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Essays on Working-Class and International Revolution, 1904-1917

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PREFACE

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The world has not known us Russian revolutionists. The world has sympathized with us; the world abroad has given aid and comfort to our refugees; the world, at times, even admired us; yet the world has not known us. Friends of freedom in Europe and America were keenly anxious to see the victory of our cause; they watched our successes and our defeats with breathless interest; yet they were concerned with material results. Our views, our party

affiliations, our factional divisions, our theoretical gropings, our ideological constructions, to us the leading lights in our revolutionary struggles, were foreign to the world. All this was supposed to be an internal Russian affair.

The Revolution has now ceased to be an internal Russian affair. It has become of world-wide import. It has started to influence governments and peoples. What was not long ago a theoretical dispute between two "underground" revolutionary circles, has grown into a concrete historical power determining the fate of nations. What was the individual conception of individual revolutionary leaders is now ruling millions.

The world is now vitally interested in understanding Russia, in learning the history of our Revolution which is the history of the great Russian nation for the last fifty years. This involves, however, knowing not only events, but also the development of thoughts, of aims, of ideas that underlie and direct events; gaining an insight into the immense volume of intellectual work which recent decades have accumulated in revolutionary Russia.

We have selected Leon Trotzky's contribution to revolutionary thought, not because he is now in the limelight of history, but because his conceptions represent a very definite, a clear-cut and intrinsically consistent trend of revolutionary thought, quite apart from that of other leaders. We do not agree with many of Trotzky's ideas and policies, yet we cannot overlook the fact that these ideas have become predominant in the present phase of the Russian Revolution and that they are bound to give their

stamp to Russian democracy in the years to come, whether the present government remains in power or not.

The reader will see that Trotzky's views as applied in Bolsheviki ruled Russia are not of recent origin. They were formed in the course of the First Russian Revolution of 1905, in which Trotzky was one of the leaders. They were developed and strengthened in the following years of reaction, when many a progressive group went to seek compromises with the absolutist forces. They became particularly firm through the world war and the circumstances that led to the establishment of a republican order in Russia. Perhaps many a grievous misunderstanding and misinterpretation would have been avoided had thinking America known that those conceptions of Trotzky were not created on the spur of the moment, but were the result of a life-long work in the service of the Revolution.

Trotzky's writings, besides their theoretical and political value, represent a vigor of style and a clarity of expression unique in Russian revolutionary literature.

M.J. Olgin.

New York, February 16th, 1918.

LEON TROTZKY

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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Trotzky is a man of about forty. He is tall, strong, angular; his appearance as well as his speech give the impression of boldness and vigor. His voice is a high tenor ringing with metal. And even in his quiet moments he resembles a compressed spring.

He is always aggressive. He is full of passion,—that white-hot, vibrating mental passion that characterizes the intellectual Jew. On the platform, as well as in private life, he bears an air of peculiar importance, an indefinable something that says very distinctly: "Here is a man who knows his value and feels himself chosen for superior aims." Yet Trotzky is not imposing. He is almost modest. He is detached. In the depths of his eyes there is a lingering sadness.

It was only natural that he, a gifted college youth with a strong avidity for theoretical thinking, should have exchanged, some twenty years ago, the somber class-rooms of the University of Odessa for the fresh breezes of revolutionary activity. That was the way of most gifted Russian youths. That especially was the way of educated young Jews whose people were being crushed under the steam-roller of the Russian bureaucracy.

In the last years of the nineteenth century there was hardly enough opportunity to display unusual energy in revolutionary work. Small circles of picked workingmen, assembling weekly under great secrecy somewhere in a backyard cabin in a suburb, to take a course in sociology or history or economics; now and then a "mass" meeting of a few score laborers gathered in the woods; revolutionary appeals and pamphlets printed on a secret press and

circulated both among the educated classes and among the people; on rare occasions, an open manifestation of revolutionary intellectuals, such as a meeting of students within the walls of the University—this was practically all that could be done in those early days of Russian revolution. Into this work of preparation, Trotzky threw himself with all his energy. Here he came into the closest contact with the masses of labor. Here he acquainted himself with the psychology and aspirations of working and suffering Russia. This was the rich soil of practical experience that ever since has fed his revolutionary ardor.

His first period of work was short. In 1900 we find him already in solitary confinement in the prisons of Odessa, devouring book after book to satisfy his mental hunger. No true revolutionist was ever made downhearted by prison, least of all Trotzky, who knew it was a brief interval of enforced idleness between periods of activity. After two and a half years of prison "vacation" (as the confinement was called in revolutionary jargon) Trotzky was exiled to Eastern Siberia, to Ust-Kut, on the Lena River, where he arrived early in 1902, only to seize the first opportunity to escape.

Again he resumed his work, dividing his time between the revolutionary committees in Russia and the revolutionary colonies abroad. 1902 and 1903 were years of growth for the labor movement and of Social-Democratic influence over the working masses. Trotzky, an uncompromising Marxist, an outspoken adherent of the theory that only the revolutionary workingmen would be able to establish democracy in Russia, devoted much of his energy to the task of uniting the various Social-Democratic

circles and groups in the various cities of Russia into one strong Social-Democratic Party, with a clear program and well-defined tactics. This required a series of activities both among the local committees and in the Social-Democratic literature which was conveniently published abroad.

It was in connection with this work that Trotzky's first pamphlet was published and widely read. It was entitled: *The Second Convention of The Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party* (Geneva, 1903), and dealt with the controversies between the two factions of Russian Social-Democracy which later became known as the Bolsheviki and the Mensheviki. Trotzky's contribution was an attempt at reconciliation between the two warring camps which professed the same Marxian theory and pursued the same revolutionary aim. The attempt failed, as did many others, yet Trotzky never gave up hope of uniting the alienated brothers.

On the eve of the Revolution of 1905, Trotzky was already a revolutionary journalist of high repute. We admired the vigor of his style, the lucidity of his thought and the straightness of his expression. Articles bearing the pseudonym "N. Trotzky" were an intellectual treat, and invariably aroused heated discussions. It may not be out of place to say a few words about this pseudonym. Many an amazing comment has been made in the American press on the Jew Bronstein "camouflaging" under a Russian name, Trotzky. It seems to be little known in this country that to assume a pen name is a practice widely followed in Russia, not only among revolutionary writers. Thus "Gorki" is a pseudonym; "Shchedrin" (Saltykov) is a pseudonym. "Fyodor

Sologub" is a pseudonym. As to revolutionary writers, the very character of their work has compelled them to hide their names to escape the secret police. Ulyanov, therefore, became "Lenin," and Bronstein became "Trotzky." As to his "camouflaging" as a Russian, this assertion is based on sheer ignorance. Trotzky is not a genuine Russian name—no more so than Ostrovski or Levine. True, there was a Russian playwright Ostrovski, and Tolstoi gave his main figure in *Anna Karenin* the name of Levine. Yet Ostrovski and Levine are well known in Russia as Jewish names, and so is Trotzky. I have never heard of a Gentile bearing the name Trotzky. Trotzky has never concealed his Jewish nationality. He was too proud to dissimulate. Pride is, perhaps, one of the dominant traits of his powerful personality.

Revolutionary Russia did not question the race or nationality of a writer or leader. One admired Trotzky's power over emotion, the depth of his convictions, the vehemence of his attacks on the opponents of the Revolution. As early as 1904, one line of his revolutionary conceptions became quite conspicuous: *his opposition to the liberal movement in Russia*. In a series of essays in the Social-Democratic *Iskra* (*Spark*), in a collection of his essays published in Geneva under the title *Before January Ninth*, he unremittingly branded the Liberals for lack of revolutionary spirit, for cowardice in face of a hateful autocracy, for failure to frame and to defend a thoroughly democratic program, for readiness to compromise with the rulers on minor concessions and thus to betray the cause of the Revolution. No one else was as eloquent, as incisive in pointing out the timidity and meekness of the Zemstvo opposition (Zemstvo

were the local representative bodies for the care of local affairs, and the Liberal land owners constituted the leading party in those bodies) as the young revolutionary agitator, Trotzky. Trotzky's fury against the wavering policy of the well-to-do Liberals was only a manifestation of another trait of his character: *his desire for clarity in political affairs*. Trotzky could not conceive of half-way measures, of "diplomatic" silence over vital topics, of cunning moves and concealed designs in political struggles. The attitude of a Milukov, criticizing the government and yet willing to acquiesce in a monarchy of a Prussian brand, criticizing the revolutionists and yet secretly pleased with the horror they inflicted upon Romanoff and his satellites, was simply incompatible with Trotzky's very nature and aroused his impassioned contempt. To him, black was always black, and white was white, and political conceptions ought to be so clear as to find adequate expression in a few simple phrases.

Trotzky's own political line was the Revolution—a violent uprising of the masses, headed by organized labor, forcibly to overthrow bureaucracy and establish democratic freedom. With what an outburst of blazing joy he greeted the upheaval of January 9, 1905—the first great mass-movement in Russia with clear political aims: "The Revolution has come!" he shouted in an ecstatic essay completed on January 20th. "The Revolution has come. One move of hers has lifted the people over scores of steps, up which in times of peace we would have had to drag ourselves with hardships and fatigue. The Revolution has come and destroyed the plans of so many politicians who

had dared to make their little political calculations with no regard for the master, the revolutionary people. The Revolution has come and destroyed scores of superstitions, and has manifested the power of the program which is founded on the revolutionary logic of the development of the masses.... The Revolution has come and the period of our infancy has passed."

The Revolution filled the entire year of 1905 with the battle cries of ever-increasing revolutionary masses. The political strike became a powerful weapon. The village revolts spread like wild-fire. The government became frightened. It was under the sign of this great conflagration that Trotzky framed his theory of *immediate transition from absolutism to a Socialist order*. His line of argument was very simple. The working class, he wrote, was the only real revolutionary power. The bourgeoisie was weak and incapable of adroit resistance. The intellectual groups were of no account. The peasantry was politically primitive, yet it had an overwhelming desire for land. "Once the Revolution is victorious, political power necessarily passes into the hands of the class that has played a leading rôle in the struggle, and that is the working class." To secure permanent power, the working class would have to win over the millions of peasants. This would be possible by recognizing all the agrarian changes completed by the peasants in time of the revolution and by a radical agrarian legislation. "Once in power, the proletariat will appear before the peasantry as its liberator." On the other hand, having secured its class rule over Russia, why should the proletariat help to establish parliamentary rule, which is the

rule of the bourgeois classes over the people? "To imagine that Social-Democracy participates in the Provisional Government, playing a leading rôle in the period of revolutionary democratic reconstruction, insisting on the most radical reforms and all the time enjoying the aid and support of the organized proletariat,—only to step aside when the democratic program is put into operation, to leave the completed building at the disposal of the bourgeois parties and thus to open an era of parliamentary politics where Social-Democracy forms only a party of opposition,—to imagine this would mean to compromise the very idea of a labor government." Moreover, "once the representatives of the proletariat enter the government, not as powerless hostages, but as a leading force, the divide between the minimum-program and the maximum-program automatically disappears, collectivism becomes the order of the day," since "political supremacy of the proletariat is incompatible with its economic slavery." It was precisely the same program which Trotzky is at present attempting to put into operation. This program has been his guiding star for the last twelve years.

In the fall of 1905 it looked as if Trotzky's hope was near its realization. The October strike brought autocracy to its knees. A Constitution was promised. A Soviet (Council of Workmen's Deputies) was formed in Petersburg to conduct the Revolution. Trotzky became one of the strongest leaders of the Council. It was in those months that we became fully aware of two qualities of Trotzky's which helped him to master men: his power as a speaker, and his ability to write short, stirring articles comprehensible to the masses. In the