

The Prophet Outcast

A Biography of Leon Trotsky

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December 12-24, 2020

When the *Ilyich* arrived in Constantinople¹ he was met by the Soviet diplomatic staff as a dignitary and set up comfortably at the consulate. Kemal Atatürk, to whom he had sent a formal message and feared to be in cohort with Stalin, welcomed him with good wishes and invited him to stay as long as he wished. The stay at the consulate became brief as Trotsky has published in the New York Times a frank account of his ousting from the party which did not please authorities. He needed to find an alternate residence and found one on the small island of Prinkipo in the Sea of Marmara close to Istanbul and by coincidence a traditional site of banishment. This was, except for summer vacation time, a rather deserted island, at the time more or less unchanged for a millennia, where he was able to rent a house with a terrace and a spectacular view. The family cleaned it up and set it up by whitewashing the walls and painting the floors² but made no attempt to make it comfortable let alone charming and cozy, much to the consternation of Western visitors. Trotsky had his study with a large desk and walls covered with books but apart from that there were almost no furniture and the garden below was filled with weeds and the general quietude only broken by the braying of donkeys³. The situation that confronted Trotsky now was very different from that of his first exiles during his youth. Then he had sought it out voluntarily escaping Tsarist Russia as a revolutionary and finding entire communities of exiled revolutionaries welcoming him. Now the revolutionaries had all returned to Russia, where many would later end up in jails, camps and dumped into graves, and been replaced by White emigres, counter-revolutionary in spirit pining for the *Ancien Regime*, and with whom Trotsky had nothing in common⁴. Back then he was just another obscure Russian dreamer unknown except to a few initiates, now he had acquired notoriety and had also a duty to remain in the public eye. Back then the Revolution was just a distant possibility now he was pretty hopeful that he would be able to return soon. Why should Stalin not fail when Tsardom had done so in spite of more repressive measures including executions (this was before the latter had become an option to Stalin). Frustrating as exile was he now could at least champion the Internationalist cause, at the core of this

¹ It was still called so. In 1928 Turkey changed from the Arabic script to the Latin, and the world at large was strongly advised to use the Turkish names. Thus Istanbul gradually became the standard reference. The official re-designation took place in 1930. In fact the colloquial designation (*εις την πολιν*) meaning *in to the city* and used by Greek speakers for almost a thousand years.

² Actually with cheap paint which stayed on sticky.

³ The island is still to our day off-limits to cars and the main means of transport horses and carriages

⁴ Most of those were harmless, but as noted in the previous installment, Trotsky feared the vengeance of White guards.

political persuasion. Being stuck in Turkey was not the most propitious situation for this and consequently he saw it as a very temporary measure and hoped to resettle in some Western country and tie up with fellow Communists. However, the First World War had brought about profound changes in international travel, before passports were not needed and consequently no visas, but now he had to apply for them with disappointing results. Fellow British Socialists welcomed him of course but they cut no mustard with the British authorities. Shaw tried to intervene on his behalf, but as Trotsky dryly remarked, not with his usual acid sarcasm but ineffectually so, Fabian as he was. Sidney and Beatrice Webb the driving force in the Fabian society even came down to pay him a visit and were politely received but with no enthusiasm. Churchill, which obviously carried much more weight, was dead set against. And the British experience repeated itself, Trotsky was just too much of a hot potato, especially to governments anxious of maintaining a good relation with Stalin's Russia, as a consequence his reception met with greater resistance with the British Labor party than with the Liberals. He had to resign himself to a longer stay. But even negative attention is good, his status as a *cause celebre* earned him fat book contracts and large fees for articles, so he was economically well-off able to financially support many causes (as well as mere hangers on).

He settled down to his new routines involving a large retinue of people, official guards, secretaries and visitors and of course also servants, and it was not so clear how to draw the line of demarcation between household and the rest, nor to isolate hangers on and veritable provocateurs, who could be very dangerous. He had family troubles, one daughter already dead, the other - Zina - suffering from tuberculosis and with a husband deported to Siberia. In vain he tried to get her to join him and had to be content with mere financial assistance. But he drained his worries in frenzied activities. In addition to his usual political writings, he had also been urged to write his autobiography⁵. But his excess energies found its most spectacular outlets in his vigorous relaxation, involving ambitious and dangerous fishing trips, bringing to mind his hunting trips around Alma Ata. In spite of all this attention by friends and well-wishers he was very isolated missing his Bolshevik comrades made up of far sterner stuff than his soft Western adherents. He hoped from further banishments to bolster his influence, but Stalin was far too astute to strengthen his hand.

Trotsky had hoped, reasonably so, that his International outlook would find fertile ground in the International, but as it turned out they had followed Stalin in abolishing inner party democracies and thus become undemocratic enclaves in democratic societies. This led to a marginalization; in fact it severely hampered the activities of party members, in particular put them at disadvantage in debates, as they could not so easily extemporize having to toe the party line. In fact the absence of inner debates made them unused to confront other views and think for themselves standing up. Their speeches and oratories would tend to appear rather pedantic to reasonable audiences. It is one thing to preach to the choir, quite another to take on a hostile audience. As a result the Russian Bolshevik came to play a dominant rôle in the International to which all other parties look to for guidance, thus they became more like sects, and very suspicious ones to boot as they

⁵ A task he found very frustrating more than often tempted to dump into the fireplace, except that he had none.

seemed to pay allegiance to a foreign power and to scheme a take-over not only assisted by it but directed by it⁶. Furthermore due to the left-turn of Stalin, Molotov at the head of the International started to preach a so called Third Period Theory in which history now had entered the third phase in which revolution would be imminent and in which capitalist regimes would collapse at the next economic crises, which was not far off, the stock market crash of 1929 leading the way. This in particular led to the demand that Communists would turn against reformed Socialist as their main enemy, which had very unfortunate consequences as to the ascendancy of Nazism, a phenomenon Trotsky had already warned against following upon widespread economic decline.

The state of the International, dominated not to say reduced it to a satellite of the Russian Bolshevik party, stymied Trotsky's efforts of wider influence. In particular he tried to activate the French Communists among the strongest in Europe, but his name did not carry the same weight it once had. The time had long passed since International parties had protested against the treatment meted out to him, the hero of the Revolution and the Civil War; but sustained slander had done its slow but steady work. In addition erstwhile supporters such as the journalist Souvarine⁷ and the couple Paz turned their backs to him, although they were resolutely anti-Stalinists. In fact Trotsky was rather frustrated by European Communists intellectuals who he found to be mere philistines and just being revolutionaries as a hobby.

Trotsky's position was complicated, being absolutely loyal to the Bolshevik party and the accomplishments of the Revolution he was not able to take an unconditional stand against Stalin, but had to in all honesty support many of the measures taken by his formidable adversary. For one thing he could not dismiss out of hand the fact that Stalin did in fact pursue many central policies that Trotsky had argued in opposition against Stalin's earlier center-right stand. Thus there was a left wing of the Opposition who was in favor of reconciliation. On the other hand there was also an ultra-left wing of the same, who rejected any kind of reconciliation, arguing that Thermidor had triumphed, the Revolution was dead, the Bolshevik party an empty shell, and the need was to start anew forming a new party. Trotsky argued for the continuity of the Revolution that it had achieved things absolutely necessary and to be kept, such as the Nationalization of land, and that no counter-revolution had actually taken place, because such would only have taken place through a Civil War and none such had of course occurred. Trotsky was careful not to let anti-Stalinism trump national interests being loyal to the Soviet Union

⁶ I believe that this greatly contributed to anti-Communists feelings in the West, Russia was hardly an exemplar to be followed, but on the contrary a primitive, not to say semi-barbaric country, inspiring fear and disgust rather than hope. And this would of course be further exacerbated by the Cold War, when many illusions had been shattered, as intellectuals through the 30's looked upon the Russian experiment with curiosity but with the detachment which comes from the security of a bourgeois society. I myself as a child was brought up anti-Russian as part of Swedish history, and initially thought of Communism as a Russian invention, and hence no good. I was greatly surprised at the age of twelve or so, learning that the Russian spoke about Marxism thus paying homage to someone who turned out to be German.

⁷ (1895-84) born Lifschitz in Kiev but grew up from the age of two in France became a French National and during the war a founding member of its Communist party and edited for many years *Bulletin communiste*.

he had been so instrumental in creating. This moderate stand of his estranged him from supporters, both actual and potential. His efforts of mediation seemed at time pointless and just a waste of precious energy, but he thought of it as education, regretting that the material for such in the West was much softer than had been the case in the East. A split of the Opposition seemed inevitable, between those who thought that Stalin's policies were wrong no matter what, simply by virtue of being his, and the only way forward was to found a new party as the Revolution had been stolen; and those who found merit in them and the need to come to a mutual agreement in order to save the very Revolution, which the others considered gone. Meanwhile dramatic things happened.

The war against the peasantry had had dire consequences. There was a full-blown agricultural crisis that threatened widespread starvation and thus also about to stymie the ambitious industrialization. The conciliators, criticizing Trotsky for bringing the ideological crisis to the Western press, saw the Reconciliation in terms of a heavy cross that it was imperative to bear. Their chief proponent - Preobrazhensky⁸ - was allowed to travel to Moscow and negotiate a return. Among his demands was a rescinding of terror and the freeing of Trotsky. But Stalin had no interest in admitting that he now was pursuing the program of the opposition, that would certainly put him in a bad light. What he demanded, and eventually got, their recantation on their knees. No vestige of any triumph was to be allowed. Preobrazhensky was followed by Radek⁹ who, citing the dire straits in which the country found itself renounced his old friend Trotsky proclaiming him an enemy of the public. Even the non-conciliators started to surrender referring to the critical situation the country found itself in and the necessity to close ranks. Of course they also put up demands, such as the reinstatement of Trotsky, but over time Stalin managed to wear them out and whittle away the demands. Even Rakovsky¹⁰ at the core of the Trotskyist faction, also submitted himself to a slow surrender, initially also having demanded a release of Trotsky. The returning party members were not, with a few possible exceptions, given post of political significance but there was a big demand for able administrators and also specialists and experts. And despite his banishment Trotsky was still held in high regard, even if unacknowledged. The country was in a big crisis and many a secretly doubting Stalinist was secretly wondering what Trotsky would have done. At this time the first execution took place, it concerned a young hapless revolutionary serving the soviet secret service who had visited Trotsky in his Turkish exile and bringing back a message for

⁸ (1886-1937) ended his life being shot at the Great Purge. It was under his watch that the last Tsar and his family was executed. He was an opponent of the draconian conditions of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, a co-writer with Bukharin (with whom he would later disagree on the industrialization issue) of the popular *The ABC of Communism* and established himself as a leading Marxist economist. He was along with Bukharin rehabilitated by Gorbachev

⁹ (1885-1939) born in present day Lviv. A Polish revolutionary also active in Germany. Was expelled to Tobolsk and Tomsk by Stalin but re-instituted as being noted, but sent to camp at the Second Moscow Trial where he perished. Exonerated along with other old revolutionaries by Gorbachev.

¹⁰ (1873-1941) born Stanchev, a Bulgarian revolutionary and journalist serving as a diplomat, being the Soviet ambassador to France but recalled when he signed Trotsky's platform for a world revolution. He was briefly reinstated but then imprisoned and subsequently executed during WWII. He along with many other former veterans of the Bolshevik party rehabilitated under Gorbachev's glasnost.

Radek, who had then haplessly (or with malicious intent) betrayed him. This step meant that a certain red line had been broken for the first time.

Stalin did after all pursue the policies of Trotsky and would the latter have done it differently had he had the chance? This is, as noted in the previous essay, a question of speculation, yet hard to disregard. Deutscher's biography is if not a hagiography obviously intended to display the virtues of his subject and thus implicitly bring to attention an alternative to Stalin and his terror. If chances are that Trotsky would not have acted significantly differently much of the rationale for the biography would have been lost. What better alternative than to dip into Trotsky's more detailed criticism, that he was abhorred by the brutality with which everything was implemented says little, the point is would he have avoided it himself? He too certainly was eager to get things done and impatient with obstacles.

When it came to industrialization he held that the pace was far too high, quantity too precedence over quality, and this by itself endangered the entire project that now degenerated into a pointless competition serving its own purpose. The point of planning and socialism was to do things in a far more rational way to look at purposes and needs not to blindly concentrating on profits as in classical capitalism. The entire planning and implementation was done in the dark allowing no transparency and inspection. One surmises thus, that Trotsky would have gone about it in a more measured and thoughtful way with actual planning and consideration of consequences and not just a fury of blind production. The real question is how much leeway he would have given private market forces, whether pragmatism or ideological purity would have won the day. In war, he noted, the principle of reality-recognition must trump purely ideological considerations. His criticism of the forceful collectivization of peasant was even harsher. He claimed, somewhat controversially, that without a sophisticated mechanical underpinning a collective farm would not be viable. His idea was that force would not be necessary, if private farming and socialized farming would be allowed in friendly competition the latter would show its mettle and thus gradually absorb more and more of private, which would be lagging behind, just as in capitalist economies, small holdings are not competitive with large units and are hence bought up and absorbed by the latter. In the same way private enterprises in general would prove themselves obsolete when in competition with planned and efficiently run socialist ones; thus there were never any need to forcefully end N.E.P. as Stalin had done. You cannot wish a free market out of existence, Trotsky argued, whenever there is a need for it, it will re-emerge, due to the ironclad laws of supply and demand, only if socialized industry could keep the balance would the need for the private initiative remain. Neither did Trotsky have any illusions about wage equality especially in a poor economy, in fact differentiated rewards (within limits of course) were necessary for economic growth. Furthermore he was if anything skeptical to workers running factories; those were tasks that should be left to professionals, and consequently worker management was a failure. In fact workers had no right to oversee actual production only the right to criticize it. In fact, due to the way the economy is integrated worldwide, socialism in one single country is impossible. This begs the question how this would come about. If there would be no global Revolution would that set a ceiling on how far the economy could be pushed towards socialism? Would it in fact force a working economy to be a mixed one? He

accused Stalin of being too late with his reforms, and above all having gone about them in an irrational way. As long as the agricultural sector was inefficient industrialization would run up against intractable problems. Stalin not only saw the citizens as his subjects but for all intents and purposes as his enemies. In particular he wanted to crush the individualism of the peasants, to reduce them to obedient cogs in a larger machine. Trotsky on the other hand urged a reconciliation with the peasants and allow them to leave the collective farms if they wanted, that would incur no loss and let the successful collective ones survive. However, such advice would anyway have been too late for the government to benefit from, had they agreed to listen. Stalin had in fact put into process a gigantic machine that could not be stopped unless one would be prepared to face catastrophic loss. One is reminded of an airplane on takeoff too far gone to abort. Stalin could not back off, he had started something that went over his head and he could only hope for the best. Afterwards he allegedly admitted that the agricultural crisis had been much worse than the one which faced him during WW II. Had Trotsky returned to power at this stage, the challenges facing him would have been formidable. Stalin's brutal repressions had sought to accomplish what a world revolution would have done for Trotsky. In classical Marxist sense, a Revolution is like surfing on a wave driven from below; Stalin had tried to effect a Revolution from above, not driven from below by the masses, but through the party machine. Nevertheless he managed to effect decisive social changes. The industrial class which had played such a decisive rôle in October '17, did not longer exist as such. It was passive and mute, as Trotsky had found out to his peril, infused as it was by a massive influx of the rural population, illiterate and primitive in outlook, no voice of its own and brutally trained. The elite of it was drawn into managerial positions thus undercutting its natural cohesion. One element of this was so called 'Stakhanovism' the practice of rewarding exceptionally productive workers, thus separating them from the working class at large which no longer could be seen as a class in the classical Marxist sense of not just be in itself, supposedly meaning just being a conglomeration, but for itself, ostensibly indicating an awareness of itself and its purpose. Marx meant that once a class becomes for itself, it is self-perpetuating and cannot be reversed. In Russia there had been a regression nevertheless. But the peasants made up a class united in its hatred of the government, a hatred that united the poor peasants with kulaks. In vain government workers tried to enlist the old notion of the *Mir* as a precursor to the collective farm, but with scant success. The peasants effected a kind of Revolution in some sense, but not one to further their cause, only one to give vent to their immense frustration and anger. What ensued was a massive slaughter of live stock involving a depletion of half of the Nation's. We are talking about fifteen million cows and forty millions of goats and sheep, a similar figures for pigs. The immediate effect was an orgy in meat-consumption coupled with heavy drinking; the long term effect was short of catastrophic as there were no longer beasts of burden, huge tracts of land had to lie fallow for want of power to do so, and anyway there was a severe shortage of grains to sow.

During this time Stalin finally established himself as an absolute dictator, which was a logical conclusion of the fractal structure of power. One there was a one-party system, internal diversity became harder and harder to maintain until there was a ban on factions, and one that was in effect, within a faction no factions could be tolerated in the long run.

Thus power became more and more concentrated and became more and more monolithic in nature. In the end it was concentrated into one individual, Stalinism reduced to the interests of one single individual, namely Stalin's with his wills and whims as the laws. Ironically with the ascendancy of Stalin also Trotsky grew in stature, as he became the one remaining opposition. The paranoia of Stalin created Trotsky and fashioned him into an ogre.

What would preoccupy Trotsky in the early 30's was the rise of Hitler, the consequences of which he saw much clearer than his contemporaries did. He urged a common front between the Communists and the Social-Democrats against him, but they were at loggerheads. The Communists saw everybody else as crypto-fascists, making no distinction between the Social Democrats, center-right politicians such as Brüning, and Hitler, and the Social Democrats were very suspicious of the Communists. Together they could marshal a force of several millions of voters, much more than that of the Nazis, and if those could be put in the streets united against the Storm troopers they could quench them. But in the so called Red plebiscite against the Prussian government, the Communists actually joined forces with the Nazi in order to crush the center, in fact marching under identical banners and using very similar slogans. As to be noted: Hitler had learned a lot from the Communists and he was eager to steal their fire. But Trotsky's warnings about the Nazi party fell on deaf ears in the Soviet Union, Stalin branded him as a warmonger and was very anxious to maintain good relations with Germany, as manifested by the Rapallo agreement. Stalin saw France as the main enemy and wanted to distract Hitler towards the West. Trotsky assumed initially, until events would prove him wrong, that Hitler would not be able to acquire power without a Civil War, and in that case the Soviet Union had not only an excuse but a moral obligation to come to the aid of the German Communists. But they did not follow a cause of action to have such dramatic consequences, and in the absence of a Civil War the Soviet Union had no longer such options.

Now family troubles would distract and occasionally dominate Trotsky for the next year or so. Finally Stalin had given permission for his surviving daughter Zina to join her father and step-mother in Turkey, Deutscher writes that of all his children she was the one who most resembled him, both as to personality and temperament. She was also admiring him, maybe excessively and wanted nothing more than to be of service to him. But there was a hitch, and a big hitch to that, Zina was mentally unbalanced, not to say deeply disturbed. Trotsky found himself unable to deal with her irrationality; how much easier was it not to deal with the psychology of a whole social class than an individual, especially one of his own flesh and blood. He did not dare to trust her in the delicate matters pertaining to his contacts when he was forced to use codes. Mentally unhinged she could, when returning to Moscow, reveal it all under pressure. As a consequence she felt slighted and ignored by her father and developed feelings of jealousy towards her half-brother who was let into their father's confidence. It was suggested that she move to Berlin for psychiatric treatment, to which also her half-brother had been sent working for the family business of revolution and agitation. The necessary visa was arranged and she found the city exciting, maybe too excited for such a high-strung mind. The separation did not relieve pressures and conflicts, a harrowed correspondence followed in which she repeatedly found herself ignored and slighted by his father, immersed as he was in his work.

Then there was the added complication caused by the son who had been allowed to join her in exile, the other son was kept as a hostage along with her mother. It was thought that taking care of her son would stabilize her behavior. It was also thought that Berlin was too exciting for her and that she would be better off going to Vienna where she could rest and recuperate properly. But she resisted it. Finally her son was sent to her, but it was too much, she could not handle it, and in early 1933 she barricaded herself so successfully in the kitchen that she could not be rescued with the gas turned on. Needless to say it was a severe personal blow to Trotsky whose two daughters now in his first marriage were dead. Things were not helped by her mother writing a bitter accusatory letter to her ex-husband, blaming him for her suicide, claiming that he had failed her and not given her the encouragement and intellectual stimulation for which she longed so fervently and which also was her due. According to Deutscher the letter, in spite of a final conciliatory note that even had she stayed in Moscow would she probably have come to the same end, it wounded him too deeply to allow him to find words.

There were also other, but less serious distractions to his work, such as the fire that destroyed his library but allowed him to rescue his archives, in particular the ms on his book on the history of the Revolution he was hard at work with. The damage was so serious that they had to move out and stay at a hotel for a year, while their residence was being fixed. For most people such an event would have been more than a mere distraction, but Trotsky took it in stride and just continued working. There were suspicions that the fire was a case of arson and that the Soviet Security was behind it, suspicions which were never corroborated. The matter of his and his personal safety was an ongoing concern. The West as well as Turkey were rampant with White emigres eager to inflict vengeance on their main enemy from the Civil War. In vain Trotsky pleaded for Soviet protection, but Stalin had other plans. Stalin began to regret his banishment of his adversary, at large abroad he was more dangerous to him than he would have been at home. Now he could remain at Prinkipo light the proverbial spider in the net and maintain a large network of followers not only in Russia but all over the Western World in addition. He decided to strip him of Soviet citizenship and make him stateless; in such a way everyone who entered into contact with him would automatically be branded as a participant of a foreign conspiracy.

As an exile he was indefatigable in his campaign against Stalin urging the Stalinists to rise against him, not only out of political reasons but also out of self-preservation. As it would turn out, his dire predictions would come true, the great majority of them would eventually get killed. He tried to impress on them the basic weakness of Stalin, that he did not have a real base and without the party machine which he had appropriated he was nothing. He impressed on them the fact that they had come to an impasse and appealed among others to Khrushchev and Mikoyan but they were not to heed the advice until after the death of Stalin and so only luke-warmly. But the Stalinists were terrified at the thought of the return of Trotsky and his presumed vengeance, and Stalin would not have been Stalin had he not played on their fears. Trotsky had no such ambitions being more concerned with the state of the Soviet Union than his own private issues. But above all what hampered him was his commitment to the Revolution, the Party which effected it and the Soviet Union that resulted from it. To form a new party, the splinter it, was not only against his principles but also his deep emotional attachment which he shared with many

veteran revolutionaries to whom expulsion from the party amounted to a personal trauma and allowed them to humiliate themselves to get readmission. To remove Stalin from power in which he was so deeply entrenched carried with it the danger that the party would not survive it and with the toppling of the Bolshevik party would follow the toppling of all the accomplishments of the revolution, the state ownership of industries and land. In fact deep as his enmity was against Stalin he figured that if there was a counter-revolutionary movement he would need to support him. Those considerations tempered any move he would contemplate against him.

Now he was stripped off his citizenship, but not in isolation but along with a number counter-revolutionary Mensheviks, which added insult to injury. Stalin would proceed to banish all of Trotsky's relatives, vengeance striking deep, in accordance with Stalin's vindictiveness and paranoia.

During his time in Turkey there was one welcome distraction, namely an invitation to give a lecture in Denmark. That would necessitate a rather tortuous trip by steamer and railway and steamer again, arriving not directly in Copenhagen but in Esbjerg on the west coast of Jutland. He had hoped that the necessary transit visas would be amenable to extensions, and also that his stay in Denmark would be prolonged. But no such luck, the Danish reception was not exclusively friendly, a member of the Danish Royal family accused him of killing the Tsar (whose mother had been a Danish princess), and the Danish authorities refused to extend his permission to stay beyond the absolutely necessary. He also tried to obtain a Swedish visa, but Soviet authorities intervened against him. On his way back Turkey he passed through the port of Antwerp but was cordoned off from the curious crowds. In vain he appealed to the Belgian prime minister, who had been favorably treated and allowed to be on the council of the woman accused of trying to shoot Lenin, but he refused to reciprocate an old favor and letting him set temporary feet on Belgian soil, something that induced him to write a bitter letter. Passing through France he missed the boat connection and was filled with joy, but the French refused to let him stay on for what was needed and put him on the first available ship with no accommodations for passengers. He refused and skipped ship but was later allowed to transit through Italy, Mussolini being accommodating. Finally he arrived back in Prinkipo. And a few days later he learned about the suicide of his daughter, whose troubled circumstances had occupied him during the Danish excursion.

The bloodless *Machtübernahme* by the Nazis early in 1933 disturbed Trotsky a lot, thinking of it as nothing short of a catastrophe. The Communists and the Social Democrats were still doing well in polls and a concerted effort surely would have prevented it. It was strictly speaking not too late to act and undo the damage, but the Communists made light of Hitler's triumph. It had such a momentous impact on his thinking that he started to make plans for a fourth International, and against his principles playing with the idea of founding a new party. But Stalin maneuvered skillfully, having brought the country into an impasse with catastrophic consequences, he backed down, followed many of Trotsky's suggestions, but of course never acknowledging them, such as setting more realistic goals for his five-year plans. Zinoviev and Kamenev made another capitulation around the time this one more abject than any previous. As he noted: Stalin collected Dead Souls as there were not any alive around. The ascension of Hitler was a shock to many leftist

parties, and Trotsky's prescience was noted. Many Stalinists admired him, if secretly, and as Deutscher notes, Trotsky's standing was at the zenith during his exile, and this was the moment, if any, during which he should act. But nevertheless the reality of the situation was stacked against him. The bloodless ascension of Hitler changed the facts on the ground dramatically. Trotsky figured that a new World War would be inevitable, say within five or ten years. At the time Germany was unarmed but this would not last very long. He urged the Western powers to form an alliance with the Soviet Union against Germany but they were not in the mood for that. Instead Hitler had after coming to power made pacifist overtures, a bait which the British were just too happy to swallow (and who would not have been taken in at the time, or at least desired to be taken in). He turned to Franklin Roosevelt and urged him, sixteen years after the fact, to recognize the Soviet Union. Roosevelt did so in fact much to the delight of Stalin, who of course were still pursuing the Rapallo deal with Germany. Trotsky admitted that given the prevailing balance of power, Stalin had no choice and Trotsky would have acted in the same way. Arranging an accommodation with Hitler while biding his time. Obviously given the situation it was not the time to topple Stalin, especially when he pursued policies that Trotsky would have done in his shoes. There was no sense in criticizing the duplicitous action of Stalin, international diplomacy forced one to act out of expediency.

The long stay on the island in the Marmara sea had been very fruitful and he had been able to write a lot of works, but nevertheless he felt restless and isolated from the world in which he was immersed, whose pulse excited him but only reached him muffled from a distance. He would miss his fishing trips on the Marmara Sea but not Istanbul, which he only had visited once or twice. Once to inspect the Hagia Sophia and once to go to the dentist. He now hoped to be able to move to France, which he thought about as the headquarters of non-Soviet Communism after the fall of Germany.

Like many other great writers, and Deutscher mentions explicitly Thucydides, Dante, Machiavelli, Heine, Marx and Herzen, Trotsky only came to his own as a writer in exile. His *History of the Revolution* is unique as he is both a main actor in the story as well as its objective narrator. In fact those rôles are kept apart as he actually downplays his own rôle and takes a bird's eye perspective as becoming a historian. Man of letters are seldom if ever actors in the business of life, but Trotsky is an exception, and therein resides the fascination he exerts on friends and foes alike. As an actor he played a decisive rôle in history, but can his writings really be compared to that? According to Deutscher they definitely can and he spares little in extolling his virtues with the pen, referring to the judgments of professional non-Marxists historians coming up with comparisons to Cayley and Churchill, yet having the philosophical edge, as unlike those he has a thought-out philosophy of history which permeates his narrative. As a writer he was a disciple of Marx, the latter was superior when it came to abstract theory and Gothic imagination (whatever is meant by that) but as an epic artist Trotsky transcends his master in graphic descriptions. He knows when to expand and contract his story as few narrators, his literary depiction of Lenin surpasses those of novelists such as Wells and Gorky¹¹. Deutscher even claims that as to Russian prose he was unsurpassed in his generation, although he does not necessarily come across well in translation, especially not into English, where he might,

¹¹ Wells on Lenin has been reviewed in these Reviews (Russia in the Shadows) XVb

according to current taste, seem a bit too wordy.

Deutscher takes up his autobiography *Моя Жизнь* (My Life) and his *История Русской Революции* (The History of the Russian Revolution) for special attention. His autobiography may have been written too early thus failing to take into account the full tragic scope of his life, on the other hand autobiographies can never be written after death, and autobiographical writing, offering unique perspectives on lives, are of great interest, no matter when written in life. As an autobiographer he has been censured for his selfcenteredness, especially by his fellow politicians, but as Deutscher points out, 'self-centeredness' lies at the core of autobiography, so the censure is really against his decision to write one at all. But autobiographies are always of great documentary interest, even if not truthful, because as the British historian R.G.Collingwood reminds us, no historical document should be taken on face value, but should always be interpreted as a piece of evidence to be subjected to a forensic gaze. In fact the writing of his autobiography took place when he arrived in Prinkipo partly being urged to do so by his supporters. The urge to write one would on the other hand be irresistible to any of a writers temperament, and for Trotsky the time was propitious coming after his banishment needing to set the record straight as to his blackened reputation. In spite of being a politically motivated autobiography it had limited if any political impact, his fellow communists were embarrassed and disdainful of his 'self-adulation'; while the bourgeois was charmed by its literary qualities but indifferent to its political message. Although an autobiography it does not overly dramatize the subject. In the book Trotsky is very deferential to Lenin whom he greatly admires, and who is allowed to play the main part in the Revolution. The relation between Lenin and Trotsky was rather complicated, as recalled in the first part of the biography, they were initially adversaries and Lenin had to suffer severe criticism from Trotsky in his youth, criticism so malicious and wounding that one wonders how it could ever been healed. Lenin responded to it, but never in kind, holding off taking a more indulgent view of his slightly younger contemporary. To a large extent it was a question of temperament, Trotsky prone to get carried away, especially as a young man testing the limit as the saying goes, while Lenin was less flamboyant and more controlled. Eventually there would be a reconciliation, not willed but imposed by circumstances as they both realized that they shared a common political outlook, if more in strategy and principles than tactics. Yet in spite of their close and friendly co-operation during the crucial years, no real personal bond formed between them, as testified by Lenin's widow. There was always to remain an element of detachment on the side of Lenin, which may very well have been a consequence of Trotsky's initial vituperation. It is a common psychological phenomena that when you have been really personally hurt, you are unable to free yourself emotionally no matter how much you intellectually disregard it. The will to forget and forgive is there, but not the ability to do so from the bottom of your heart. As to Stalin, who invariably has to appear in the account, he was below notice as a serious adversary, but clearly Trotsky greatly underestimated him. We should not forget that Lenin admitted him as a man of talent and capability comparable to Trotsky and saw the two men as the obvious contenders to succeed him, only gradually becoming aware of Stalin's moral shortcomings.

But the main work is of course his history, while the autobiography may be rich in gossip or, as it is often put nowadays, in 'human interest', the revolution, if anything,

was bound to transcend mere individual interest. Trotsky starts with a general overview of Russian history in which he emphasizes the explosive combination of extreme backwardness and progress. Russia was at the turn of the century still steeped in Medieval times, having had no Reformation with a weak bourgeois and a small compact working class. One should perhaps add an elite, as sophisticated as it was shallow, meaning having no real roots in the Russian soil. History is, according to Trotsky, a study in mass psychology. Thus it boils down to there being a psychology that transcends that of the individuals. This is if anything controversial indeed but deeply suggestive¹². According to Trotsky that suddenly the masses become aware of being behind the times and want to make up for it quickly. But how to judge the mood of a mass? Trotsky argues that if you as a revolutionary can do it in real time, it should not be impossible to do it retrospectively in the quietude of your study. But can you really talk about the will of the people? Is that not just an abstraction with no real tangible meaning? Individual wills vary a lot, but does that not make collective wills meaningless. Or could it be that a collective will is something that is not made up of individual wills but is something apart? One is reminded of Poppers claim that sociology is not applied psychology but in fact that sociology predates psychology that it indeed creates individual psychology. That human ancestors were bound together and that is what we have inherited as a species, while individuation in Jung's terminology comes later. Yes Jung's theory of a collective unconsciousness pertains to the same circle of ideas. Marx's notion of society belonging to different classes, each of them defined by their interest, lies at the heart of Marxist philosophy of society, and the theory stands and falls by it. Trotsky's whole life and acts have their basis in this conviction of the palpability of social class and their interest and the possibility of trying to divine it something which is beyond the ability of individual members of a class to articulate. Or is it all a mirage, a conceived Deity, with possible no correspondence in real life? Should one think of a class, such as the Proletarian class, as being a Deity, whose wishes we need to divine in order to comply with them? Is the rôle of a Communist to be that of a priest, to divine and interpret the gospel and preach it? ¹³. As Trotsky claims, the Bolsheviks not only taught the masses (as many socialist parties had been more than willing to do) but also learned from them. In any enterprise in real life, there must be some empirical touchstone, in the business of a Revolution, the masses provide that touchstone, without which the Revolution may drift away and dissipate. Is this putative wisdom of the masses the touchstone needed? When after the Civil War had ended satisfactorily, we have remarked that the party felt to be situated in a vacuum, as if there were no longer any active class from which to draw support and guidance. And also when the campaign against Trotsky took off ground the

¹² One are reminded of frequent references to 'mass hysteria' one example being lynchings, in which a group of people, internally egged on, are capable of perpetrate acts they would never conceive of as responsible individuals. Elias Canetti wrote a lengthy study, probably more literary and speculative than strictly scientific, called 'Masse und Macht'.

¹³ To liken Communism to a religion is not an original idea but has been bandied around for quite some time, I have seen it made explicit in a ironic commentary by Bertrand Russell. One may think of this comparison to be a metaphor, but as I always warn, metaphors should never be taken too literally, then they become just silly.

masses were to his frustration passive and mute¹⁴.

One may read his history as metaphysics or one may concentrate on its factual narration. When the two volumes appeared many of the enemies of the Bolsheviks were of course still alive, the events were not further back in time than a decade and a half ago, but no one, according to Deutscher, came up with any valid criticism let alone, with the possible exception of Miliukov, came up with an alternative account. There are no villains in Trotsky's account, Deutscher points out that he is always fair even generous, his weapons are those of irony and wit. Nor does he dramatize his place in history, in fact to get a fair assessment of his position you need to consult back issues of Pravda or the accounts left by his enemies. The most remarkable thesis in the work, is according to Deutscher, that according to Trotsky without Lenin there would not have been an October revolution, the propitious moment to act would just have slipped away. The Revolution may have been postponed for another five or ten years, maybe even fifty years and we would have seen a Capitalist Russia, possibly with a reinstated Tsardom. To posit for the individual such a decisive rôle in history goes against the grain of the Marxist conception of history as an independent force transcending individual choices (not unlike the conception of a class having a will and a concomitant interest not to be manifested at the level of an individual). This historical determinism is what critics of Marxisms, notably Popper, dismisses as so called *historicism*'. We are now entering on the game of counterfactual speculation, an activity as seductive as it is ultimately meaningless. From a Marxist point of view such speculations are meaningless because in any deeper sense there are no interesting and viable alternative histories, and even if you are not a Marxist you may dismiss the rôle of the individual and in some sense talking about historical forces. This is of course what Tolstoy engages in when he discounts the greatness of Napoleon during his philosophical digression. Napoleon did not direct events he was only haplessly riding on them. Bismarck expresses similar views, but more upbeat and approaching those of Trotsky, when he explains that a politician cannot bring about events only take advantage of them. Deutscher makes a digression and takes up Plekhanov¹⁵ and his views on the rôle of the individual in history. According to him it is the historical forces which pick out the actors needed. Once say Napoleon filled the niche created by the historical circumstances, he barred any competitor to step into his shoes, and hence an optical illusion is created that Napoleon was unique and that he actually created the niche and that no one else could have done so, because there would have been no known candidates, none of the potential alternatives having become actual. This question of replacability is a very topical one in science. Clearly if Newton had not lived, someone else would surely have brought

¹⁴ The idea of listening to the mass and acting accordingly is a rather dangerous notion. How does it really differ from mere populism? Did Hitler listen to the German Volk (which later betrayed him!) and acted accordingly. Do the supporters of Trump have interests and grievances that only Trump are aware of and listen to. Even if they have what obligation is there to adhere to them? The seductive notion to listen to the proverbial people, the Spirit of the Nation, is rather dangerous. How to make the necessary distinctions?

¹⁵ (1856-1918) Russian revolutionary and Marxist philosopher stemming from the lower rungs of the aristocracy. The author of many books in particular *On the Question of the Individual's Role in History*(1898). A prominent antagonist of Lenin and Trotsky, yet highly regarded by the Soviet Communists.

about the same insights. His infinitesimal calculus was reinvented by Leibniz, never mind that the latter was accused of plagiarism. Those ideas were more or less explicit in the works of Archimedes and some of the key ideas can also be discerned in the thought of some Medieval scholastics, but they never made an impact, possibly because society was not ready for them. Similarly logic made substantial advance in the 1930's which would have had such an impact had not electronic computers evolved a decade or so later taking advantage of them, or maybe rather allowing those ideas to be palpably manifested. From the point of counterfactual speculation, we always know what we could have missed, but by definition never what we have actually missed. Had Lenin not been and the Russian Revolution not taken place, history may indeed have changed its course, but we would not have been aware of it. With no Russian Revolution, the absence of it would obviously not have had the same significance as it would have now. Individuals may indeed change history but in retrospect not being aware of it, it would have looked inevitable. Now the crucial issue, and one that probably was the driving force between this biography, was whether Stalinism was inevitable, pre-ordained by the Marxist view of history, or just an accidental perversion that prevented a humanly and materially successful Communism to develop. Stalinism is dead, but its dead-weight still oppresses Russian society which seems to have veered away from the road to Communism, if not indefinitely at least for the foreseeable future. Then after all the Russian road to Communism has turned out not to be the only one. The Communism that emerged in the so called satellite states after the Second World War was not really indigenous but more in the nature of an imperialistic imposition. However, in Yugoslavia, a Communist regime emerged independently and one is tempted to add in defiance of Stalin. However of this little remains it apparently being so dependent on the personality of Tito. But finally the Chinese version has proved to be quite successful as a kind of state capitalism, economically at least, reaping benefits from both sides. As to the moral, as opposed to the economical aspects of Communism, the State of Kerala in India, seems to be a success, well worthy of emulation for the future in terms of ecological sustainability, although one should be leery of drawing too sentimental conclusion. After all, one of the principal tenets of Trotsky's thinking is that a Socialist economy cannot function in isolation, and that a reliable assessment of Communism can only be made when it is global.

Trotsky sailed with his wife to France. He was traveling incognito under the last name of his wife, just as he had done earlier on his excursion to Copenhagen. He was hoping to take a much more active part in politics no longer stuck in the backwaters of Turkey. Those four and a half year had, however, been quite fruitful intellectually having completed some major books, as noted above, and many pamphlets and articles. He now had plans to write a history of the Civil war as well as a biography of Lenin to be his main work. None of those plans would be brought to fruition, but some early chapters remains of the Lenin biography. Arriving in France, suffering badly from lumbago restricting his freedom of movement, he was taken off the boat just before coming into Marseilles and instead being taken to the small town of Cassis outside, in order to spare him the ordeal of media attention. From there he was taken to a villa by the Atlantic, where he lived in secrecy, visitors never being given the exact address. Many visitors came, he was still very much a celebrity for better or for worse, and the question of his physical safety was

a steady concern. He was depressed, in a hypochondriac mood and bedridden and as a consequence he started to feel his age and more, yet he was only fifty-five, recalling the words of Turgenev to the effect that the greatest vice is to be over fifty-five and he was almost jealous of Lenin who had died before that age. He had some suicidal thoughts but decided that there was no need to do so unless his physical strength gave up entirely, and so far he felt that his intellectual ability was unimpaired. The stay in France would turn out to be a severe disappointment. His contacts with the opposition back in Russia dwindled and reduced to a trickle only to dry up completely. One after the other of his old comrades capitulated, and with the final capitulation of Rakovsky, he felt that the last link with the old Revolutionaries was gone. Trotsky and his wife felt very lonely. There were visitors but more in the nature of distractions than inspiration and support. One example was Maria Rees, a former Communist member of the Reichstag and who had exposed the total confusion of the German Communists, much to his gratification, but a confusion she shared drifting into the Nazi party after having briefly flirted with Trotskyism. Such conversions were far from exceptional in the Third Reich, giving some credence to the idea that in politics extremes merge, the political spectrum forming a circle rather than a segment. Simone Weil, the sister of the distinguished mathematician Andre Weil struck him as muddle-headed, and soon she was going to drift away too from her Trotskyist phase and end up a Catholic mystic. The recruitment of Trotskyists was slow and frustrating. His main work was dedicated to getting a Fourth International off ground, but that was a project fraught with frustration and obviously stillborn without him really admitting that. The Popular Front in France was a movement he was not a part of and which filled him with no enthusiasm, although some kind of united front against Fascism was necessary. None of his work in France came to any fruition. Furthermore another family tragedy struck, his youngest son Sergei, who unlike his older son Lyova, had not come under the spell of his father and engaged himself in his political work, but instead followed a totally unpolitical scientific career, was seized by Stalin and his underlings, and no news were heard of him. This was a blow under the belt. True, although Trotsky had no part in condemning the Tsar and his children to death, that was ultimately the responsibility of Lenin, he nevertheless approved of it, at least on principle. It would have been utterly irresponsible to allow the Whites, who were operating in the vicinity at the time, to liberate the Tsar and use him effectively. This also applied to the children due to the dynastic connection. But no such dynastic connection existed between Trotsky and his children, least of all with Sergey who shared none of his father's political activity. The Communists in France found Trotsky to be a liability and wanted to expel him but was stymied by the absence of any country willing to accept him. The hope of an asylum in Norway felled through the last minute when Trotsky had traveled to Paris to pick up the papers. He was not allowed in Paris so the French wanted to deport him within 24 hours. The situation was desperate, where to go. Finally matters worked out with the Norwegians who in a strange mixture of generosity and suspicion offered him a visa with severe restrictions. Trotsky had little choice and accepted. The most irksome being a ban on political activity which Trotsky interpreted as a ban on meddling into domestic Norwegian concerns, with which he had no problems. He was treated as a celebrity and welcomed by ministers, in

particular Trygve Lie¹⁶, the minister of justice and later the first general secretary of the UN, all eager to sun themselves in his fame. He was not allowed any political activity yet they pressed him to be interviewed for the *Arbeiderbladet*. Quizzed by Trotsky as to the flagrant contradiction, they made light of it, and clearly his ban on political activity should not be taken literally but was for internal political consumption, the members of Quisling Nasjonal Samling were very much against allowing Trotsky to enter. The problem of finding a residence (Oslo was out of bounds) was solved by the Social Democrat Konrad Knudsen¹⁷, who opened his home in Hønefoss to Trotsky and his family.

During his stay in Norway Trotsky was able to finish his last major work *the Revolution Betrayed* in which he makes a thorough attack on Stalinism and argues convincingly that it constituted, as the title, indicates, a perversion of Marx. Deutscher claims that it is the most complex and original of Trotsky's works displaying all the virtues and vices of Trotsky's thought. Its point of departure was to take issue to Stalin's claim that socialism had been established in Russia, in view of the successful completion of the crash-industrialization as well as the final consolidation of the collectivization of farming. And not to forget the drafting of the most democratic constitution in the world. Everyone was assured of the right to vote, but of course not for whom to vote. After all in a classless society a one party system was appropriate one. Being classless meant an absence of inter-class conflicts the latter something that gives rise to a variety of parties and perspectives. Yet economical inequality was rampant in Stalin's Russia, much encouraged by Stalin. Many of the progressive reforms of the 1920's were overturned, such as the basic educational reforms. The army reinstated the elaborate Tsarist hierarchy of ranks, and the State assumed the tutelage of science (some of which with disastrous results as is well-known). The State glorified its power which laid the foundation for the Stalin cult, surely nothing of the sort Marx would have advocated. Trotsky argued that social ownership of the means of production is of course essential for socialism, but far from sufficient. Socialism presupposes a material plenty and cannot function let alone thrive in want. Thus a wealthy nation such as the US was far more congenial to the establishment of Socialism than a economically backwards Russia, something Trotsky had held in the beginning. The State, basically an instrument of class domination, would be obsolete in a truly Socialist society, as far as the State should administer something it should be things not people. The parallel with the thought of a minimal state in rightist liberal circles may be thought of stunning, but the approach is of course profoundly different.

Trotsky admits that inequality is unavoidable during the first stage (even in such a wealthy country as the US). After all it has to motivate people to work and particularly reward needed skills, but in the end it has to work for equality. Lenin provocatively stated that the Soviet state was in fact bourgeois, but without the bourgeois. Now how can one reconcile this inherent contradiction between equality and inequality. According to Trotsky this contradiction can only be resolved through an immense, unprecedented wealth, surpassing what mankind hitherto has dreamed of. This almost gluttonous fixation on material wealth must be thought of characteristic of the time, nowadays with pressing concerns of sustainability and limited resources of the Planet, such ideas are not as natural

¹⁶ (1896-1968)

¹⁷ (1890-1959)

to modern leftists as it was a hundred years ago. What bothered Trotsky was the growth of the bureaucracy and thus the presence of a privileged segment of society, a segment which could become a *bona fide* class and tempted to become a propertied to boot. Of course the privileged groups were not allowed to appropriate the means of production, and in a functioning socialist economy they would have no incentive to do so, as the socialist production would be the guarantee of their wealth and hence their privileges. Thus in a full-fledged state of Socialism the situation would be self-regulating. But Stalinist Russia is not a full-fledged Socialist society, and Trotsky made a tentative prediction that it might. According to Deutscher writing in the late fifties, events did not bear this out. Yet Stalin brought the Revolution to the brink of restoration without actually crossing the line. Trotsky is fair to Stalin, but the fact remains, and others may take steps which Stalin was committed not to take. Also Stalin's purges held the bureaucracy in check as well, the bureaucrats like politicians could never sit securely in the saddle; yet Trotsky was perplexed by Stalin's simultaneous promotion and repression of bourgeois elements.

As a remedy, Trotsky proposes a second revolution, a political one and not a social one. The social Revolution has already been carried through. Thus a second revolution is not to be a counter revolution, not one to undo the accomplishments of the first only one to refine and consolidate them. As he noted a bourgeois social order admits many different political ones, monarchical, republican etc. Thus the social basis established by the Russian Revolution admits many different political manifestations. He takes as an example the French Revolution of 1789 who was followed by two political revolutions of 1830 and 1848 respectively, which in no way changed the economic structure established by the first. Trotsky can well imagine a multi-party system in the Soviet Union, but not any kind of party, which begs the question of what parties to allow.

What actually followed in the post-Stalin period was not revolution but reforms, and reforms from above. What are the conditions for a Revolution, Deutscher asks and refers to the three conditions proposed by Lenin. a) The rulers are bankrupt and no longer manages to rule b) the ruled are fed up by being ruled c) there is a party ready to act and seize power. None of that was present in the Soviet Union, especially not after the war.

The Bolsheviks were fond of making comparisons with the French Revolution. Such comparisons are hard to make in any meaningful way and you easily are led astray, as Trotsky had done, and tried to make amends for. He, and many others, had seen the French Thermidor as a counter-revolution and hence to be fought at all costs. The NEP of 1921 was actually a kind of semi-Thermidor on which both Lenin and Trotsky had congratulated themselves upon. Then there were no Thermidor, but maybe there were after all, at least between 1923 and 1935. This was bound to confuse readers. What worried Trotsky was a world war, that surely would bring about a counter revolution. On the other hand a world war might bring about a global revolution which would counter its defeat in Russia. Trotsky was in the habit of making predictions (as was Marx), sometimes they were on the mark, other times rather off, but Deutscher claims that both were 'algebraically' correct, if their 'arithmetical' conclusions were wrong. What does that mean? They they we right in principle, but not necessarily as to details.

The book had a lot of influence, Deutscher writes, but people misunderstood it. They saw the slogans but failed to pursue the subtleties of his reasoning. The author recalls what

Goethe claimed about Lessing, namely that you needed to be as intelligent as Lessing to appreciate him. The same with Trotsky is implied. Koestler and Orwell were both deeply influenced by the book, although, one suspects following Deutscher, that they applied it superficially.

And at the end of his stay, hell breaks loose. On a climbing expedition with Knudsen on a island in a fjord they get an urgent message that there has been a break-in in Knudsen's home in an attempt to get to his archive. It failed because Knudsen had had the foresight to put it into a safe in a bank during their absence. Soon thereafter the show trials take place in which Zinoviev and Kamenev are forced to humiliate themselves and also to denounce Trotsky and his son as masterminding an attempt at Stalin's life and a subsequent counter-revolution. This is clearly going beyond what happened during the French Revolution. The timing of the show-trials was taken by care and actually coincided with Hitler's arming of the Rhineland to provide distraction and sympathy for Stalin himself. Now the Norwegians who had acted in such a friendly and supporting way to Trotsky made a sharp turn. The Soviet ambassador made a strong protest to the Norwegian authorities complete with veiled threats, and the Norwegians buckled under the pressure showing both cowardice and duplicity. Trotsky was moved from his home in Hønefoss to an imprisonment on an island, heavily guarded, mostly by Quislings men. He was forbidden to react against the accusations leveled against him by the show-trials, claiming that this would be a breach of the initial agreement of non-political activity, which was clearly hypocrisy. Furthermore he was asked to sign a document of what was in effect abject surrender, Trotsky scorned it and asked why they thought themselves more powerful than Stalin who would not be able to force him to sign such a thing. He ended by making a prophecy that in a few years time they would themselves be forced out of their country by the Nazis, a prediction that turned out to become true, and which they had not forgotten at that time. So Trotsky was condemned to silence, something which in the eyes of the world was seen as an admission of guilt. Trotsky then tried to bring the matter to court as to get a platform, but even that was denied him. Illegally so in fact, save for Lie managing to effect a special decree. It went to Lyova to publicly defend his father as well as himself against obscene accusations. And Lie put Trotsky on a ship heading for Mexico¹⁸. Deutscher does not hold back his contempt for the Norwegians expressing his indignation.

The arrival in Mexico was such a contrast to the coldness of the Norwegians and the Norwegian crew. Trotsky refused to leave the ship unless they were met by friends, whereupon the Norwegians threatened to expel them by force. But Diego Rivera was there, and old admirer of Trotsky, and whose admiration Trotsky reciprocated when it came to his art. Rivera had been instrumental to get him an asylum in Mexico and invited him to share his and Frida Kahlo's home - La Casa Azul - in Coyoacan, a borough of Mexico City. The sun, the artworks, the archaeological artifacts, everything seemed so idyllic and promised to provide a most promising exile. Even the president - Cardenas - welcomed him warmly as a

¹⁸ Relations between the men had as expected cooled considerably as a consequence of the betrayal. Lie tried several times to shake Trotsky's hand, but the latter refused. It turns out that Trotsky during his short stay had managed to acquire Norwegian as well to his stock of languages and read Ibsen's plays in the original (being particular taken by 'An Enemy of the People' (folkefiende) with whom he strongly identified), as well as conversing with his wardens in fluent Norwegian.

fellow revolutionary, although his concern was with peasants not the industrial proletariat as such. Furthermore he was supported by the Mexican Communist party who was Stalinist and did not look favorably on the invitation of Trotsky. As Trotsky arrived the Moscow show trials started anew, and now with even more grotesque accusations, including singling out Trotsky as the ultimate culprit. Thus Trotsky became once again a defendant eager to clear his name. The ridiculous accusations offended his sense of logic. Thus he passionately tried to establish alibis to all of the accusations. This was a quixotic mission really, trying to refute the unfalsifiable. His friends and supporters found it excessive, his pamphlets against Stalinism should be more than enough to discredit it, but Trotsky was dead set to produce irrefutable proofs, maybe as a consequence of a mathematical temperament. It took his toil, not only on himself and distracting him from his work, but also on his family, especially his son Lyova, who was in charge of collecting evidence from his base in Paris. Trotsky's impatience got the better of him and he constantly was abusive towards his son, accusing him of laziness and lack of commitment failing to produce expected results quick enough. The intellectuals, especially the American literati, started to cool towards him, some of them even turning against him. This might not have been too surprising, as most of them were intellectual opportunists and followed fashion and Trotsky had a rather low opinion of them. What he wanted was to establish a counter-trial where he could present his proofs and have his name cleared. A counter-trial actually came to fruition and the old doyen of American intellectuals - John Dewey ¹⁹ consented, against friendly advice to head it. It became as a consequence known as the Dewey Commission, which served as an inspiration for the Nuremberg trials. The sessions took place in Mexico, as Trotsky was unable to travel to the States. Trotsky handicapped himself by conducting his defense not in Russian, French or even German, but English, a language he did command but poorly. Anyway he managed to comport himself so well as to earn the dazed admiration of the court. Later a formal verdict of innocence was announced. But of course the Stalin purges continued becoming more and more grotesque.

Soon thereafter a family tragedy would befall Trotsky and his wife. Lyova their son died, most likely through poisoning arranged by an *agent provocateur* by name of Etienne who had managed to nestle himself into his confidence and making himself indispensable. Lyova, whose health had suffered from the unrelenting pressures he had been subjected to, not the last by his father, was about to have an operation of the appendix, but was, ostensibly for security reasons, taken by Etienne to a hospital run by Russian Emigres. He seemed to rally after his operation but then his condition deteriorated. It was a heavy blow to his parents, he being the child to which Trotsky was closest. He was only thirty-two at the time of his death. Adding insult to injury, they got embroiled in a fight with their daughter-in-law upon the custody of Trotsky's grandson Seva, the son of Zinaida. But Etienne, who had had unlimited access to the private interchanges between Lyova and his father, was appointed as a deputy for Trotsky in the Fourth International.

The Fourth International was a primary concern with Trotsky in his later years claiming that the Third was corrupt, but he was warned by his Polish friends that it was moribund and would have no impact. The Trotsky opposition had dwindled during his exile. Much publicity has been given the Moscow Trials, which targeted the elite of the

¹⁹ (1859-1952) noticeable as a pragmatist philosopher and educational reformer

regime, and whose victims could be counted in the hundreds. What did happen out of sight was the steady and systematic liquidation of opposition members in Siberian camps²⁰. The result was that the number of Trotsky adherents dropped precipitously, and most were to be found in the US, especially in New York and the circle around *the Partisan Review*. Yet they were not particularly reliable, as already more motivated by fashion and sympathy, than from any deeper convictions. Effective as the show trials were to drum up sympathy for him, they did not do so sustainably.²¹ In fact Trotsky feared that the opposition to Stalinism would lead to a rejection of Marxism and Bolshevism, which actually would happen. But Trotsky could nevertheless not bring himself to admit the futility of his efforts. He predicted a World War but thought (and hoped) that this would lead to the by him fervently desired world revolution which would release the Soviet Union from its isolation and bring about the fall of Stalinism. He was dismissive of the New Deal, actually the closest the US ever came to some sort of Socialism, condemning it as mere quackery, a futile effort of reforming capitalism from within. He predicted that the advanced American worker would look upon Marx as their mentor. As Deustcher sadly acknowledges, Trotsky's hope and predictions did not come true in the 50's, maybe around 2000 he wonders. One pillar of his credo was that a Revolution has to be Proletarian and cannot be effected by peasants. To an outsider of Socialistic Revolutionary theory this is very puzzling. Oppressed class as oppressed class, what could its provenance matter, as long it was anchored in a sufficiently restive mass movement.

The relation with Rivera would eventually degenerate to the point of affecting a breach between them. The major reason being that Rivera had withdrawn his support for Cardenas and instead championed a right-wing general. But what can you expect politically from an artist, more entranced by the aesthetic fascination of Trotsky than his political thought, which would in its abstractness be bound to bore him. Before that Trotsky had encouraged Rivera in his efforts to found *the International Federation of Artists and Writers* which, however, came to nothing. Art and its relation to politics greatly excited Trotsky, who characterized the art of the Stalin epoch to be a symptom of the deepest decline of the proletarian revolution. The consequences of the breach was that Trotsky had to move out of Casa Azul and find himself a new residence in Coyoacan on Avenida Viena, which he actually had to buy and raise the money for this, his first and only venture into real estate. This new place would for security reason be fortified and turned into a fortress, replete with watch-towers and regular police patrolling outside and his loyal supporters acting as body-guards inside.

A major reason for the whittling down of his supporters was that he expected of them the same passion and dedication he brought to his mission. But they were not made of the same stuff as he was. The result was that his supporters, loyal as they might be, started to balk, then becoming critical and ultimately hostile. The incident of Kronstadt in 1921 was turned against him. Did he not display the same ruthlessness as Stalin would show. Could one not claim that this was the precursor to Stalinism, that in effect that it was the

²⁰ Including their son Serge as it would turn out later.

²¹ As an example we may bring up Andre Breton, who came to visit him in Coyoacan, stricken by him and writing him an eulogical letter of such abject appreciation that Trotsky expressed his uneasiness about the future of their elation.

crucial juncture at which the Revolution took a wrong turn. Trotsky wrote a pamphlet on moralism defended himself, first by admitting full responsibility. The crux of the matter was to what extent does the ends justify the means. He first points out that there is no such thing as an absolute morality, but morality is subservient to the ends of society, and so far ends do justify the means and he defends the Jesuits as being maligned by posterity, they understood the limits of this principle. Not all means can lead to a given end, so a particular end cannot justify certain means, as some of them will pervert the end. He claimed further that Stalinism was not a product of the Revolution, but of what of the old order survived it. John Dewey took upon himself to criticize the pamphlet. In particular he inveighed against the emphasis on class struggle, which he found mystical, an going back not only to Marx but above all to Hegel and his misdirected idealism, as he as a pragmatic philosopher was battling. In short Trotskyism was based on pure idealism, not to say utopianism, and saw him as a Quoxite figure. This resonated very well with the intellectuals and made more and more retreat from him, not necessarily into hostility, but detachment, as they as intellectuals just could not follow him all the way, and more significantly could not muster enough enthusiasm for the problems he struggled with to join him albeit critically.

His financial situation was declining, as he no longer enjoyed the same topicality and had dropped out of fashion. Publishers fees drying up, partly also due to his own failings on delivering on promises and advances, in particular this concerned his projected work on the Lenin-biography. The problem was that he spread himself thin being both politically active as well as jornalsticaly and intellectually, on the other hand the one always presumed the other. His politics required his intellectual labors, while the latter needed the motivation provided by the former. His agents also faced mounting resistance to his journalism finding it increasingly difficult to place them, even when he wrote on very topical issues, even predicted a pact between Hitler and Stalin.

Although his health deteriorated²² and he looked prematurely aged, but when not ill he displayed enormous physical strength and stamina, his younger body-guards having trouble keeping up on him on his latest hobby, the collecting of rare cacti, planting some of them in his garden. Another hobby of his was raising rabbits, and with everything he undertook, he did not stop with half-measures, spending hours each day cleaning their pens. At the end of his life he also started on a biography on Stalin, which no doubt should be counted among his weakest works, in fact by working on it, he demeaned himself. What he managed with it was to produce the torso of a terrifying monster, the result of unmitigated hatred, and without some measure of sympathy you cannot dig very deep nor come up with any interesting insights. For one thing Trotsky suggests that Stalin poisoned Lenin. Coming fifteen years after the fact, the statement cannot be taken seriously. In fact Deutscher suspects that Trotsky is merely project the trauma of the death of his son, back to the death of Lenin, which also struck him very deeply. More importantly though is that Trotsky allows no development of Stalin but presents him from the start as the full-fledged monster he turned out to be. This makes his account of Stalin viewed as a biography uninteresting. This is of course the fallacy every historian risks falling into, the temptation to view history from the perspective of the present and thus to emphasize the

²² particularly his blood pressure

aspects of the past with tangible references to the present²³.

To give a true perspective of Trotsky's views of Stalin as a politician, as opposed to a vengeful individual, we have already referred to his satisfaction that Stalin pursued the politics of a planned economy and forced industrialization, as well as a collectivization of the peasants and the crushing of the Kulaks in their rôle of agrarian capitalists, even if he did not always approve of the brutality of the methods as well as their slipshod characters²⁴. Anyway Trotsky was proud of the progress the Soviet Union had made and that it had managed to deeply change the society. As already remarked he was fearful that anti-Stalinism would lead to a rejection of the Soviet Union itself and its undeniable accomplishments, in other words throwing out the good with the bad. As to the Hitler-Stalin pact he did not condemn it as such, he in fact defended it as an act of expediency, given that the Western powers rejected an alliance with Stalin; but what he opposed was the moral readiness with which that pact was hailed by Stalin and his making a virtue of necessity, and speaking about the brotherhood of the two countries. Of course one can always dismiss this as mere rhetoric, yet it did confirm many in the view that the extreme right and the extreme left met. and in fact in Germany there were many converts from Communism to Nazism, one example of which we have already referred to.²⁵ Furthermore Stalin when he conquered Polish territory initiated land reforms of which Trotsky very much approved, and likened them to the reforms in the spirit of the French Revolution

²³ Of course to a large extent this is inevitable, in a wider sense every look at the past is done from the present, and Collingwood describes the art of history to be the reconstruction of the past into the present using the knowledge and techniques available to us in the present. The warning is of course to put undue emphasis on matters with direct connections to the present as that will narrow the scope of history. If we want to get a deeper understanding of the past we need also to dwell on things which in the sense turned out to be dead-ends, especially if we think of history in so called Whig-terms, as an account of human progress. The genuinely curious historians also digs into the proverbial dustbins of history. In a sense one can see this as a parallel to the conflict between applied and pure research in the Natural sciences.

²⁴ As noted before, the question of whether Trotsky would have been as brutal as Stalin in implementing his policies or whether he would have proceeded more competently and humanely, is a counterfactual question and not amenable to falsification

²⁵ Individual examples per se can of course be dismissed as merely so called anecdotal with no wider implications. But Hitler supposedly claimed that it was much easier to make a Nazi out of a Communist than out of a Social Democrat. One may argue that the more reformist and 'democratic' nature of the latter may have acted as a kind of inoculation; but more importantly the outward forms of both Fascism and Communism with mass rallies and mystical references to the will as striving of large groups of people, be it *das Volk* or the Proletarian class should give pause for thought. Admittedly someone like Trotsky would dismiss those parallels as very superficial, but that is no guarantee that the mass of followers would possess the same insights. The Bolshevik party was, as noted, concerned in the 1920's about the great influx of 'raw' members without any deeper understanding of Communism. Exulted as the Proletariat may be, there is and was necessarily a division, some would even call it a gulf, between the elite of the party and its rank and file. Or put more bluntly, between the leaders and the mob (pöbeln - ochlos), or more politely expressing the distinction between democracy (good rule) and populism (bad rule). This lies of course at the heart of the liberal critique of Communism, one which I am personally much inclined to agree with.

Napoleon imposed on conquered territories. He spoke about Revolution from above, which he could not really condemn, although he very much preferred Revolutions from below. Furthermore he thought Stalin's attack on Finland very reasonable, securing a weak flank, after all Leningrad was vulnerable to artillery attacks from within the Finnish border²⁶ What he would criticize was the ineptness with which Stalin proceeded

Some of the criticism Trotsky leveled against Stalinism was the rise of bureaucracy. That was further developed by Bruno Rizzi. The State exploits the worker and distributes the profits to its managers i.e. the bureaucrats. The planned economy and collectivized management of industries would turn out to be far more efficient than capitalism to produce wealth, hence it amounted to historical progress. Those were ideas which made an impact on the intelligentsia as they allowed them to both have the cake and eat it. Trotsky predictably went into polemics, and in doing so he started to ask himself some hard questions. Could Marx after all have been wrong? Was Marxism after all but a Utopian ideology, and Stalin's victory a triumph of reality over illusion? Trotsky suggested that World War II would provide a test. If it did not lead to a world wide revolution or if it did but it would degenerate into a bureaucratic and not remain a proletarian revolution, Marx would have been wrong. But if bureaucratic exploitation would be a historical necessity one should still be on the side of the oppressed.

But the Stalin-Hitler pact scandalized American Trotskyists, they could no longer see the Soviet Union as a workers state, and those who had previously bitterly criticized the retreating intellectuals became retreating intellectuals themselves. Surely Trotskyism was no longer fashionable. The issue of his physical safety had been present ever since his banishment to Turkey, and as noted his home was very well protected. Yet assassination was not a pressing worry of Trotsky, but he nevertheless felt that his life was coming to an end, maybe through a cerebral hemorrhage. A massive attempt on his life was made in May 1940 when the villa was raided by machine-gunning thugs, masterminded as it later turned out, by the famous painter Siqueiros²⁷. A lot of shots were fired and they retreated believing that no one alive could remain in the house. However both Trotsky and his wife were unscathed having sought refuge under their bed. Furthermore Seva survived as well but was shot in the foot. The investigating police who arrived on the scene later was puzzled and wondered whether this was a put-up job. How could they have survived otherwise, and how could Trotsky be so calm after being through such an ordeal? Little was he aware of the *froid sang* of Trotsky who had been through much in his life. Later on the corpse of a missing young body-guard was found in a nearby farm. He initially came under suspicion of having been an accomplice, but Trotsky gave it little credence. Siqueiros had to go in hiding and was later exiled from Mexico²⁸. A few months later, a less spectacular but successful attempt was made on his life. A certain 'Jackson' also known under the name of 'Jacques Mornard' of uncertain provenience had befriended a Trotsky groupie - Sylvia Agelof - in fact acting as her 'husband' and driver. He had brought her to the Trotsky

²⁶ Similar views were expressed by Orwell at the time, which greatly annoyed me when I read about them in his collected works some thirty odd years later.

²⁷ (1896-1974) A Mexican socialist realist painter and as a member of the Mexican Communist Party an avowed Stalinist. Also along with Rivera and Orozoco, the most known 'Mexican Muralist'

²⁸ He was exiled to Chile and then emigrated to Cuba in 1944, returning to Mexico City in 1946.

residence, at first content with waiting in the car, later invited inside and being enabled to get a sense of the lay of the land. This repeated itself a few times and he was slowly earning the confidence of the household, greatly aided thereby for his connection with the trusted groupie. One day he came alone and wanted Trotsky's advice on an article he had written. He followed Trotsky into his study and acted strangely, sitting on his desk, and generally behaving in a rather impolite and curious manner (clasping his coat closely to his body and with a hat, usually being bareheaded) making Trotsky very uneasy, without forming any definite suspicions. It turned out that his first visit was only a dress rehearsal of what would ensue a bit later as the assassination, he coat had served to hide an ice-ax his weapon of choice. The second time he brought a typed and edited version of his article, which Trotsky had found feeble filled with clichés but he found himself obligated to have a second look. So while he was preoccupied with the text leaning over his desk, the assassin sneaked up behind, brought out his ice-ax and plunged it with all his force onto the head of his victim. He had expected that the latter would without a sound fall to the ground allowing himself to sneak out unnoticed. But instead Trotsky brought out a howl, alerting everyone around, turned around, throwing ink-horns and other loose objects on his assailants and finally himself in a rage, biting his hand. When his wife found him, he was still standing up, his face covered with blood, fully conscious. In the mean-time his body-guards had seized the assailant and nearly beating him to death, but stopped by Trotsky who wanted him saved so he could talk²⁹. Trotsky's condition worsened of course and his arms and legs got paralyzed. He was taken to a hospital where he was operated upon. The ax had penetrated some 10 centimeters in the skull which had been splintered with pieces embedded in the brain. He would never wake up from his coma and die 24 hours after the blow. On autopsy it transpired that his brain was exceptionally big, and his heart large as well. He was laid on a lit de parade and some 300'000 people filed by him. He was buried in his home yard, where his widow would find her resting place as well. The house would then be turned into a museum and his study left untouched as it was at the time of the attack. An attack that did not come as a surprise to him, in fact while he was still conscious and communicable, he confessed that the thought of being killed by his visitor occurred to him; but this was a thought that must have occurred to him many times before, and hence not one causing him to act upon it.

There was an end to Stalinism, Deutscher admits, but it did not occur until after the death of Stalin. As all the anti-stalinists had been exterminated under Stalin, de-stalinization had to be conducted by stalinists, and hence half-heartedly so. Deutscher died relatively young at sixty in 1967 and hence did experience the fiftieth anniversary of the 1917 revolution, when post-Stalin Soviet Union still was at its zenith. A slow decay would take part in the 70's under Brezhnev, and then falling almost freely during the 80's, leading to the collapse with a whimper and its dissolution. To what extent is Soviet Union a socialist country? It is, as we know, no longer a Soviet Union, but a restoration of the old Russian empire, with Leningrad once again St-Petersburg and the Russian Orthodox

²⁹ Mercarder did talk but produced nothing but misinformation, i.e. straight lies, blaming his act on personal revenge against Trotsky, allegedly having destroyed his life. His true identity was not revealed until the fall of the Soviet Union. His last words supposedly was that :I hear it always. I hear the scream. I know he's waiting for me on the other side.

church reinstated. And even in a sense with a Tsar - Vladimir Putin. Capitalism, maybe in its worst forms, is back in Russia. And as to being an industrialized power, it has been reduced to a Third World country deriving its wealth not from industrial production, not even agricultural, as its food production has been inadequate, with the need for large grain imports from North America during the 70's; but from the exportation of raw materials, in Russia's case oil. Does anything of the Soviet Union remain in present day Russia, except backwardness? And what about Trotsky's visions of the permanent Revolution? What remains of the proletarian class in an ostensibly post-industrial economy? At best a marginal section of society of 'losers' as in mindless Trump supporters. A hundred years ago there was a huge reserve of talent and enterprise among the suppressed masses just waiting to be exploited. The present concerns of civilizations are not the one of material wealth but survival on a sustainable basis. Of course many aspects, especially the ones not having to do with economy, of classical Marxism has not lost its relevance, such as the questions of how to lead a meaningful and spiritual life, as envisioned by the leftist intelligentsia of the 19th century, of which Trotsky was an outstanding example.

Thus even if you do not have much sympathy for Trotsky's politics and visions, you cannot fail to be fascinated by the individual and his tragic fate. Impressed by his passionate energy and the width of his intellectual interest and humbled by his extensive literary publication.

Appendix:

Natalia Sedova (1882-1962) lived on in Mexico and wrote with Victor Serge a biography of her husband

Lev (Lyova) Sedov (1906-1938) probably poisoned by G.U.P.

Sergei Sedov (1908-1937) died in a Siberian camp

Vsevolod (Seva) Volkov (1926-) became a noted chemist and later custodian of the Trotsky museum in Mexico City

Alexandra Volkova (1923-1989) died of cancer shortly after a reunion of her half-brother Volkov; as she had spent her life in the Soviet Union and he outside forgetting his Russian, they had no language in common.

David Alfaro Siqueiros was in 1966 given the Lenin Peace Prize belatedly for his 1940 attempt of murder.

Ramon Mercader (1913-1978) Came to serve twenty years in Mexican prison after his deed during which he was presented with the Order of Lenin in absentia, and upon his release in 1961 awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

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