solution to this problem is to build a revolutionary party that will *lead* the working class politically to taking power in its own hands. This necessarily requires a revolutionary

39 We have taken up this debate in detail in our short book on Lenin in Turkish: Sungur Savran, *Lenin'i Yakmalı mı?* [Should Lenin Be Burnt?], Istanbul: Kardelen Yayınları, 1998.

40 V. I. Lenin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", Moscow: *Collected Works*, volume 7, pp. 271-72n.

programme and a constitution that establishes a disciplined internal regime that sees to it that the party closely abides by this revolutionary programme and does not veer from it at the caprice of its leadership. So, Lenin's disciplined party is in fact more of a dictatorship over the leadership than a dictatorship of the leaders over the membership. Naturally, even this provides no unassailable guarantees against opportunism or reformism. Nonetheless that a method does not fully guarantee victory is no reason why it should not be employed as long as it brings a certain level of protection. It is surely better to arm the party against the reformist scourge and fight one's way to victory or defeat than to surrender without a fight. The clearest manifestation of the young Trotsky's misapprehension of the class-party relationship is the statement in the editorial of issue number one of the *Pravda* (not to be confused with Lenin's *Pravda*) that Trotsky started to publish in 1908 to the effect that this publication does not set out to "lead the working class but serve it".⁴¹ The mature Trotsky pins down the problem with the young Trotsky with enviable precision in the autobiography of the Bolshevik Trotsky: "social-revolutionary fatalism"⁴²

This is why Trotsky wandered in the desert for 14 years between 1903 and 1917, why he pursued an ever-receding dream of unifying the RSDLP rather than laying stone upon stone in building a truly revolutionary proletarian party. Once again, it is a lie to say that Trotsky was a Menshevik. He acted together with the Mensheviks because he mistakenly believed that Lenin "disorganized" the Second Congress, but already in 1904 he officially parted his way with them because he understood clearly that their political views and his were simply impossible to coexist under the same roof. Politically speaking, Trotsky stood apart from both major factions due to his programme of permanent revolution. However, because the hard ground on which the idea of permanent revolution rose was based was the idea that the bourgeoisie had spent its revolutionary energies, Trotsky was a full-scale enemy of the liberalism of the Cadet party. The Mensheviks, on the other hand, were still living in the world of the 19th century: they believed that it was bourgeois liberalism that was going to lead the struggle for the democratic revolution. From this vantage point, Trotsky had a much greater kinship to Lenin and the Bolsheviks for although Lenin insisted that in the short run and before the victory of revolution in Europe, the Russian revolution could not move beyond the democratic stage, he conceived of this democratic revolution not as one that would be led by the liberal bourgeoisie, but would move forward thanks to an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. Here, there was an almost insuperable difference of political programme: while Menshevism led the working class to tail-end the bourgeoisie, Bolshevism and Trotsky, in their different manners, defined the immediate revolutionary tasks of the proletariat as one of struggle against the bourgeoisie. How could Trotsky's relationship to Menshevism have survived the 1905 revolution let alone continue for a full dozen years?

41 In order to distinguish it from the *Pravda* Bolsheviks started to publish in 1912, this newspaper is usually referred to as the "Viennese *Pravda*".

42 *My Life*, op. cit., p. 224.

An ill-tempered and pugnacious fight

Given this, it is even more incomprehensible why Trotsky would insist on the unity of the party. It is true, as he rightly argued, that events leading to revolutionary ascendancy or moments of crisis drew important sections of the Mensheviks towards revolutionary positions. This is what the revolution of 1905 did, opening the way in the aftermath of the revolution to the unification at the Stockholm Congress. But when political reaction took hold (1907-1912), tendencies to simply liquidate the party flourished among the Mensheviks. Again, there would be those among the Mensheviks who took an internationalist stand during World War I, but the greater part of the Menshevik faction adopted a social-patriotic position. There is no need to multiply the examples. Lenin himself tried to win over to his party elements that could be won from among the Mensheviks and other currents. But Trotsky's attitude was different. Rather than strive to build the revolutionary party of the proletariat that is bound by a centralized discipline, he wanted a party that would bring under its roof all socialists no matter what their views were. Just like Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky had also fallen into the trap of a large and united party no matter what. It is true that at certain moments leaving a large party may imply separating from the class itself. But in Russia there was not even a trace of that problem. Before the outbreak of the war, the Bolsheviks had effected a much more successful organizing drive within the working class than other components of the working class movement.⁴³ To leave a large party or to remain, that is essentially a tactical question. The young Trotsky falsely turned this into a principled question.

The effort to reconcile two irreconcilable currents made Trotsky prey to bizarre contradictions. This young man who yearned for unity for all was not able to unify anyone and thus himself remained all alone! And in 1912 the effort to effect the unification of the party through a struggle against factionalism directly led to an unprincipled factionalism on the part of Trotsky himself. One needs to dwell longer on this question of the 1912 event. This has to do with the notorious "August Bloc".

In 1910, under the pressure of the International, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks tried to close ranks for one last time. A meeting was held in Paris. The decision was reached to share in the financial resources of the two factions and turn whatever was available to a delegation representing the International, to stop the publications of the factions, to have both sides break from the extreme irreconcilable elements on their side. The Bolsheviks, ever the scapegoat to be accused of factionalism, did everything they were bound to: they turned over the financial resources they wielded, expelled the Otzovists, who were against all legal work, and they arrested their publications. But the Mensheviks did not break from their extremists, the current that pushed for the entire party structure to come out into the open and was therefore called "liquidationists" simply because they insisted on a move that might end up liquidating the party under the despotic conditions of Tsarist Russia. Everything is crystal clear: The Mensheviks simply infringe on the

43 Lenin demonstrates this, statistics in hand, to the most minute detail in a report he has submitted to the International: "Report of the C.C. to the Brussels Conference and Instructions to the C.C. Delegation", Moscow: *Collected Works*, volume 20, pp. 495-527.

Paris agreement and choose to stick to an extremely right wing tendency within their own ranks rather than join hands with the Bolsheviks. Upon this, Lenin and his Bolsheviks held a congress in Prague and declared themselves a separate party. Face to this move, Trotsky adopted an incomprehensible stance. He brought together all the factions, including the liquidationists, fighting Lenin together under a patchwork movement called the “August Bloc”. The strongman within this bloc was Trotsky himself. Thus Lenin and Trotsky had become the leaders of two opposing factions facing each other!

This is how Lenin described in 1914 the August Bloc of 1912:

In March 1912, the following united in the columns of *Vorwärts* to abuse us: the liquidators, the Bund, the Letts, the Poles, the Trotskyists, and the Vperyodists. What a lot of “trends” and “groups”, one might think! How easy it should have been for them to set the workers of Russia a good example by their unity!

But when steps were taken to convene the “August” Conference of the liquidators, it was found that our opponents *could not* march in step. Both the Poles and Plekhanov refused to attend the “August” Conference of the liquidators. Why? Because they *could not* agree on the meaning of the term: membership in the Party!⁴⁴

How ironic! Trotsky, who had moved away from Lenin because of the latter’s supposed “ego-centrism” based on the whole debate on party membership, now found himself as the leader of groups that could not even agree on that question. It is no wonder then that as soon as the newspaper *Kievskaya Mysl* proposed to him the position of war correspondent concerning the Balkan wars, Trotsky jumped on that proposal and abandoned the August liquidators to their fate!⁴⁵

Even after he had gone through this experience Trotsky was not able to take the correct road. The war naturally found the two uncompromising internationalists on the same side. The two leaders of the future October revolution were both present in Zimmerwald. But Trotsky was still running after compromises, just as he did in 1912. Although internationalist Mensheviks refused to break from social patriotic Mensheviks, Trotsky himself still continued to refuse to break from internationalist Mensheviks. 1912 was repeating itself. It is perhaps only the war atmosphere and the forced exile of Trotsky by the European bourgeoisie that prevented the formation of a new August Bloc!

One only needs to add to all these big mistakes the fact that Trotsky hardly ever attacked the Mensheviks, but polemicized against Lenin and tried to counter his influence. Let us call to the witness stand an honourable witness, Rosa Luxemburg, who, we know, was never pro-Lenin:

44 Ibid, p. 514.

45 Trotsky’s mistake is so flagrant that Rosa Luxemburg, habituated as she is to point a finger towards Lenin for every problem that befalls the Russian movement, does not accuse him this time, but blames Trotsky for “supporting opportunist elements [i.e. the liquidators] who contribute to the dispersal of the movement in the guise of pretending to defend tolerance”. Our translation from the French original. Cited by Broué, *Trotsky*, *ibid*, p. 140.

[Trotsky] insults the Bolsheviks and the Polish directly as the “instigators of division in the Party”, but does not have so much as to say a word to condemn the pamphlet written by Martov against Lenin, a pamphlet which surpasses ignominiously what has gone on before and tends to provoke visibly a split.⁴⁶

The part psychology played

Why all this? We are of the opinion that this phenomenon cannot be explained solely on a political basis. Psychology seems to have played a considerable part in the relationship between the two geniuses. The young Trotsky was someone who was passionately and jealously trying to safeguard his independence, made it a point of honour, so to speak, to think with his own head and reach his own conclusions, hardly amenable to the guidance of another. We see this in Trotsky's remarks again and again and he had, one might add, a very insightful penetration into the intricacies of his own personality. To take one example, this is how Trotsky explains his resistance to the widespread criticism of his ornamental style of writing:

Only time would purify my style. And as the struggle for form was neither an accidental nor an external thing, but a reflection of my intellectual processes, it is no wonder that, with all my respect for editors, I instinctively protected my still shaping individuality as a writer against the inroads of men who were already mature but differently constituted.⁴⁷

He talks of a similar process on the question of the party:

My break with Lenin occurred on what might be considered “moral” or even personal grounds. But this was merely on the surface. At bottom, the separation was of a political nature and merely expressed itself in the realm of organization methods. I thought of myself as a centralist. But there is no doubt that at that time I did not fully realize what an intense and imperious centralism the revolutionary party would need to lead millions of people in a war against the old order... *Independently* I still could not see Lenin's centralism as the logical conclusion of a clear revolutionary concept. And the desire to see a problem *independently*, and to draw all the necessary conclusions from it, has always been my most imperious intellectual necessity.⁴⁸

And finally directly on Lenin himself:

At first, I “denied” Paris, and even tried to ignore it. Rightly considered, it was the case of a barbarian struggling for self-preservation... I resisted the Louvre, the Luxembourg, and the exhibitions... In point of fact, I was resisting art as I had resisted revolution earlier in life, and later, Marxism; as I had resisted, for several

46 Ibid, p. 139.

47 *My Life*, op. cit., p. 156.

48 Ibid, p. 162. Our emphasis.

years, Lenin and his methods.⁴⁹

We here find ourselves facing a brilliant instance of self-analysis. Trotsky's aim is to explain the dynamics of his relationship to Lenin. Very subtly he starts out discussing art. He has earlier explained how he has resisted Marxism, so he alludes to that. Then comes the crux of the matter. His pride has prevented him from surrendering to Lenin easily!

Then he turns to the second time his path crosses with Lenin's and this time he recounts everything in complete frankness:

I came to Lenin for the second time later than many others, but I came *in my own way*, after I had gone through and had weighed the experience of the revolution, the counter-revolution and the Imperialist war. I came, as a result, more surely and seriously than those "disciples" who, during the master's life, repeated his words and gestures—not always at the right moment—but, after his death, proved to be nothing but helpless epigones and unconscious tools in the hands of hostile forces.⁵⁰

Is this really the fact of the matter? Let us see.

4. Lenin and Trotsky: the anatomy of a political relationship

It is a well-known fact that before the 1903 Congress separated them, Lenin and Trotsky got along quite well. Lenin supported and tried to win this young man (as young as 23) of extraordinary talents to the cause, as he did with all who displayed an aptitude of contributing to the revolution. After a brief period of acquaintance, he proposed Trotsky as the seventh member of the *Iskra* board. In the letter he sent to the board, he described the young man as "of rare abilities, ... conviction and energy".⁵¹ The elderly Plekhanov refused because he saw this as a manoeuvre against himself and also because of his personal repulsion for Trotsky. Trotsky was referred to as "Lenin's bludgeon".

We have seen above how very fiercely Trotsky attacked Lenin in the aftermath of the 1903 Congress. Despite this, when in 1905 Trotsky was elected to become president of the Petrograd Soviet and started to play a very important part as a leader of the working class, Lenin did not spare his praise. Our witness is Anatoly Lunacharsky, Commissar of Education in the first few years of the revolution:

I remember somebody saying in Lenin's presence: "The star of Khrustalyov is setting. To-day the strongman in the Soviet is Trotsky." For a moment Lenin's expression seemed to darken; then he said, "Well, Trotsky has won this by tireless and striking work."⁵²

49 Ibid, p. 148.

50 Ibid, p. 164. Our emphasis.

51 For the entire letter see *ibid*, p. 152-54.

52 Ibid, p. 182.

Typical of Lenin, with his strong sense of fairness! Of course it was not just Trotsky who attacked Lenin with harsh accusations in the period 1903-1917. At times Lenin also used severe invectives against his rival. But on the one hand these were lighter than Trotsky's deliberately injurious style. On the other hand, one positive remark by Trotsky throughout this period concerning Lenin is still awaiting discovery, while Lenin is on record to have admitted Trotsky's virtues.

Political differences between the two men throughout this period are not to be underestimated. Just to skim over them, topics such as the weight of the peasantry in the revolution, the importance of the national question, the policy to be pursued during the world war (in other words, Lenin's revolutionary defeatism), the slogan of the "United States of Europe" were all areas in which the two revolutionaries defended different positions.⁵³ However, the two main contentious issues were permanent revolution and the party. We have already seen what the differences on these two questions are.

Lenin and Trotsky face to the October revolution

1917 would eliminate these differences. This is how Trotsky explains in his autobiography the light under which the question of permanent revolution appears:

In New York, at the beginning of March, 1917, I wrote a series of articles dealing with the class forces and perspectives of the Russian revolution. At that very time, Lenin in Geneva, was sending to Petrograd his "Letters from Afar." And both of us, though we were writing in different parts of the world and were separated by an ocean, gave the same analysis and the same forecast. On every one of the principal questions, such as the attitude toward the peasantry, toward the bourgeoisie, the Provisional government, the war, and the world revolution, our views were completely identical. Here a test of the relations between "Trotskyism" and Leninism was made on the touchstone of history. And it was carried out under the conditions of a chemically pure experiment. At that time I knew nothing of Lenin's stand; I argued on the basis of my own premises and my own revolutionary experience, and I drew the same perspective and suggested the same line of strategy as Lenin.⁵⁴

There is not a shred of doubt that by abandoning his insistence on the democratic stage of the revolution and advocating the taking of power by the proletariat first in his "Letters from Afar" and later, when he arrived in Petrograd, the "April Theses", Lenin had come very close to the programme of permanent revolution defended by Trotsky ever since the 1905 revolution. Trotsky had, for his part, reached the same conclusions on the immediate tasks of the revolution *independently* of Lenin.

⁵³ We do not go into the details of the disagreements between Lenin and Trotsky on these questions since our aim here is not to draw up a full balance-sheet of the differences between them. Let us just point out that most of these have been *manipulated and distorted* later by the Stalinist establishment.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 329.

There was, then, no reason to continue resisting. This new situation led to Trotsky and his group joining the Bolshevik party upon the invitation of the latter, with Trotsky being co-opted to the Central Committee. From that moment on, the two revolutionaries would collaborate in the closest manner possible until the death of Lenin. What Stalinists have tirelessly propagated about this relationship for the period 1903-1917 is distorted and exaggerated, but at least has historical basis. But after 1917, especially after the revolution had become victorious, the belligerent relationship between Lenin and Trotsky was replaced by an extremely productive exchange and cooperation.

With his characteristic sense of fairness, Lenin expressed this in different ways. At a central committee meeting of the party one week after the revolution, he said that once he became convinced of the impossibility of union with the Mensheviks, “there has been no better Bolshevik than Trotsky”.⁵⁵ The great novelist Maxim Gorky has narrated how Lenin described to him how he assessed the work Trotsky did for the Red Army:

Striking the table with his hand, he [Lenin] said: “Could any one point out to me another man who could organize an almost model army in a year and even win the respect of military experts? We have such a man! We have everything. And there will be miracles.”⁵⁶

On the day after the conquest of power, Lenin proposed the post of premiership to Trotsky in front of the central committee of the party! Even more significant is the confidence he has in Trotsky, which he displayed on various occasions. In 1919, after he drafted a statement for the Council of Defense, the supreme body in the area of the conduct of the Civil War, he wrote the following as he was sending the draft to Trotsky: “I did it hastily, and it did not turn out well. You had better put my name under your own text.”⁵⁷ For someone like Lenin who usually split hairs on each phrase in political texts, to write something of this nature to anyone is phenomenal.

Even more strikingly, when complaints were raised about the disciplinary punishments handed down by Trotsky as commander of the Red Army, Lenin vouched for these without reserve by writing a letter with an open date to be used when Trotsky deemed necessary: “Knowing the strict character of Comrade Trotsky’s orders, I am so convinced, so absolutely convinced, of the correctness, expediency and necessity of the cause of the order given by Comrade Trotsky, that I unreservedly indorse this order. V. Ulyanov/Lenin.” A blank cheque, so to speak.⁵⁸

Apart from all of this, it is also a fact that in the six years of their collaboration in this second period, Lenin never once referred to their differences of the past against Trotsky. It is not that there arose no differences between the two men in this period. Secondary matters aside, there were serious disagreements on at least two matters.

55 Ibid, p. 333. Also p. 339.

56 Ibid, p. 360.

57 Ibid, p. 425.

58 Ibid, p. 469.

The first arose immediately after the revolution on the question of whether to sign a peace agreement with Germany. In this debate that has gone down in history as the Brest-Litovsk controversy after the name of the town where the peace negotiations were held, the “left communists” under the leadership of Bukharin raised the line of “revolutionary war”. Lenin, taking the measure of the military situation, advocated peace in order to defend the revolution, while Trotsky defended the slogan of “neither war, nor peace”. The epigones would later try to use Lenin’s position in this controversy in defense of the idea of “socialism in a single country” and accuse Trotsky of advancing the phantasy of “exporting revolution”. Leaving aside the adventuristic position on Brest-Litovsk advocated by Bukharin, who was an ally of Stalin until the late 1920s, it must be pointed out this debate has nothing to do with the idea of “socialism in one country”. The easiest way to show this is to compare the Brest-Litovsk incident with the debate on Poland two years later. After the Red Army repelled the Polish armies in the civil war, Lenin made a miscalculation and defended the march of the Red Army into Polish territory and towards Warsaw, hoping that under the impact of the war, the Polish working class would rise to bring down the government, while Trotsky saw the dangers this posed and voted against this course. He proved to be right: having suffered oppression at the hands of Russia for so long, the Polish workers joined the defense of the country against the armies of Russia, which resulted in a defeat for and consequently the retreat of the Red Army from Polish territory. Does this mean that, this time around, it was Trotsky who was defending “socialism in a single country” and Lenin who was a partisan for the “export of revolution”?

The second disagreement created greater friction. We touched upon this debate as an instance of how (in Lenin’s opinion) Trotsky was prone to attribute excessive importance to the “purely administrative side” of things and thereby to commit errors in human communication and relations. We pointed out that Trotsky defended the elimination of the independence of trade unions as a logical implication of War Communism and that Lenin came up against this completely. As we will return to this below, we refrain from going into detail for the moment.

Alliance

However, these differences on specific issues should not hide from view the fact that Lenin and Trotsky were on the same ground in the building of the revolutionary state and the new International. To take the Comintern first, Lenin and Trotsky indicated the same line to be adopted vis-à-vis the tendency called “left-wing communism”, which appeared in quite a few European countries in this period. This line leaned on a struggle with the reformist (social democratic) parties that have a large following within the working class on the basis of a united workers’ front unless a revolutionary situation occurs that promises the revolutionary party hegemony over the masses. The aim here is to make possible, on the one hand, the gaining of new strength of the working class through its daily struggles and expose, on the other, the reformist leaders in the eyes of the masses not through propaganda alone but within the living struggle itself. This is the policy abandoned by the Stalinist leadership in the 1920s and early 1930s in favour of its narrower

self-interest. That is why power was almost offered to Hitler on a golden plate.

That is the situation on the international scene. As for the Soviet Union itself, an alliance was established between Lenin and Trotsky, as was mentioned above, against the rise of the bureaucracy. This alliance aimed for a more forceful assertion of the importance of planning, the consolidation of the state monopoly of foreign trade subject to a string of erosions, a struggle against the bureaucratic practices within the party and the state, and the prevention of the revival of great Russian chauvinism.⁵⁹ We have seen above how this effort proved abortive when Lenin had a new and lasting stroke in the spring of 1923.

Self-criticism

Before we leave the topic of the political relationship between Lenin and Trotsky, it would be wise to see what kind of evolution the thinking of the two revolutionaries underwent on the two major disagreements between them in the period 1903-1917.

Let us first look into Trotsky's changing position on the question of the party. Trotsky subjected the attitude he took towards Bolshevism and Lenin's conception of the party in the past to an unambiguous self-criticism in his writings of 1939-1940 later compiled in the book titled *In Defense of Marxism*. It is necessary to quote Trotsky at length:

Upon joining the Bolshevik party, Trotsky recognised completely and wholeheartedly the correctness of the Leninist methods of building the party. At the same time the irreconcilable class tendency of Bolshevism had corrected an incorrect prognosis. If I did not again raise the question of "permanent revolution" in 1917 it was because it had already been decided for both sides by the march of events. The basis for joint work was not decided by subjective or episodic combinations but by the proletarian revolution.

As one can see, Trotsky contends that it is he who has conceded the correctness of Lenin's position on the question of the party and Lenin who did the same on that of permanent revolution. There is a certain realism to this assessment. (Why we use the qualifying adjective "certain" will be clear in a moment.) A bit further on, Trotsky talks about the August Bloc:

I participated actively in this bloc. In a certain sense I created it. Politically I differed with the Mensheviks on all fundamental questions. I also differed with the ultra-left Bolsheviks, the Vperyodists. In the general tendency of politics, I stood far more closely to the Bolsheviks. But I was against the Leninist "regime" because I had not yet learned to understand that in order to realise the revolutionary goal a firmly welded centralised party is indispensable. And so I formed this episodic

⁵⁹ See Moshe Lewin, *Lenin'in Son Mücadelesi*, [The Last Struggle of Lenin] translation A. Muhtittin, İstanbul: Yücel Yayınları, 1976 and V.I.Lenin/L.D.Trotsky, *Lenin's Fight Against Stalinism*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975.

bloc consisting of heterogeneous elements which was directed against the proletarian wing of the party.

In the August bloc the liquidators had their own faction, the Vperyodists also had something resembling a faction. I stood isolated, having co-thinkers but no faction. Most of the documents were written by me and through avoiding principled differences had as their aim the creation of a semblance of unanimity upon “concrete political questions”. Not a word about the past! Lenin subjected the August bloc to merciless criticism and the harshest blows fell to my lot. Lenin proved that inasmuch as I did not agree politically with either the Mensheviks or the Vperyodists my policy was adventurism. This was severe but it was true.

Then he generalises the question:

As “mitigating circumstances” let me mention the fact that I had set as my task not to support the right or ultra-left factions against the Bolsheviki but to unite the party as a whole. ... The second mitigating circumstance is this, that the very phenomenon of Bolshevism as the genuine revolutionary party was then developing for the first time — in the practice of the Second International there were no precedents. But I do not thereby seek in the least to absolve myself from guilt. Notwithstanding the conception of permanent revolution which undoubtedly disclosed the correct perspective, I had not freed myself at that period especially in the organizational sphere from the traits of a petty-bourgeois revolutionist. I was sick with the disease of conciliationism toward Menshevism and with a distrustful attitude toward Leninist centralism.⁶⁰

This text is an exemplary specimen of courage and honesty to a degree rarely seen in the history of Marxism. Outside of instances of fabricated self-criticism that Stalinist parties used to have their members that have fallen into disfavour exposed before the party, it is very difficult to come across such an instance of frank self-criticism that a revolutionary has made of his own free will. Let us repeat the crux of all this lest the reader skip the message: Trotsky in his Bolshevik age characterises the young Trotsky as someone who has not been able to cast off “the traits of a petty-bourgeois revolutionist especially in the organizational sphere”. What to say of those “Trotskyists” who, after this bold self-criticism in the starkest terms possible of the master they supposedly own, still ruminate about the alleged lack of democracy in Lenin’s party etc.?

We have criticised Trotsky ruthlessly. Let us now say out loud what he deserves: bravo, great revolutionary!

It is now time to look at the other side of the medallion. Has Lenin also admitted that Trotsky was right on the question of permanent revolution? We pointed out above that that is how Trotsky saw the picture and that there is “a certain realism” to this. We said “a certain realism” because Lenin never admitted so much in public.

60 Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, London: New Park Publications, 1982, pp. 175 and 177-78.

Or rather he did so, but did not name it permanent revolution. Among those texts of Lenin that we are aware of, that in which he comes closest to characterising the October revolution through the lens of permanent revolution is the transcript of a talk he made on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the revolution on 14th October 1921, published on 18th October 1921 in *Pravda*. Let us now delve into this text to read some passages of immense significance:

We have *consummated* the bourgeois-democratic revolution as nobody had done before. We are *advancing* towards the socialist revolution consciously, firmly and unswervingly, knowing that it is not separated from the bourgeois-democratic revolution by a Chinese Wall, and knowing too that (in the last analysis) *struggle alone* will determine how far we shall advance, what part of this immense and lofty task we shall accomplish, and to what extent we shall succeed in consolidating our victories.⁶¹

Up until this point Lenin has somewhat diverged from the old Bolshevik formula by stressing that there is no break between the two stages of the revolution. Of course, the two revolutions are linked to each other or have even penetrated into one another, but this is still not permanent revolution. For the characteristic trait of permanent revolution, its *differentia specifica* as it were, is that the democratic regime can be completed only by growing over into socialist revolution, in other words, only socialism in power will make it possible to carry out the democratic tasks. Let us proceed a bit further in Lenin's text:

We solved the problems of the bourgeois democratic revolution in passing, as a "by-product" of our main and genuinely *proletarian*-revolutionary, socialist activities.⁶²

Now this is permanent revolution. In his polemics with the "old Bolsheviks" carried out in 1917, including in his "April theses", Lenin said that the democratic revolution had been *completed* in Russia thanks to the February revolution so that it was the turn for socialist revolution. This of course came close to Trotsky in practice in that it admitted that the power of the proletariat was on the agenda of history, but that is all it conceded. Here, on the other hand, "proletarian-revolutionary" or "socialist" power is advanced as the *condition of the completion* of the democratic revolution. Let us take still another step:

Incidentally, the Kautskys, Hilferdings, Martovs, Chernovs, Hillquits, Longuets, MacDonalds, Turatis and other heroes of "Two-and-a-half" Marxism were incapable of understanding *this* relation between the bourgeois-democratic and the

61 V.I. Lenin, "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution", *Pravda*, No. 234, 18 October 1921, *Collected Works*, volume 33, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, pp. 51-52. All emphases belong to Lenin.

62 *Ibid*, p. 54. Emphasis in the original.

proletarian-socialist revolutions. The first develops into the second. The second, in passing, solves the problems of the first. The second consolidates the work of the first.⁶³

Had Trotsky been asked to define permanent revolution, he would probably have had recourse to the same words and phrases! What is being described here is the quintessence of permanent revolution. *Lenin thus admits here that the October revolution has developed and been completed according to the dynamics of permanent revolution!*

Under these circumstances, there is no reason whatsoever to doubt the veracity of what Adolf Joffe, a member of Trotsky's Left Opposition, wrote in the letter he left behind for Trotsky when he committed suicide in 1927:

I have never doubted the rightness of the road you pointed out, and as you know I have gone with you for more than twenty years, since the days of 'permanent revolution.' But I have always believed that you lacked Lenin's *unbending will*, his *unwillingness to yield*, his readiness even to remain alone on the path that he thought right in the anticipation of a future majority, of a future recognition by every one of the rightness of his path. *Politically, you were always right*, beginning with, and I told you repeatedly that with my own ears I had heard Lenin admit that even in 1905, *you, and not he*, were right. One does not lie before his death, and now I repeat this again to you ... But you have often *abandoned your rightness* for the sake of an overvalued agreement, or compromise. This is a mistake. I repeat: politically you have always been right, and now *more right than ever*. Some day the party will realize it, and history will not fail to accord recognition. ... Many a time I have wanted to tell you this, but only now have I brought myself to do so, as a last farewell.⁶⁴

True, no one would lie when facing death. However, one cannot but wish that not only Joffe but the whole party had heard with their "own ears" that Lenin had said he believed that even in 1905 Trotsky was right concerning their political disagreements!

We have submitted Trotsky to the harshest of criticisms in this article. Is there any good reason to spare Lenin from criticism? *One of Lenin's biggest mistakes in his lifetime* was not to have explicitly made self-criticism on this question after the victory of the October revolution, admitting that on the programmatic debate Trotsky had been in the right, that the Russian revolution had become victorious on the basis of the dynamics of permanent revolution in precisely the terms that he (Trotsky) had foreseen. It was because he had not done this that, hardly Lenin's body interred, the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev Triumvirate started a frontal and wholesale attack on the concept of permanent revolution advocated by "Trotskyism". Had Lenin's mark of protection been sealed over the concept of permanent revolution, the Triumvirate

63 Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

64 Quoted in Trotsky, *My Life*, op. cit., p. 537.

would have to pay a prohibitively higher price in order to launch that attack. At least, everything would have been clearer for all to see. Every Bolshevik would have known that the conception on which war was being waged by the Triumvirate was one to which Lenin had seen fit to subscribe to at a certain stage of his life. In other words, as Trotsky was saying at the time, it would have been much clearer that the struggle that was being waged was “against proletarian revolution”!

One can only speculate as to why Lenin did not make such self-criticism. The problem cannot be lack of confidence on Lenin’s part toward Trotsky. We saw above what extensive powers he bestowed on Trotsky from 1919 on. Moreover, Lenin entrusted the command of the army, the Red Army to him. Had he not had such great confidence in him, he certainly would not have put in Trotsky’s hand a lever that was susceptible to abuse for inconceivably evil purposes. A more reasonable political explanation might have been Lenin’s fear that Trotsky might use Lenin’s self-criticism to his own ends in the context of party infighting. He might have thought that such self-criticism coming from the unquestionable leader of the party and the revolution would augment Trotsky’s prestige to a level that might pose a problem in the context of possible future intra-party friction. One can see clearly that his testament is marked through and through with the fear of a future division of the party. Hence, he might have shrunk from giving an even more formidable weapon to Trotsky, whom he already assesses as a leader of superior talent.

Until a certain stage of development, this might indeed be seen as a wise tactical consideration. But Lenin should at least have done this self-criticism after he started a war in common with Trotsky against the bureaucracy in the fall of 1922. He now believed that Stalin should be removed from office, which implies that he has already understood that Stalin was the chief menace. There is no reason why he should still fear strengthening Trotsky’s hand excessively.

A psychological explanation might be that it proved difficult for Lenin to present a self-criticism after 14 years of polemic against his erstwhile rival. Lenin has gone down in history as an exemplary leader who, once he found out that he was wrong, was able to change instantly his point of view and move over to the correct position. But this case is different. In all the other cases, Lenin reached the correct position by settling accounts with reality *himself*. Here, there is something akin to *capitulating* before your rival after 14 long years of disagreement. This is pure speculation, we repeat, because we do not wield any evidence to substantiate it, of the type that we did when explaining the psychology of Trotsky’s resistance to Lenin.

Whatever might be the reason, Lenin’s hesitations or his judgment that there is no place for self-criticism under the circumstances proved to be very costly for the future of the revolution he led and cherished so much.

5. The liberal Trotsky or Trotsky as an alternative to Lenin

The restoration of capitalism successively in most workers' states resulted in Lenin footing the bill of the crimes of Stalin. And because Stalinist calumny had for decades presented Trotsky as an anti-Leninist, many leftists disillusioned in Lenin (and in Stalin who, they imagine, is the legitimate successor to Lenin) started to ask themselves the question of whether Trotsky may be a promising alternative to Lenin. Naturally, Soviet democracy, as well as inner party democracy, played an important part in Trotsky's critique of the bureaucracy. On the other hand, because Stalinist parties had presented their bureaucratic centralist inner regimes as an example of the "Leninist party", it was possible to reason as follows: since Trotsky criticised the Stalinist inner regime, which is said to be "Leninist", he may be defending a model of the party that is not centralist but lax and liberal. For all of these reasons, many people who were looking for a road outside what was being called "really existing socialism" (or "real socialism" for short, both of them nonsensical and apologetic terms) started to look at Trotskyism as a liberal or anarchistic model.

As this was happening in the formerly Stalinist camp involving large masses of people in many countries, another tendency was seeing the light of day, one that complemented and further reinforced this tendency. In its effort to emphasize the differences between itself and Stalinism for decades, Trotskyism had striven to bring to the fore its democratic credentials. This had not brought Trotskyism much support for a very long time. But now former Stalinists were turning their face towards "democracy" and indeed sliding with the speed of light towards liberalism *en masse*. The emphasis on democracy could perhaps finally pay off. Many Trotskyist groups started to represent "socialist democracy" as a paradise where all political currents would be able to work unfettered, where even the bourgeoisie would not be subjected to any kind of repression or exclusion; in effect, many would, in time, start to see the very concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as ballast in the way of increasing their popularity and decided to throw it away. As for the inner regime of the party, tendencies and factions came to be seen not as a permissible right, but something almost desirable, something, indeed, to be encouraged, something that is a mark of maturity. The end result was to ignore the rule of unity of action, which was a *sine qua non* of democratic centralism, the rule to the effect that once a decision was taken in due fashion, the whole party was bound by that decision and would contribute to its practical implementation. On the other hand, in European countries, where Eurocommunism had by now become the dominant trend, militants who worked in Trotskyist parties also came to decide which actions of the party they would attend or, for that matter, in which sphere of activity they would be exerting their militant effort. Former Stalinists having become new left-wing liberals should surely be forgiven for thinking, inspired by these examples, that Trotskyism was really an alternative to Leninism!

The idea of the "liberal Trotsky" is a fiction, one that has been fabricated by currents that have long abandoned revolutionary Marxism, but still continue to apply the label of "Trotskyism" to their movement. It is not possible to find a speck of such tendencies in Trotsky himself, nor in the currents that have remained loyal to his true heritage. We saw above that some elements of such tendencies were present

in the thinking of the young Trotsky. Even then, the sole problem was basically the existence of a spontaneist logic preventing Trotsky from grasping the importance of a centralist revolutionary party. There is not the slightest sign that Trotsky had any illusions in “pure democracy” regarding the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Quite the contrary. But when Trotsky became a Bolshevik, even the loose conception of the party was completely eliminated. What should one call people who insist on committing the youthful mistakes of a master who later saw his errors and presented as thorough a self-criticism as Trotsky dared to make on that very question?

In this fifth section, we will introduce some new elements into precisely this topic, elements that will fill the partisans of a liberal Trotsky with dismay. There are some works of Trotsky that instill in those who adopt a liberal interpretation of Trotsky’s thinking a mixture of embarrassment and regret. One of these is the compilation of articles and documents from which we have quoted at length above, titled *In Defense of Marxism*, which brings together material from the years 1939-1940. In a review of that book years ago, we advanced the idea that the book in question may even be read as the testament of Trotsky.⁶⁵ A second book composed of writings penned only slightly before these articles, in 1938-39, was later published under the title *Their Morals and Ours*.⁶⁶ Then there is another book or pamphlet written by Trotsky, hardly ever mentioned in our day and age, called *Terrorism and Communism*. He wrote this one in 1919-1920, when he was crisscrossing Russia in his armoured train. It is his answer to Kautsky’s critique of the Russian revolution.

Because we have assessed the import of *In Defense of Marxism* before,⁶⁷ we will not go here into that book. As for *Their Morals and Ours*, we will refer to it only briefly as the complexity of its philosophical topics require a more detailed exposition and discussion. But we would like to dwell somewhat on *Terrorism and Communism*. Additionally, we will also take up the questions of the “militarisation of labour” and the elimination of the independence of the trade unions, two mutually related concepts that Trotsky raised in 1920. This book (*Terrorism and Communism*) and this practical proposal are almost hidden by self-styled Trotskyists from the public eye. Others, on the other hand, constantly exhume them supposedly to throw shame on Trotsky. We criticize Trotsky, in the same way as we will criticize other Marxists we regard as our leaders, when he or others make mistakes. But if no mistake exists, we continue to defend their thinking and practice. And if mistake there is, it is important to know what its real import is and whether the enemies of Marxism are abusing those mistakes so as to turn the younger generations away from Marxism.

65 Sungur Savran, “Trotsky’ in Vasiyetnamesi” [Trotsky’s Testament], *Sınıf Bilinci*, No. 11, October 1992.

66 Leon Trotsky/John Dewey/George Novack, *Their Morals and Ours*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1986.

67 What is meant here is that the author has gone over the major aspects of *In Defense of Marxism* in a book review earlier (see footnote 65 above). Unfortunately, as the article is in Turkish, the foreign reader does not have the opportunity to inspect that article.

Terrorism and Communism

As is widely known, Kautsky was one of the leaders and the major theoretician of German social democracy before the imperialist war, but moved gradually towards reformism, pursued a centrist policy during the war and moved definitively to the ranks of the counter-revolution after the October revolution. He wrote two pamphlets attacking the October revolution. Lenin answered the first one and Trotsky the second. Both of these ripostes referred to the views of Marxism on wars and revolutions and engaged in serious theoretical debates and were, in their essence, written along similar lines. This simply shows that the views of Lenin and Trotsky overlap, dealing another blow to the search for “Trotsky as an alternative to Lenin”. Here we will dwell exclusively on Trotsky’s book.

In his book, Trotsky insists that in times of revolution and civil war, the proletariat must defend the power that it has acquired by all kinds of extraordinary measures and, as one component of these extraordinary measures, respond to counter-revolutionary terror by resorting to revolutionary terror. In order to explain this to those of the ilk of Kautsky who have renounced revolution and turned their attention to parliamentarism, he cites instances of this attitude from past revolutions. The “Glorious Revolution” of 17th century in England, the Jacobins in power during the French revolution of late 18th century, and the Civil War of the mid-19th century that completed the American revolution, as well as the Paris Commune of 1871, which Kautsky pretended to defend, all had recourse to terror. Because, adds Trotsky, “the problem faced by revolution, as that faced by war, is to break the will of the enemy, to force him to capitulate by accepting the conditions of the victor.”⁶⁸

Trotsky advances evidence in countering Kautsky’s attempt to demonstrate how different the Paris Commune was from the October revolution. Most importantly, he shows, in counterposition to Kautsky’s allegations, that Marx criticised the Commune for exaggerating the importance it attributed to democracy and for not having destroyed the counter-revolutionary Versailles army while the latter was still weak. In Marx’s opinion, the National Guard turned power over to the elected Commune bodies too early. The author of *Civil War in France* complains of an “artificial atmosphere of parliamentarism”. Why all this criticism? The reason is simple: because the Commune refrained from defeating the Versailles army conclusively, the Versailles had the time and the opportunity to recompose and subjected the communards to a fusillade that cost tens of thousands of them their lives! The Kautskian mind, unable to grasp this decisive importance of war in revolutions, disregards this unassailable fact!

The last chapters of *Terrorism and Communism* were devoted to a discussion of the question of the “militarisation of labour”. We will convey this policy proposal and practice of Trotsky to the reader in its historical context, without confining ourselves to this book.

68 *Terrorisme*, *ibid*, p. 64. Our translation from the French edition.

The militarisation of labour and the question of trade unions

As mentioned before, the economic policy of the Civil War period in Russia was named “War Communism”. Without going into detail, the gist of this policy was the requisition by the state of the economic surplus produced by the peasant. The peasantry, which was initially prone to a lot of self-sacrifice in order to protect the land that it had acquired thanks to the Bolshevik regime, grew increasingly restless. Because Trotsky, in contrast to Lenin and others who were administering the new state from their offices in Moscow, contacted peasants face to face constantly on his trips in the armoured train, he noted this restive mood earlier than all. In his opinion, a policy was necessary that would address the interests of the peasant, a policy that would provide more incentive to work more. His proposal was a prefiguration of the NEP (New Economic Policy) orientation that was to be adopted later at the Tenth Congress of the Party in early 1921. Trotsky brought his proposal to the Central Committee in early 1920, but Lenin came up against this and the motion was rejected with 4 votes in favour and 11 against. Trotsky did not consider it appropriate to take his proposal to the ninth party congress that was to be convened soon.

It thus became clear that the policy of War Communism, the requisition of the peasant’s economic surplus, i.e. its appropriation through extra-economic measures, was going to be carried on for some time longer at least. This policy was one that did not create a relation between work and personal remuneration, but subjected the entire economy to the requirements of military needs and targets. Even the needs of certain vital institutions were not met. Transport and, in particular, railroad transportation was one of these industries. When in early 1920 engineers reported that railroads would, technically speaking, come to a halt a short time later, the government gave Trotsky, commander of the Red Army in the ongoing Civil War, the additional task of reviving the transport sector, with the railway network in the foreground. Trotsky was well aware that, marked by a spirit of devotion and political consciousness as it was, the Red Army was the Soviet institution that functioned in the most effective fashion. Benefitting from the fact that in certain regions of the country the Civil War was practically over, he started to devote the services of military troops to civilian economic activities. It was thanks to these measures that the railroad system came to be revived in a brief time.

During this successful effort, Trotsky came into conflict many times with the railroad labour union. The militarisation of labour was prone to create arduous work conditions that were met with a lot of discontent by the unions. Trotsky defended these conditions on the ground that the salvation of the revolution demanded self-sacrifice on the part of the working class and criticised the union’s resistance for creating an obstacle in the way of the survival of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the process, Trotsky started to defend a new position on trade unions: because the state was henceforth a workers’ state, the working class had no need of defending itself face to the state. The unions should join the effort, on the side of the state, of increasing production. This controversy would go all the way up to the Congress of Trade Unions and the Bolshevik president of the Congress, Tomsky, would come up against the policy advocated by Trotsky.

From then on the question became one of a controversy within the Bolshevik Party itself. The 10th Congress, which met in early 1921, put this question on its agenda and duly deliberated on it. Lenin, who had up until then supported the policy of militarisation, was to defend the unions against Trotsky. Lenin's position was quite straightforward: he insisted that the Soviet state was not a workers' state in the pure sense of the term, but a workers' state marred by bureaucratic deformations. Thus workers did need their organisations to defend their rights. His approach to the question was to be adopted by the delegates at the congress and Trotsky's theses defeated.

But the 10th Congress was also the one that abandoned the policy of War Communism and adopted the New Economic Policy (NEP). The restlessness that Trotsky had first observed in the ranks of the peasantry had now taken forms visible to all. The country was rife with a series of peasant revolts. There were also stirrings within the working class itself. Lenin and the Bolsheviks concluded from all this that a retreat was necessary. NEP was an economic policy orientation that allowed for a certain part of the economic surplus produced by the peasant, over and above that paid as a tax to the state, to be sold on the market, for market incentives to be used in other spheres of economic activity, even for the seeking of opportunities of cooperation with foreign capital. The importance of all this with respect to the controversy on unions and the militarisation of labour lay in the following: Trotsky had advanced this proposal within the context of War Communism after the NEP-like orientation he had earlier recommended had not been adopted. In his opinion, the logic of War Communism imposed this course. But now that War Communism had been left behind, the actuality of this course disappeared.

Defending the dictatorship of the proletariat

This, in a nutshell, is the nature of the controversy on the militarisation of labour and trade unions. Trotsky was wrong on this and Lenin was completely right. In our opinion, even Lenin did not go far enough, for he predicated his rejection of Trotsky's trade union policy on the twin facts of the disproportional influence of the peasantry on the state and the idea that the Soviet state was, indeed, a workers' state but a "bureaucratically deformed workers' state". We believe that trade unions will long have a part to play even in the healthy and robust workers' state of the future because although the state is a workers' state, to the extent that individual workplaces are not run by the workers themselves but managers that do not share the power of decision-making with workers, workers will need organs of defense of their interests. We say this tentatively, open to further debate on the question. Trotsky's position, on the other hand, is indefensible given *the general grounds he presents* for his theses. The fact of the existence of a workers' state should not, *per se*, be advanced to turn the unions into docile organs of the state apparatus, irrespective of all circumstances.

The careful reader will have noticed the reference to the "general grounds". Under certain conditions, when the revolution is faced with liquidation and the dictatorship of the proletariat with the threat of extinction, there may be exceptional practices that are defensible. If terror is permissible for the survival of the workers'

state, surely union rights might as well be suspended. To object to this implies the counterposition of *abstract and partial rights* to the interests of the *working class as a whole*.

Why did we bring up the question of the militarisation of labour and trade unions? In fact, this question does not stand alone. Many other questions could also have been evoked for the same purpose. The critics of the Bolsheviks do in fact adduce other kinds of evidence that range from the banning of other socialist parties to the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising. We need not go into all of this for two reasons. First, the defense of terror for the preservation of the revolution goes further than all of that. We see hence that *both Lenin and Trotsky* consider the protection of the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat above all else. And, secondly, the idea of the elimination of the independence of the trade unions deals a mortal blow to the image of the “liberal Trotsky”, since *Trotsky has defended a method that is rejected even by Lenin*. If Lenin is a despot, Trotsky is surely more of a despot!

Trotsky, Stalin minus the power?

No further evidence is necessary to rebut the image of the “liberal Trotsky”. But now we have to turn the other way and deal with another serious question. All that we have recounted here (terror, the banning of socialist parties, trade unions, Kronstadt etc.) provide evidence for anarchists and left-wing liberals, as well as straightforward bourgeois thinkers for the following proposition: Had he been able to win the struggle for power Trotsky would not have been any different from Stalin. This cohort thereby confess that they have not understood a thing about Stalinism.

For the question is not one of *which methods* Stalin has resorted to. The question is *why, to what ends* the Stalinist terror has been applied. The despotic dictatorship established by Stalin was shaped by the needs of the constitution and preservation of the power of the bureaucracy over the working class and the toiling masses. The methods that Trotsky defended during the Civil War were, on the contrary, to protect and defend the power of the proletariat. Some may object that Stalin also claimed he was defending the proletarian state. How then can we establish the difference? To show the difference, we will present evidence of two different orders.

Trotsky applied terror to the White Armies that were trying to oust proletarian power. Stalin applied it to communists. If he substituted the secret police and other apparatuses of repression in place of the party as the main instrument of power, if he had all the members of the Central Committee of the party that had led the October revolution to victory (like the Zinovievs, the Kamenevs, the Bukharins, the Pyatakovs, the generals of the Red Army that won the Civil War etc.), that is those who had not earlier died of natural causes (like Lenin or Sverdlov for instance) judged and killed during the Moscow Trials for collaboration with fascism and its ally Trotsky, sabotage, assassination or other utterly outlandish crimes, if he had a revolutionary of the stature of Trotsky assassinated upon his personal orders, or even more strikingly, if he had 139 full members and 98 alternate members of the Central Committee elected at the 17th Congress of the party convened in 1934, a congress ironically labelled “the congress of the victors”, purged, if at the opening

of the 18th Congress that met in 1939 only 24 per cent of those that had been elected at the previous congress were still alive,⁶⁹ this can mean only one thing.

Trotsky defended suppressing Kronstadt because it was an *armed* insurrection against the proletarian state.⁷⁰ It is obvious what Stalin has done to his most peace-loving opponents. If Trotsky defended the banning of socialist parties, that is because the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries (or the SRs as they are more commonly known) sided with the Whites against the revolution during the Civil War. The Bolsheviks tried, from time to time, to win over these parties to the side of the revolution but it was they who each time refused to abide by Soviet legality.⁷¹ Stalin raised the nonsense that the working class could possess only one party to the level of theory and constitutional provision, an idea the Bolsheviks had never subscribed to during the revolutionary period of the party.

In short, we are applying the criterion that Trotsky threw at the face of Kautsky in *Terrorism and Communism* to the case of the latter-day Kautskyists:

“Well, then how does your tactics differ from those of the Tzarist state?” ask us the pontiffs of liberalism and Kautskyism.

Do you not understand, you false bigots? Then we will explain to you. The terror of the Tzar was directed to the proletariat. The Tzarist gendarmerie was strangulating workers fighting to bring socialism. Our Special Commissions are executing landlords, capitalists, generals, who are all striving to restore the capitalist order. Do you grasp this... nuance? Yes? For us communists, this is more than sufficient.⁷² It might be in order to point out how closely this argument is linked to the philosophy of “the ends justify the means”⁷³ propounded in *Their Morals and Ours*. This shows that the ideas Trotsky set forth in *Terrorism and Communism* in 1920 are not tainted by the bloody environment of the Civil War and that he has remained true to them until 1938-39, to the end, in fact, of his days.

The real criterion

We can now pass over to the second criterion. Although the facts are there for all to see, some may still complain that it is not comprehensible who applied terror to communists and the partisans of the working class and who against the defenders of capitalist exploitation. Hence the first criterion may not seem to them sufficiently “fine”. We will now put forth an indisputable criterion. Marxist communism differs from all currents in the ranks of the working class by defending the *long-term*

69 See Sungur Savran, “Stalin’in Yazısına Uzun Bir Dipnot: ‘Devletlü Komünizm’” [A Long Footnote to Stalin’s Piece: ‘Communism with the State’], *Sınıf Bilinci*, No. 3, December 1988, pp. 172-73.

70 See Nail Satlıgan, “Kronstadt 1986” [Kronstadt 1986], *11. Tez*, No. 2, February 1986.

71 Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, op. cit., pp. 330-32 ve 447.

72 *Terrorisme*, op. cit., p. 69. Our translation from the French edition.

73 In our opinion, the better formula is “it is the ends that justify the means”, which shows not all means are justifiable when you look at the ends. This formula is a better rendering of the idea. However, in the text above, we have used the formula that is familiar to all.

interests of the *entire* working class. Because capitalism has given a worldwide character to productive forces and combined the entire historical process into a single one, proletarian internationalism and the programme of world revolution taken together are an indispensable criterion of Marxism. Whoever writes on their banner the aim of reaching classless society within the bounds of a single country is not a Marxist; they are not defending the interests of the entire working class or, in other words, of the world working class, but those of the bureaucracy of that single country, albeit presented in the guise of the interests of the working class of that same country. The real criterion is, hence, whether the struggle is waged in the name of proletarian internationalism or “national communism”. The real criterion is whether the struggle is for world revolution or “socialism in a single country”.

When Lenin returned from his exile in Switzerland to the Petrograd of the February revolution, he addressed a crowd of workers in front of the Finland Station at which he had just arrived. He finished off with the slogan “Long live the world socialist revolution!” Trotsky arrived in Petrograd a month later, after an adventurous trip. The day after his arrival, when he was given the floor at the Petrograd Soviet, of which he had served as chairman in 1905, he finished his speech with the following slogan: “Long live the Russian revolution, prelude to the world revolution!” Both revolutionary leaders, *without the means of knowing what one or the other has on their minds*, saw the process triggered in Russia as part of the revolution that would unfold at the international arena.

Let us then wrap up in the following manner. The fundamental criterion that sets apart Trotskyism and Stalinism is not that Stalinism is for despotism and Trotskyism is for democracy. That *is* certainly the case. But democracy can only be handled within the framework of an algebraic formula. Its content can only be filled depending on concrete conditions, relations between the classes, between war and peace, between revolution and counter-revolution. Trotsky, having defended a single party under the concrete circumstances of the Civil War and the upheaval caused by the revolution, criticises, in the 1938 Transitional Programme, the fetishism of the single-party system raised to the level of doctrine under Stalinism and demands freedom for all Soviet parties.

Proletarian democracy is of *crucial* importance for Trotskyism or revolutionary Marxism. But because of this question of algebraic formula, it cannot be the real distinguishing criterion. That is why the real distinction between Stalinism and Trotskyism is proletarian internationalism or world revolution.

In *In Defense of Marxism*, Trotsky depicts the order of priorities for revolutionary Marxism in the following way:

We must not lose sight for a single moment of the fact that the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR; that the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of the world proletarian revolution.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *In Defence of Marxism*, op. cit. p. 26.

The ranking is clear: the first priority is world proletarian revolution, that is to say internationalism; the second criterion is the defense of the workers' state; the elimination of the bureaucratic degeneration of the workers' state and establishing, as part and parcel of that process, proletarian democracy comes only in third place. Liberal Trotskyism will become history before long. In effect, those who adopt and practice Trotskyism in that manner are more and more undergoing a process of fusion with left-wing liberalism, becoming indistinguishable from it day by day.

6. El hombre que rescató a la humanidad de la “medianoche en el siglo”⁷⁵

We can now pull the strings of the different arguments advanced in this article together. In this paper, we first looked at the place of Trotsky in the rise and fall of the proletarian revolution in the first half of the 20th century. To begin with, we saw the great contributions that he made to the struggle of the proletariat and to Marxism in the spheres of both theory and practice. Later we subjected his weaknesses to a scrutiny. This showed us that as he matured, Trotsky cast off the spontaneism of the young Trotsky and became a Bolshevik or, in other words, corrected the fundamental flaw in his Marxism. But we also established the fact that this was a long drawn out and painful process that cost Trotsky and the revolution a very high price after Lenin's early death. Despite all this, Trotsky succeeded to hold the banner of Marxism and proletarian internationalism high under very adverse circumstances all his life.

We pointed out at the beginning of the article that, just like Lenin, Trotsky was a man of extraordinary gifts. Having been thrown by history into the maelstrom of an explosive working class movement, this genius contributed immensely to the repertory of ideas accumulated by humankind. Trotsky was as good a writer as any of the literary figures of his age; he was one of the three outstanding orators of the socialist movement in the 20th century, together with Jean Jaurès in the early century and Fidel Castro in the second half; he was a thinker of extremely high calibre in the sphere of literature and the arts; he was a giant of an intellectual that could, on behalf of the proletariat, cross swords with the most influential thinkers and statesmen of the 20th century, from Bernard Shaw to Winston Churchill and from André Malraux to Bertrand Russell and John Dewey. These and his contributions to Marxist theory and to revolutionary politics deserve to be recounted in much greater detail. But we think that Trotsky has a *unique place in history* for a reason that towers over all of the rest. This is what we are going to dwell upon in this concluding section.

Victor Serge was an intellectual who was a rare cross-breed between anarchism and Trotskyism (a mixture that was closely reproduced in Daniel Guérin, a generation younger than him). He depicted an age darkened by the twin enemies Stalinism and fascism in his *Midnight in the Century* successfully. It was Trotsky who, in this dark moment of the 20th century when fascism was massacring the proletariat and humanity at large and Stalinism was slaughtering Marxism within the working class movement, rose like the Northern star in the horizon of the working class movement

⁷⁵ Spanish for: The man who saved humanity from “midnight in the century”.

and *created the preconditions for the survival of revolutionary Marxism and proletarian internationalism up until the 21st century*. The different variants of the bureaucracy that descended upon 20th century socialism as a calamity and of Stalinism its ideology (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of China, the series of communist parties of different appellations in Eastern Europe and the Balkans etc.) became the architects, precisely as Trotsky had predicted in *The Revolution Betrayed*, of a process of capitalist restoration that delivered the property of the means of production into the hands of the bureaucracy. All the other currents in the international working class movement extolled one or another of these bureaucracies as the vanguard force of world communism. Most of these pure-bred Stalinist or Maoist parties have now become social democratic or plain democratic parties, defending liberal capitalist ideology. But those parties that were formed in the light shed by Trotsky continue to some or other degree to be the defenders of Marxism.

We wish to underline three dimensions of this process. First, the significance of Trotsky lies in that his presence in the debate shatters the equal sign that the bourgeoisie and the liberal left place between Marxism and Leninism, on the one hand, and Stalinism, on the other. Within a process that started at the end of last century and has continued to this day, post-modernism, post-Marxism, left wing liberalism and countless similar currents have tried to lay the blame for the horrendous practices of Stalinism and its variants at the door of Leninism. See what Marcel Gauchet, historian and philosopher who plays an important part in the public debate among left-wing intellectuals in France, has recently said while discussing the 1968 experience:

...for me the word totalitarianism has been of central importance. The decisive question for me has been the nature of the regimes born of the Leninist communist movement. It was around this that my intellectual itinerary turned. In that period, I considered the Communist Party [the PCF] not as going through destalinisation but through deconstruction. The problem that gripped me and became the engine of my personal journey is the failure of Marxism to explain those regimes with a Marxist inspiration. I developed very early on the idea that the fundamental question was to elaborate one's thinking on history that would avoid the dead ends of Marxism, in particular with respect to its assessment of so-called "bourgeois" democracy. It is this question that separated me from 68 thinking, which was not amenable to be used to that end.⁷⁶

What succinct summary! There are so many left-wing intellectuals around the world today who would oppose their signatures to this passage, whatever other differences they may harbour with each other. The basic allegation made by Gauchet is the "failure of Marxism to explain the regimes that claim to have been inspired by

76 "La pensée 68 est-elle épuisée?", *Le Monde*, 28 July 2015, pp. 14-15. Our translation from the French original. (https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/09/02/la-pensee-de-68-est-elle-epuisee_4702049_3232.html).

itself". Yet Trotsky has, in his *The Revolution Betrayed* and other writings, advanced the fundamentals of such an explanation with resounding success. The analysis that he presents there on the basis of a dialectical and materialist method has, moreover, provided us with ***the only diagnosis that has born the correct prognosis*** concerning the final outcome of the process of becoming of these societies. This, then, is the first point: Trotsky is the barrier in the way of the contemporary prejudice that identifies Marxism and Leninism with Stalinism.

Secondly, the influence of Stalinism did not remain confined to the Soviet Union, but spread to the rest of the world movement through the mediation of the Comintern. Thus, only a quarter of a century after 1914, the international socialist movement of the working class suffered another blow. Social democracy had sided with its own bourgeoisie in each country, thus decapitating the working class internationally for the first time. Now it was the turn of Stalinism to do the same thing by first transforming the Comintern from a world party to a foreign policy instrument of the Soviet bureaucracy and later, in 1943, liquidating the organisation that Lenin had founded under such difficult circumstances. Trotsky, by now an accomplished Bolshevik, knew how important was the continuity of a revolutionary organisation both at the national and international scales. Despite aging, he would roll up his sleeves. This is what he wrote in his diary in 1935:

...I think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life—more important than 1917, more important than the period of the civil war or any other. For the sake of clarity I would put it this way. Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place—***on the condition that Lenin was present and in command***. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring—of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to overcome the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders. The struggle with “Trotskyism” (i.e. with the proletarian revolution) would have commenced in May, 1917, and the outcome of the revolution would have been in question. But I repeat, granted the presence of Lenin the October Revolution would have been victorious anyway. The same could by and large be said of the Civil War, although in the first period, especially at the time of the fall of Simbirsk and Kazan, Lenin wavered and was beset by doubts. But this was undoubtedly a passing mood which he probably never even admitted to anyone but me.

Thus I cannot speak of the “indispensability” of my work, even about the period from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is “indispensable” in the full sense of the word. There is no arrogance in this claim at all. The collapse of the two Internationals has posed a problem which none of the leaders of these Internationals is at all equipped to solve. The vicissitudes of my personal fate have confronted me with this problem and armed me with important experience in dealing with it. There is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method over the heads of the Second and Third International.

And I am in a complete agreement with Lenin (or rather Turgenev) that the worst vice is to be more than 55 years old! I need at least about five more years of uninterrupted work to ensure the succession.⁷⁷

The year is 1935 and he needs another five years! Trotsky's calculation proved to be right. Five years proved to be enough. Despite the "insufficient and fragmentary nature" of the process of foundation of the Fourth International, today the programme and revolutionary ideas inherited by the world movement from that experience forms the ground for the construction of the international vanguard of the proletariat. So, this is the second point: Twice was the world vanguard of the proletariat destroyed, the first time by social democracy and the second time by Stalinism. Trotsky mended the broken link of this effort of reconstructing the vanguard.

Finally, Trotsky did not permit the great tradition of revolutionary Marxism embodied in the practice and principles of Lenin to be destroyed by the bureaucracy. Some of Trotsky's own contributions are so great as to be compete with those of Lenin. But *his success in establishing the continuity of Bolshevism for the victory of world revolution is the greatest contribution Trotsky has made to Marxism.* Trotsky came to Lenin, to use his own words, late, but with great seriousness. Let us leave the floor once again to Trotsky:

Long before anyone else, I made a public appreciation of Lenin's part in the Brest-Litovsk days. On October 3, 1918, at the extraordinary joint meeting of the higher organs of the Soviet government, I said: "I deem it my duty to say, in this authoritative assembly, that at the hour when many of us, including myself, were doubtful as to whether it was admissible for us to sign the Brest-Litovsk peace, only Comrade Lenin maintained stubbornly, with amazing foresight and against our opposition, that we had to go through with it to tide us over until the revolution of the world proletariat. And now, we must admit that we were wrong."

I did not wait for the delayed revelations from the epigones to recognize the political courage of Lenin's genius, which had saved the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Brest-Litovsk days. In the words I have just quoted, I took upon myself a larger share of responsibility for the errors of others than was really my due. I did it as an example to the others. At this point, the stenographic report notes "prolonged ovation." The party wanted to show in this way that it understood and appreciated my attitude toward Lenin, an attitude devoid of jealousy or pettiness. I realized only too well what Lenin meant to the revolution, to history, and to me. He was my master.⁷⁸

This is precisely why, for us, Trotsky is of paramount importance, but only together with Lenin. We are all Leninists, Trotsky included. This is why Lenin is a master to us all and Trotsky is his true heir.

⁷⁷ Quoted by Joseph Hansen, "Introduction: With Trotsky in Coyoacan", *My Life*, op. cit. pp. vi-vii.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 393-94.