

---

# Leon Trotsky.

by Ludwig Lore

Published in *One Year of Revolution: Celebrating the First Anniversary of the Founding of the Russian Soviet Republic: November 7, 1918.* (Brooklyn, NY: The Class Struggle, 1918), pp. 7-10.

In wartime events crowd each other, and a year of war counts more than a decade in normal times. This old truth holds good even in our rapidly moving modern age. Scarcely 22 months ago Leon Trotsky was still among us, striving with a few others to make the pulse of the American movement beat more rapidly, in tune with the revolutionary forces of the European socialist movement. At that time Socialist America was intensely ignorant of conditions and tendencies of European Socialism. The words Zimmerwald and Kienthal were only the vaguest of conceptions even to the more intelligent of American Socialists. Always astonishingly out of touch with international questions, the movement here had completely failed to establish even the most superficial affiliations with the International organization of the Socialist Left.

It was thus Leon Trotsky, one of the authors of the Zimmerwald Manifesto, found the American Socialist Party when he arrived in New York in the first days of January 1917. And with him seemed to come the first actual contact with our comrades in Europe. It happened that a few days before his arrival a group of American Socialists had decided to hold a conference at which a program of action for Socialists of the Left, for the purpose of organizing the radical forces in the American Socialist movement, was to be discussed. America stood on the brink of war, and we felt that our movement was utterly unprepared to take up the momentous questions that lay before it.



Something had to be done to arouse the Party to a more energetic spirit of protest. A meeting in a private home was arranged, and our Russian guest, who had arrived in America just the day before, was invited.

As we look back upon that seemingly informal occasion in the light of what occurred during the year that has just passed, it was a distinguished company that came together in the sleepest part

of sleepy Brooklyn that night. Besides the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the commander-in-chief of the Russian Army and Navy, there was the always interesting, always spontaneous Alexandra Kollontai, Mrs. Minister of Public Welfare (now Public Security). There was the "typical Leninite," as Trotsky so often called him, N. Bukharin, the most noted and generally recognized theoretician of the aggressive school of New Russia, who, since Brest-Litovsk, has been consistently opposed to Lenin; there was the youthful, uncommonly sympathetic G.T. Tiudnovsky, who made the impression that he could not kill the proverbial fly and yet proved to be one of the truest heroes in the battles of the Bolsheviki, sacrificing first limb and then life itself in active defense of the great cause; there was V. Volodarsky, who always played the role of the silent onlooker and yet, from the very first day of the establishment of the Soviet regime, was one of the most reliable and efficient pillars of the Russian proletariat.

At first it seemed that this conference which was rapidly followed by a number of others would achieve no tangible results. The Russians were in their element and long drawn-out but intensely interesting theoretical discussions were always in order. We others felt that for the time being it was hopeless to think of organizing the Left within the Party for anything like effective action. Here Trotsky, who had unconsciously become the spiritual center of this movement, proved himself to be a practical man as well. He proposed that first of all an organ be created that would fearlessly and truthfully express the attitude of the revolutionary minority. Another group, with Bukharin, were at first in favor of founding a separate organization, with a periodical expressing its aims and purposes, but were outvoted by the others. A subcommittee was elected with instructions to present definite suggestions to the next meeting of the conference, and a week later this committee, of which Trotsky was a member, proposed the publication of a bi-monthly periodical. *The Class*

*Struggle* is the fruit of this conference.

Since then not quite two years have passed. And we have done day-laborers' work, while our former co-workers were fighting out world-historical battles for the international proletariat. Yet these few months in which those staunch, faithful, and true men and women of the Russian Revolution fought side by side with us in our own movement shed a bright glow upon this first anniversary of the Soviet Republic, for we feel that we are flesh of their flesh and spirit of their spirit.

• • • • •

When Trotsky landed here his name was known only to his own countrymen and to a handful of German Socialists. In the ten weeks of his stay he had become one of our most popular speakers and writers. Notwithstanding the difficulties that lie in the way of a man understanding and speaking only a few words of the English language, in not quite three months Trotsky played such an important part in the party movement of the City of New York that the future promised much for him and for the ideas and forces that he represented. Had Trotsky remained a year in the United States, our movement would have found in him a great and splendid leader.

For Trotsky is born to lead men. His unusual talent as a speaker won the hearts and minds of his hearers everywhere. Without pose, strikingly free from the arts and artifices that most speakers use to enhance the effectiveness of their speeches, he was yet able to stir an audience of thousands with the same personal magnetism that made itself so unmistakably felt in the smallest gathering. And to his great credit be it said that Trotsky was always as ready to speak to twenty persons as he was to address a mass meeting or as many thousands — unlike so many of our miniature "leaders," who consider it beneath their dignity to speak to small audiences.

Leon Trotsky belongs to that rare class of So-

cialist speakers who are at once theoreticians and propagandists. In his speeches, in other words, there was nothing of grey, dry, and abstract theory. He used the events of the day to prove the reality of Socialist theory, he made them the basis of scientific research and explanation. Thus every one of his speeches became a discussion of scientific Socialism, a profession of faith in the theories of Marx, and at the same time, a plea for development away from the old, outworn tactics of pure and simple parliamentarism to a live stirring up of the masses, to revolutionary mass action.

Trotsky's political method is the historic method. Like a red line this historic materialist conception of world development permeates his speeches and writings. He applies it mercilessly and unsparingly to every new situation that arises, analyzing it in the light of its historic and its material background, dividing what seems to others an inseparable whole into its component parts. And then in one bold stroke, with the keenness and certainty of an inspired prophet, he reveals coming events while they still are hidden behind the dark curtain of the future from the eyes of ordinary mortals.

Like all Russians, he is an inspired pamphleteer. In less than no time, almost as if by magic, he produces one brochure after the other as event follows event. What would take another months to produce he accomplishes in a few days. And then a thousand times more effectively.

Every single phase of the Revolution is treated with a clearness of vision that amounts to genius; in them the great social revolution of the Russian proletariat has been chronicled. One of Trotsky's books, *The History of the October Revolution to Brest-Litovsk*, which will make its appearance shortly in the English language, is an excellent example of this method. The freshness of style, the sureness of its presentation remind one forcibly of Karl Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*. In this brochure of about one hundred pages the author gives us an undying picture of the third phase of

the Russian Revolution. Trotsky, the farseeing statesman, the brilliant journalist, the enthusiastic agitator, is not a pioneer in thought and creation as Marx was.

But far more than the founder of the modern socialist movement, he stands in the roaring current of events and is therefore destined to play an important role in their historical development. His analysis thus becomes, in a certain sense, more forceful than that of the socialist master. It is more spontaneous, more empirical, it is reality, life itself.

It is a noteworthy fact that in every country Russians have taken a leading part in the national movements. This is not only because the persecutions of the old regime have sent to other countries the best that Russia had to give of revolutionary material. It is equally due to the enormous adaptability that everywhere characterizes the Russian Socialist, his ability to become an active, integral part of the movement into which he has come, and last but not least his intense and real conception of the spirit of Internationalism which makes him more ready than the German or the Englishman, than the Scandinavian or the Frenchman to adapt himself to new conditions, to use these new conditions for his purposes. This happy faculty was developed in Trotsky to an unusual degree. Driven from country to country by the bloodhounds of capital and the almighty Tsar, forced to use not a little of his time to establish a home for himself and his family and for the regulation of numerous personal obligations, he nevertheless gained, in the few weeks of his stay, an insight into American conditions that amazed everyone with whom he came in contact. While the "lights" of the New York Russian Socialist colony still pooh-poohed the idea of American intervention, he proved that America's participation in the war was inevitable. And when later the revolutionary flood in Russia had carried Tsarism before it, he assured me that the day might not be far distant when the American government would

become the friend in need of the Russian bourgeoisie. "The European proletariat," he declared at a meeting shortly before he left, "is vitally interested in the growth of a strong, revolutionary American movement. For your democracy is the only hope, the last refuge of the European bourgeoisie, who will appeal to your capitalists for help." How near his prophesy has come to fulfillment!

• • • • •

Leon Trotsky is still a young man, at the beginning of the forties. And yet he has stood in the thickest of the fight for more than twenty years. He was, for a short time, the President of the Soldiers' and Workmen's Council of the Revolution of 1905. His life has been a life of greatest self-abnegation for the cause of the working class. Like his comrade, Lenin, he knows the steppes of Siberia, has made the intimate acquaintance of the vilest prisons, of the tortures and martyrdom of the bloodthirsty system of Feudal-Capitalism. From his "fatherland" he fled to exile, he was banished from the Kaiser's Germany and after war sentenced to six months in prison for writing his classic book, *The International and the World War* (*The Bolsheviki and World Peace*). From republican France he was driven by a socialist Minister, and neither democratic Switzerland nor the constitutional monarchy of Spain tolerated the dangerous revolutionist within their borders. But nothing could discourage his strong, hopeful assurance. On

the contrary, he seemed to grow, to become greater and more powerful with each new oppressive measure. He steeled his socialist convictions in the white fire of persecution, in it he hardened his belief in the uncompromising class antagonism of modern society. Wherever he went he found numerous friends and devoted supporters. Whenever he was driven away, he left behind him the brightly burning fire of revolutionary enthusiasm.

Today, on the first anniversary of Soviet rule in Russia, Trotsky and his comrades may hold up their heads proudly before the working class of the world. The seed that the Russians sowed has taken root; all over Europe, in Germany, in Austria-Hungary, and in Bulgaria, the first shoots of revolutionary uprising have raised their heads above the ground. Trotsky's prophesy that the Russian Revolution will and must win because the working class of the nations of Europe will be forced to take up the struggle against their governments has received splendid vindication.

The fulfillment of our proudest dreams is at hand. The night through which the proletariat has lived in mental darkness and physical suffering is retreating, the light of the sun is already shining down upon us. On the ruins of a world destroyed and devastated by capitalism the proletariat will build a new existence.

To the master-builder, Leon Trotsky, to our friend and comrade in times of stress and in victory, greetings and thanks.

*Ludwig Lore.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.*