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VOLUME TWO

October 1935
to
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By Pierre Broue

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"Leon Trotsky's Oeuvres"
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The Introduction to
"Leon Trotsky: Oeuvres"

Volume Seven

by Pierre Broue and Michel Dreyfus

OCTOBER 1935 - DECEMBER 1935

Trotsky began October 1935 in bed in the communal hospital at Oslo. The doctors prescribed for him a stay which lasted about six weeks, for studies and analyses, which do not seem to have revealed the causes of his uncertain state of health. He took advantage of this semi-enforced semi-rest to undertake a task which he expected soon to complete. This was a substantial preface, which Max Eastman asked him to write, for a new American edition of "The History of the Russian Revolution", in which he would summarise his analysis of the nature of the USSR. In the event, this task advanced more slowly than he had hoped. By the time he left the hospital, it had already grown to a considerable size, and was still far from completion. In the course of the last quarter of 1935, Trotsky resigned himself to not being content with a mere preface, however filled with good things it might be, but to writing a full-length book. The following nine months were to be devoted principally to this new book, which was to be called "The Revolution Betrayed".

In the early days of October, an event, at one and the same time political and domestic, was to strike a blow at the organisation of his work and to raise anxieties about the security of his refuge. Collaboration (which had already been evident in June) between the notoriously fascist chief of police in Norway and the consular authorities in Paris enabled the police to discover that Jan Frankel, his only secretary, had been expelled from France in February 1934. Frankel was summoned by the Norwegian authorities, who wanted to know whether they were dealing with "a dangerous agitator". The fact is that his passport had been "doctored" to remove the mention of his expulsion, but it could not stand up to a serious examination. The young Czechoslovak preferred to leave Norway without waiting for a scandal which could not fail to rebound on the Trotsky family. Here was a sign that those who opposed his having refuge in Norway were not giving up; it especially meant the loss of a precious collaborator.

Their financial situation, moreover, was catastrophic. He had to borrow to pay in advance for his hospitalisation. Probably this is why he appealed for someone who had personal resources to replace Frankel, and who did not have to be paid by the family. The search led to a young German from Czechoslovakia, Erwin Wolf, a leader of the German section in exile. He may well not have been the ideal secretary, because he lacked experience as well as a liking for that kind of work, but Trotsky valued his personal qualities, his political sense, and quickly reposed full confidence in him. Moreover, the affection which developed between him and Knudsen's daughter,

Hjördis, was to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the dwellers in the house at Wexhall.

The approach of the severe Norwegian winter meant that visits had to be fitted in between October (when Trotsky was still in hospital) and December, when travel became very difficult and often impossible. But Trotsky did not under-estimate their importance. That of Fred Zeller, the leader of the Socialist Youth of the Seine Federation of the SFIO, was a source of pleasure to him, and an important contribution to the reasoned optimism which shows through his letters and in the unconcealed pride with which he spoke of his guest, a symbol in his eyes of that youth which he must win to the Fourth International. He worked actively to win Zeller, whose questions led him to write about a number of fundamental theoretical and historical questions, especially on the anniversary of the October Revolution. He also had important discussions with the Canadian militants, who came from Britain, Earle Birney and Kenneth Johnstone. Valuable accounts of these discussions have survived.

The news from the rest of the world was not to bring him immediately the uprising of the French workers which he had forecast in August 1935. Despite the new revolutionary developments which were on their way, and were ripening in the world, the wave of reaction continued to have its effects. In Brazil the coup d'etat of Vargas destroyed one of the oldest sections of the Left Opposition, which had arisen from a political battle within the Communist International and the leadership of the Communist party of the country. Some of the leaders, such as Mario Pedrosa, managed to get away, and others went underground, but the majority were arrested, held in the worst possible conditions and often tortured. Some did not escape alive from the prisons of the dictator.

The crisis of the revolutionary organisation in the Netherlands, which resulted from the signature by the leadership of the RSAP of the "Open Letter" for the construction of the Fourth International, reached its climax and was resolved. The youth organisation, led by Jan Molenaar, decided to break from the RSAP, which founded a new organisation led by Theo van Driesten, who had the confidence of Sneevliet. A few days later Schmidt and Sneevliet won a significant victory over the opponents of the "Open Letter". The "minority", led by Bladergroen, van der Goes and Molenaar, left the RSAP and founded a rival organisation, the BRS, which had the support of the German SAP and immediately demanded affiliation to the London Bureau. But all the evidence shows that these developments inside the RSAP prevented its leadership, who were at the same time responsible for maintaining contact with the organisations supporting the "Open Letter", from following up their work on the international plane. The regrouping of the supporters of the Fourth International was marking time.

In December the faithful Frankel sent good news from Prague. A former leader of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and collaborator in the Communist International, who had spent some years in exile (in Siberia) as a supporter of the Left Opposition, had

arrived from the USSR. He appears to have managed to win his freedom because he had Italian nationality, and went on hunger-strike at the right moment. The newcomer, the Croat Anton Ciliga, confirmed the information which the Armenian Tarov had recently provided. He gave information about past discussions in the camps, about the atmosphere in the party and in the ranks of the Opposition, as well as precise, up-to-date news about the repression. Trotsky evidently exercised all the prudence necessary in his relations with the newcomer, but at the same time he found in Ciliga's first letter confirmation and additional information, with which to defend the Russian revolutionaries, at the same time as indications of the strength of the supporters who remained to him despite the unprecedented repression. Moreover, all this confirmed his apprehension. He believed that the GPU could only be preparing to strike a blow, which it would do its best to make a fatal one, at the Left Opposition, the principal source of danger to Stalin and the bureaucracy.

However, he once more devoted the major part of his attention and energy during the last quarter of 1935 to the French section of the International Communist League, which in summer 1934 had become the "Bolshevik-Leninist Group" (GBL) in the SFIO. The crisis which had been developing there for some months broke out on November 23.

On that date, in the course of a meeting of the Central Committee, Pierre Frank, to whom the task had been given of preparing its "mass journal", to be addressed to the working class directly and to bring together the scattered revolutionaries, presented a report on this question which led to an explosion. The fact was that Pierre Frank, Raymond Molinier and their close associates had during the preceding weeks occupied themselves in preparing everything, down to the smallest detail, for publishing at the beginning of December a weekly paper, which they would place at the disposal of the revolutionaries, if they were prepared to re-group on a minimum program of three points. The "Commune" faced the Central Committee of the GBL with an accomplished fact, a mass-organ which did not belong to them.

A split, therefore, became inevitable, between Trotsky on the one side and the supporters of Molinier, a significant group in the Central Committee, on the other. The split was all the more serious and heavy with consequences because the dynamism perhaps sometimes even the activism - of Raymond Molinier, in contrast to the procrastination and hesitation of the other leaders of the GBL, won him support and, often, enthusiastic co-operation from many militants, who were driven by the desire "to do something at last" and "to go over to activity", in order to win for the embryonic revolutionary party its place in the class movement, which was going forward into action. Trotsky was especially concerned that Jan van Heijenoort, who had long been his collaborator, lined up in Molinier's camp.

He appears to have detected that, behind the delays of the Central Committee, which had been going on for months, the opportunistic line of Molinier, an adaptation to the apparatus of the SFIO. He saw in the appearance of "La Commune" a new example

of Molinier's "methods" and of his lack of principle, which others had so often denounced in the past. Thereafter his letters to Paris emphasised that Frank and Molinier were "capitulating before the social-patriotic wave", while the rest of the Central Committee were capitulating before them. The split was completed when Molinier was excluded from the Plenum of the International Communist League and continued to publish "La Commune", which became the organ of "revolutionary action groups". Trotsky believed the split to be absolutely necessary, but none the less it was a severe blow. The less developed elements, who had recently been won in the Socialist Youth remained in general with the GBL leadership; Trotsky had, in a certain way, no further use for the living forces of the GBL who remained with Molinier or, at any rate, demanded a reconciliation with him.

Did Trotsky's six weeks in hospital play some part in the subterranean development of the crisis and, therefore, in the violence with which it exploded? We may think so, without, however, attaching too much importance to it, because the differences were deep, real ones, and the crisis was practically inevitable.

Trotsky's work was seriously interrupted. When he resumed activity in November, his discussions with Birney, Johnstone and Zeller, to be sure, gave him the opportunity to produce documents of great political interest. But the materials which we have today reveal gaps; perhaps his illness explains them. For example, we have no more than remote echoes, no more than allusions, to the differences of interpretation of the Popular Front which Ruth Fischer and Maslow advanced against his. Important events like the congress of the RSAP and the formation of the POUM in Spain drew no more than passing references from his pen, though they contained the seeds of important future discussions.

What is certain is that the fractional struggles - and especially those in the French section - exhausted him, to the point that, after an unsuccessful attempt to take a holiday by going for a few days to live in Knusden's cabin in the forest, he asked for "a political holiday" - something that he had never done before.

This can be understood. His information indeed showed that Stalin and his international apparatus were getting ready to launch the most ferocious blows against him personally, as well as against the international organisation which he had brought together and organised. The murder of a leading member of the Italian Communist Party in exile by a supporter of Bordiga (whom he had slandered) provided "L'Humanite" with a pretext to present the Trotskyists as "assassins". A few months later, a thoughtlessly-written postcard which Fred Zeller sent while he was staying with Trotsky at Wexhall was presented in the Stalinist press as proof that a plot - to kill Stalin - was being woven in Norway. Trotsky knew perfectly well how determined his adversary was. The evidence is that Trotsky's comrades under-estimated this danger. No doubt the virulence of the fractional struggle indicates this more clearly than anything else. Who could convince them if Trotsky had not yet been able to do so?

The Introduction to
"Leon Trotsky: Oeuvres"
Volume Eight,
by Pierre Broue

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1936

Trotsky was in Norway when he decisive year of 1936 opened, living at the house of the journalist, Konrad Knudsen, at Wexhall, near Hønefoss, and sharing the life of the house with Natalia and his secretary, Erwin Wolf.

At the centre of his activity, in the course of these studious months, was the subject which had, in a sense, forced itself upon him in the preceding September, the balance-sheet of the USSR, which he began as a preface to the new, American edition of "The History of the Russian Revolution" and which was developing into a full-sized book, "The Revolution Betrayed". Moreover, the information available from the USSR, together with his reading of the reports in the Soviet press on the purge of the official party, enabled him to detect how vast was its scale and how many Communists were excluded from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for "Trotskyism". He drew the conclusion that the current which stood for his ideas in the land of the October Revolution, at least, if not the organisation, retained importance and vitality. He frequently mentioned what he called "the Soviet section of the Fourth International" in his letters and articles. The pieces of information supplied by the former prisoners, who had got out of the USSR, the Armenian Davtian (known as Tarov) and the Croat, Ciliga, had already convinced him that an international campaign was needed to convince the revolutionaries imprisoned in the USSR. He did his best to stimulate it, by linking the fate of his Soviet comrades to that of the non-Stalinist revolutionaries in capitalist countries - who had no one to defend them.

The task on the agenda since 1933 was the construction of the Fourth International. At the beginning of 1935, he conceived the idea of gathering the parties and organisations which claimed to be revolutionary, and which understood the bankruptcy of the two old Internationals, around a "Manifesto for the Fourth International". This has been called "The Open Letter". It was signed, in particular, by the two parties which had resulted from fusions of sections of the International Communist League with organisations which up to that time had been independent. These two parties were the Workers' Party of the United States and the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Labour Party (RSAP). Trotsky looked forward to an international conference being quickly organised, which would recognise that the Fourth International (in the process of construction) existed, and would provide its first organisational structures. In the event, however, political developments beyond his control, the crisis and the split in the Dutch section, followed by that in the French section and the explosion which followed in the Bolshevik-Leninist Group (GBL), forced him to defer it. But, for all that, he

did not drop the idea.

However, the difficulties which he was already encountering were to become considerably worse during the early months of 1936. To begin with, the question of "entry" into the Socialist parties, which had so shaken the sections of the International Communist League in 1934 and into 1935, was again raised by the recent developments in the Socialist Party of USA. The ultra-right, reformist Old Guard had just left, slamming the door behind them, leaving the apparatus in the hands of two still incompletely crystallised centrist formations. The leaders of the former Workers' Party did not want to "enter", and Cannon and Shachtman had for some time been defending themselves against accusations from Oehler that they were preparing "on the sly" to enter the Socialist Party. However, they were now convinced that they should do so, and appealed to Trotsky for help and support. He wired his advice that they take this step. For his part, he was convinced that anything would be better for the American party than the crisis which he could see coming - in the form of a discussion which would drag on separate from all political activity.

None the less, some damage had to be expected. There were considerable risks that the WPUS would be disrupted. Again Trotsky was to help to avoid these consequences, both by his correspondence with those active American leaders who opposed "entrism" and in the course of discussions which spread over several days in February 1936 at Hønefoss with American visitors, among them the Canadian, Maurice Spector, whom he had known since the early days of the Comintern in Moscow. The entry was finally agreed, and was effected without significant losses from the ranks of the WPUS, when the anti-entrism tendencies, with Weber, Muste and Glotzer, finally agreed to give it a loyal try-out.

In reality, the most serious consequences of the "American turn" were to be seen in other sections, and first in the Dutch RSAP. In 1934 the leaders of both of the parties which formed the RSAP, (the OSP and the RSP), P. J. Schmidt - and especially Sneevliet, who at the time was a member of the International Secretariat of the International Communist League, had opposed the "French turn" and accepted it only as a "once-off" tactical initiative. They had also insisted that a decision of such importance should not be taken on the sole initiative of the national section concerned, but fell within the province of the International Secretariat, i.e. of the whole international organisation. But in January 1936 Trotsky expressed his personal opinion, and thus, according to Sneevliet, had confronted the International Secretariat - and the Dutch leadership, which provided the secretarial basis for the organisations which declared for the Fourth International - with an accomplished fact.

It is certain that Schmidt and Sneevliet had not made it a priority to organise the collection of signatures for the "Open Letter" (and therefore for the construction of the Fourth International) during the preceding months. But they believed that, when the WPUS decided to "enter" the Socialist Party (which was a part of the Second International), it had really abandoned the struggle for the Fourth International. It

seemed clear to them that, for an indefinite period, the Americans, as well as the Belgians who had gone into the POB, would no longer have their hands free on the international plane, while they were, with the RSAP, one of the two pillars of the undertaking and at the same time were the only parties in it on any size. Relations between the RSAP on one side and Trotsky and the International Secretariat on the other were to continue to deteriorate from January onwards.

Within the International Secretariat itself, moreover, the decision of the Americans to operate the "entry" in their turn provoked a disturbance. It led to another break-away, when Ruth Fischer, the German 'ex-Zinovievist', who had been co-opted a year earlier at Trotsky's suggestion, confirmed her hostility to "entrism" and to the method which, according to her, kept the International Secretariat out of important decisions. Her protest took the form of systematically absenting herself from the meetings of the International Secretariat and finally of leaving it. Her divergences and those of her companion, Arkadi Maslov, did not cease to accumulate, moreover, from 1935 onwards, round the question of the Popular Front, which in 1935 had been the subject of lively discussions in the International Secretariat, in the course of which they had argued against the slogans and the analysis of Trotsky.

The problem of the Popular Front - or, rather, more precisely, the pressure which the Popular Front, conceived in Moscow, exerted on the ranks of the Trotskyists - explains the sharp, definitive breakaway of the section in Spain, one of the oldest sections of the Left Opposition, led by Andres Nin, who had long been linked to Trotsky by personal friendship. The Spanish section twice rejected the proposal of Trotsky and the International Secretariat that it should enter the Spanish Socialist Party and its youth section, first in September 1934 and then in May 1935. However, in September 1935 the Spanish section joined in a fusion particularly with Maurin's Workers' and Peasants' Bloc, the outcome of which was the POUM, which had an implantation almost exclusively in Catalonia. Trotsky very reluctantly accepted this experiment; in principle it hardly differed from that in the Netherlands or in USA, although Nin and his comrades warned the International Secretariat that they would not organise as a fraction in the POUM.

However, a split, which had long been averted, became inevitable at the moment when the POUM decided to sign the electoral programme of the Left Bloc, a Popular Front in all but name; they justified doing so by arguing that the electoral system made it necessary and that an electoral victory of the Left would enable the 30,000 political prisoners from 1934 to get out of jail. Trotsky saw this as a betrayal, and he said so without beating about the bush, though he protested against the decision of the International Secretariat to exclude summarily Nin and his comrades. In any case, these events meant that no Spanish section existed at the moment when the electoral victory of the Popular Front was the first sure sign that the masses were recovering from the momentary check inflicted after October 1934 by the ferocious repression of

the Asturias miners.

In the French section things went hardly any better. The split was completed in December 1935 when Raymond Molinier founded the weekly journal, "La Commune", and everyone who sold or collaborated with the new journal in the GBL was excluded. At first there was a strong conciliatory current in the GBL - an important section of the old leadership had followed Molinier - and this current pressed for new negotiations to seek a compromise. Then Molinier took the initiative, with some success. While the GBL spent whole weeks drafting a new letter about the construction of the new party and the new International, the "Commune" people formed a "Committee of the Fourth International", which announced its intention to sign the "Open Letter", and demanded its place in the international organisation that was being constructed.

Trotsky became impatient with the slow pace and lack of initiative - even the "bureaucratic" inflexibility, as he called it - of the GBL leadership and of the International Secretariat, who seemed unable to adapt to new developments and, more simply, to manoeuvre to "un-mask" the splitters. He suggested solutions which, in the end, were not adopted. The rise of the mass movement in France also was making itself clear, and there was the danger that it might arrive at the front of the scene while the supporters of the new party and of the Fourth International were tearing themselves apart. This factor was to add to the isolation in which the parties of the Popular Front were able at first to enclose them.

However, the possibility remained that the French experience could help other sections to orient themselves better, to avoid repeating mistakes and to foresee better the obstacles on their route. This is what Trotsky thought about Poland - where the working class was beginning to take to the streets, to the advantage of the Bolshevik-Leninist fraction in the PPS and the Bund - and especially in Belgium, where for the moment the results were encouraging. To be sure, the first exclusions of Trotskyists from the Socialist Young Guard were beginning, but it could be hoped that a homogeneous fraction could be led to "leave" the POB, considerably strengthened by the year's work inside that party. Especially, the Trotskyist fraction seemed to have succeeded in recruiting the most conspicuous militant personality of "Action Socialiste Revolutionnaire", the young Walter Dauge, the leader of the Socialist Young Guard in the Borinage. Trotsky was in any case in direct contact with him, and discussed the best conditions for the coming split with the POB and the conditions for constructing the independent party in Belgium in the light of the French experience. None the less it was far from filling him with complete confidence; he was uneasy about conciliatory concessions to the "young bureaucrat", Godefroid.

Likewise he resumed contact with the Englishman, Hugo Dewar and with the group of the former members of the British "majority", which distanced itself from the International Secretariat at the beginning of 1934. Dewar and his comrades had joined the Labour Party, towards which Trotsky thought more and more of orientating his

English comrades, who, he believed, were wasting their time and energy in the ILP. Moreover, had not the dissident group led by D.D. Harber, who had independently joined the Labour Party, recruited, in the "Hyde Park Group" a nucleus of old cadres of the Communist Youth, brought in by Eric Starkey Jackson, which promised a rich harvest?

How far do these personal interventions by Trotsky - directed at the Americans, the Spanish, the Belgians and the British - suggest that the role and the activity of the International Secretariat were weakening? We may think so. At the beginning of 1936, the Dutch were sulking, the Belgians were absorbed in their day-to-day work in the POB and the problems of the "exit", and the French were absorbed in their crisis. Ruth Fischer was on her way out. With Leonetti, it was probably once more on Leon Sedov, backed by Klement, on whom the day to day activity of the leading international organisation depended.

We do not find any trace in Trotsky's writings in the first months of 1936 of the development of the international movement in other continents. There was no news, it seems, from China, nor any echo from Indo-China, where Ta Thu Thau's Trotskyists, especially through their journal, "La Lutte Ouvriere", occupied important positions in the workers' and revolutionary movement which was being born. The Brazilian section had been crushed by the Vargas coup d'etat. The beginning of 1936 was marked by grave crises in two of the oldest sections in Latin America; in Cuba, where the organisation was almost totally dissolved in the ranks of the left nationalist organisation, Joven Cuba, and in Chile, where the Communist Left, already part of a "Left Bloc" (which had all the characteristics of a Popular Front) was moving towards being absorbed in the Socialist Party and... the policies of the Popular Front. However, the first news came from Argentina about the Revolutionary Workers' Party (POR) of Bolivia in exile, which was led by a former student leader and member of the Communist Party, the young Jose Aguirre Gainsborg. In Mexico the International Communist League was again re-born from its ashes, under the leadership of the young teacher, Octavio Fernandez; it won distinguished recruits, including the painter Diego Rivera, as well as a whole series of worker-militants by way of the Casa del Pueblo.

We do not know how far Trotsky was informed of these developments, which were to have an enormous importance for his own existence some months later. We can, on the other hand, feel sure that throughout the period he was unaware of the most serious loss which his international organisation suffered, in the death in hospital at Novo-Sibirsk of one of the most brilliant and courageous men of the young generation of Bolshevik-Leninists in Russia, Eleazer Solntsev.

* * *

We wrote at the beginning of this article that 1936 was a decisive year. The reader may feel, perhaps, that nothing happened during these first two months. Trotsky did

not hold this opinion, and we believe that he was right. In Spain, the first demonstrations which followed the announcement of the election results broke open the doors of the prisons. Strikes, land seizures and bloody battles between militant workers and Phalangists (fascists) were beginning, a foretaste of the civil war which General Franco was offering to begin immediately from January onwards. The workers' agitation in France was held in check by the electoralist policy of the workers' parties: the Popular Front, but they gave unmistakable promise that identical developments would follow the elections, which were planned for May 1935. Signs of the same upward movement of the masses were multiplying in Belgium and in Poland. The part which Trotsky played was that of assembling and consolidating a stable nucleus for a revolutionary organisation, the role of which could be decisive when the revolutionary crisis exploded. The negative developments on this all-important plane in France and in Spain demonstrated yet again how the Old World defended itself, and that the revolutionaries do not live in a vacuum where the pressure of the class-enemy cannot affect them.

In the Soviet Union, the new state trial, which Trotsky had foreseen with some apprehension, was being prepared in the jails and the torture chambers. Nazi Germany, on her side, was preparing a new leap forward on the road of re-armament, a necessary stage in the preparation for its struggle to re-divide the world. Do these two factors, to which appeal has so often been made to excuse too many silences, explain by themselves why Trotsky was unable to convince his own comrades of the danger which threatened the revolutionaries in the Soviet Union? In any case, Sedov seems to have had to work alone, to try to build in Paris a committee for the defence of the imprisoned revolutionaries.

Trotsky's health had not improved since the end of December 1935. In February 1936 he returned to the hospital, for a new period of observation.

The Introduction to
"Leon Trotsky: Oeuvres"
Volume Nine

by Pierre Broue

March 1936 - May 1936

Trotsky seemed to have found in Norway a relatively safe refuge which in any case was quiet. He shared the life of the Socialist journalist Konrad Knudsen and his family at Hønefoss. He had the advantage of fairly quick postal communications and, in cases of urgency, he could receive visits. Once more the exile found conditions like those which he had enjoyed at the beginning of his stay in France; he could take part personally, principally in writing, but also by means of small meetings, in the historic task which he believed to be essential. the construction of the Fourth International.

He had some grounds for satisfaction as well as several reasons for anxiety when, at the beginning of March 1936 he left the clinic where he had just undergone a series of tests, which unfortunately provided his doctors with no clues to the nature of the illness from which he was suffering.

During the preceding months, he had feared, not unreasonably, that a crisis would explode in the Workers' Party in USA, which was led by his old comrades of the American Left Opposition, and was one of the pillars of the organisation of the Fourth International round the parties which signed the "Open Letter" of 1935. This party was deeply divided on the question of the possibility that its members might enter the Socialist Party, which was itself being shaken by a deep crisis. In January 1936, Cannon and Shachtman, with Trotsky's support, had formally proposed that this step be taken and the Socialist Party entered. Trotsky went to a great deal of trouble to convince the minority not to break away and to agree to go loyally through this experience. When he left the clinic the congress of the WPUS had just been held, and he had the telegram that told him that he had won this hand, that the opposition was going to play the game, to accept discipline, to submit to the majority and to enter the Socialist Party with them. This gave him immense satisfaction, as a great victory, which he put down to his conception of organisation and used as an example for his comrades, that Bolshevik-Leninists are able, when they behave reasonably, to regard divergences from a political standpoint; without losing sight of their objective - the construction of a new Communist Party and of the Fourth International - they can surmount their differences without splitting.

Moreover, we know that Trotsky had discovered, in the course of his work during January, the meaning of the party purge in the USSR and especially of the numerous exclusions for "Trotskyism". He drew from it a conclusion about the numerical strength of what he called "the Soviet section" - with a little exaggeration, of which he was aware - and he repeated this to all his correspondents. None the less, a newcomer was to contradict him on this point. This was Victor Serge, the Russo-Belgian writer in the French

language, who had been exiled to Siberia in 1933, and had just been freed and expelled from the USSR. Serge did not believe Trotsky's interpretation. According to him, the bureaucrats applied the term "Trotskyist" to every enemy of the regime and that many of those in Siberian exile to whom this label had been applied were far from being Trotskyists or from having any interest in Trotskyism. Trotsky did not involve himself in this discussion, at first, because Serge had brought fresh news of the Bolshevik-Leninists in the Soviet Union and that this news had to be publicised in order to ensure their better defence. Solntsev died at the beginning of January, but the others, including Boris M. Eltsine, with whom Serge had lived for some months, still were holding out and had to be helped. But, in the second place, Trotsky believed that the "current" in the USSR which sympathised with the Fourth International could not come out into the light of day except through revolutionary events in the USSR, and these in turn depended on the development of the revolution in Western Europe and, in the first place, in France.

Trotsky devoted an important statement to the situation in France. This formed the preface to the new edition of his writing against Kautsky, which had been entitled, curiously, "In Defence of Terrorism". Trotsky's conclusion was that the most urgent task, to ensure the victory of the workers in the impending and inevitable struggles in France, was the construction of a revolutionary party. He therefore felt obliged, at the same time, to devote effort - which he often thought to be excessive and, above all, fruitless, to what he called "the crisis in the French Section", which none the less had been the pride of his international organisation at the time of its entrism, and which now was ravaged by a truly uncontrollable crisis. On the one hand, there was what remained of the adult organisation, the Groupe Bolshéviste-Léniniste (GBL), with "La Verité" coming out from time to time and the Central Committee oscillating between Naville and Rous: with them were the Jeunesses Socialiste Révolutionnaires (JSR), led by militants of the GBL who none the less acted independently of it and produced the journal "Revolution", which addressed the youth less and less. On the other hand there were the comrades of Raymond Molinier: as a majority of the adults, they had followed him into "La Commune" but since they had formed a "Committee for the Fourth International" and had founded (on March 7, 1936) the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI), which declared itself to be a section of the Fourth International. Trotsky considered the development of the latter to be positive; all the evidence suggests that he wanted to manoeuvre in order to win back, if not the majority, at least a good part of the "Molinier-istes" and perhaps, after a time, even Molinier himself - why not? But he ran into the incomprehension and even the mistrust of the Central Committee of the GBL and especially that of Pierre Naville and his supporters, who often clashed with the "conciliator" Rous.

The development of "the crisis in the French Section" in Spring 1936 adversely affected and, indeed, poisoned Trotsky's relations. not with Molinier and his group, but with

the GBL, the "official" section, and consequently with the International Secretariat, which in Trotsky's opinion did not impose a coherent line upon it. Trotsky's proposal that a preliminary commission should be formed round him - the "Crux Commission" - to clear the ground on the question of relations with "La Commune" aroused the suspicion that he was seeking a "reconciliation" with the Molinieristes. His proposals were to have the essence taken out of them and then to be ignored. Meanwhile the International Secretariat, as well as the Amsterdam Secretariat of the Contact Commission of the signatories of the "Open Letter" neglected the possibilities which the letters from "La Commune" and the PCI opened up by failing to reply to them. Pierre Naville took upon himself even to read a letter addressed by Trotsky to the International Secretariat in confidence and seeking information to a conference of supporters of Molinier. Trotsky demanded that Naville be brought before a Control Commission, and decided to drop for the moment his initiative of a "Crux Commission" and even any personal correspondence with the French leadership, which he wanted to leave "to sort itself-out"

It was not by chance that the "Amsterdam Secretariat" was totally passive as the crisis unfolded in the French Section. Its members, Sneevliet and Schmidt, were also the principal leaders of the RSAP of Holland, which, with the WPUS, was one of the main supporters of the "Open Letter". The leadership of the RSAP believed that the decision of the WPUS to enter the Socialist Party amounted to giving up the struggle to construct the Fourth International. It regarded the support which Trotsky gave to Cannon and Shachtman, who supported the entry, as being an example of a bad method, which lay principally in going over the heads of the international organisms, the International Secretariat and the Amsterdam Secretariat. This was also the opinion of the German, Ruth Fischer, a member of the International Secretariat, who had not come to its meetings for two months and was never to re-appear, without, moreover, giving any explanation. Schmidt and Sneevliet expressed their irritation in letters to the WPUS, to Trotsky and to the International Secretariat and seem to have adopted a policy of complete abstention, almost of boycott, of every aspect of the international struggle which the "Open Letter" implied.

The consequences of such a state of affairs could have been catastrophic if the Belgian revolutionaries in the A. S. R. influenced and inspired by the Bolshevik-Leninist supporters of Lesoil, who had entered the Belgian Labour Party in 1936, had continued to adapt themselves more and more to the Belgian Social-Democracy as they tried to stay on in the party on the pretext of holding on to their positions there. Trotsky had always been afraid that this would happen. He agreed with Lesoil that, in Belgium, it was necessary to fight against the leader of the Socialist Youth, Fernand Godefroid, who, he believed, was playing the same role as that of Marceau Pivert in France, that of a "defender" of the left of the apparatus and a screen between the masses and the genuine revolutionaries. He had to overcome the resistance not only of Dauge, the recently-won social-democratic leader - how thoroughly won? - but also that of Georges Fux, the leader of the Leninist Youth in 1934.

Then Dauge was excluded from the Belgian Labour Party because he decided to refuse to be responsible for its electoral programme. It was decided to stand independent candidates, including Dauge and Lesoil, with the perspective of constructing an independent party starting with the ASR. On that level Trotsky was re-assured, all the more because Vereecken and his group, the ICL, were now ready to fuse with the ASR, which meant that the split in the Belgian section in 1935 would have been overcome. For the moment there was no longer the danger that Sneevliet and Vereecken would unite again against "entrism".

These were the consequences of the crisis which the "French turn" had provoked in 1934. The question of "entrism" had now to be overcome in Spain. This was not easy, but had to be faced. Most of the "Communist Left", the Izquierda comunista, the Spanish section, had entered the POUM, remaining with Nin and Andrade after the POUM signed the electoral programme of the Popular Front, which the majority regarded as no more than a manoeuvre without real importance. On Trotsky's insistence, the International Secretariat reversed its decision to exclude Nin and the others, but this gesture seems not to have had the slightest response. In April 1936 Trotsky and the IS could count on no more than two contacts in Spain. There were young Andalusian militants who had joined the Socialist Youth in Madrid, but who were to be quickly excluded when the Socialist Youth fused with the Communist Youth and the United Socialist Youth was formed. On the other hand, there was the old "Bolshevik-Leninist" nucleus of the Madrid region round Luis Garcia Palacios, who wrote to Trotsky and to whom Trotsky replied. But there did not yet exist any possibility of preparing for a Spanish Conference on however restricted a scale for the re-construction of the section. Meanwhile the tension between the classes continued to rise in Spain.

In Great Britain matters were perhaps a little further advanced, but the situation did not change quickly, that is, the Trotskyists did not seem to be deciding to make the turn quickly, as Trotsky wished. The militants of the British Section, who were in the Marxist Group in the ILP, were encouraged to continue their perspective of work in the ILP by the position which P. J. Schmidt adopted when he travelled to England. The renewal of contact which Trotsky succeeded in making with the old "majority", which was now working in the Labour Party (the Dewar Group) remained inconclusive, especially after the decision of the Easter 1936 Conference of the ILP that all "groups" must be dissolved. The Marxist Group dissolved itself, but this in fact meant that the British question, re-unification and entry into the Labour Party in order to work there as militants would be achieved only after a long delay.

From April 1936 onwards Trotsky began to devote an ever greater share of his attention and his efforts to the plan for an international conference. This perspective had been advanced in the "Open Letter" in June 1935 but circumstances had not permitted it to be realised until now. Neither the date nor the place had been decided when Trotsky had already plunged into the "theoretical" preparation and drafting of the documents

and the distribution of tasks between the speakers. Let us note that there is no such expression as the "foundation" or the "creation" of the Fourth International in any of his correspondence on these matters. Organisations already existed, one of them an international organisation, the International Communist League, and others of them national organisations, such as the WPUS, the RSAP, the GBL, the Belgian ICL etc., which regarded themselves as segments of the Fourth International. Consequently, the Fourth International already existed in a certain sense and the international meeting would merely consolidate it by providing, perhaps, that solid international leadership which was absolutely necessary.

We should note also that the international conference, as something to be achieved in a relatively short time, occurs in Trotsky's correspondence and writings only when it is clear that he was nearing the end of the task which he had undertaken in September 1936 when he was preparing to write a dozen pages on the subject of "What is the USSR and Where is it Going?", to serve as a preface to the new, American edition of the "History of the Russian Revolution". The "little preface" grew into a book of two hundred and fifty pages. Getting it published was a serious problem, either in parts in periodic journals or as a separate book, because it was too long to be used as the preface which it was originally intended to be, which presented the publisher with a great deal of difficulty. Trotsky wrote many letters to his publishers, Simon and Schuster, as well as to his son Leon Sedov and to his literary agent in New York - about whom Trotsky did not know that he had been for about a month an agent in the service of the GPU.

Trotsky was an attentive reader of the Soviet press. He analysed the characteristic features of the new Constitution, which reputable journalists by the thousand were soon to present in the world's press as "the most democratic in the world". He felt a savage wave of repression rising in the land from which he had been expelled; though he could guess that it would be large he could not foresee the form which it would take. He observed that, at the same time, it would be towards the parties of the Communist International, in reality towards the Soviet Union, that the workers were turning in the majority of those countries where they had the possibility of showing what they felt. There is a clear dialectical link between these two phenomena. The explosion of revolution in Western Europe could break the counter-revolutionary preparations of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR, but the counter-revolutionary activities of the Stalinist bureaucracy could obstruct or divert the explosion of revolution. This means for the moment, in Trotsky's opinion, that the task was to draft good documents for the International Conference and that he and the small band of militants round him would apply themselves to it.

Moreover, in May 1936, History seemed to be speeding up. The pendulum had swung to the extreme right with the victory of Hitler. Now it swung very strongly back to the left and a new upward revolutionary movement was soon to be born in Europe. Already the Bonapartist regime in Belgrade and the semi-fascist regime of the Polish colonels

had for two months been shaken by deep class movements, strikes, demonstrations and street battles. Greece seemed to be entering a revolutionary crisis, when the workers of Salonika made themselves masters of the city for forty-eight hours. In Spain the policy of the Popular Front could not prevent the movement of the workers and peasants from developing and demonstrating every day its strength and its aims. To be sure, the Communist Party was exerting itself through the policy of the Popular Front to wear down the revolution's aggressive energies and to tie the workers and the youth down to constitutional legality and to the bourgeois parties. The army chiefs in Belgrade and in Poland hit out with all their strength at this young proletariat that was gathering its strength. The generals in Greece - Metaxas - and in Spain - Sanjurjo, Franco and Mola - were preparing to liquidate the parliamentary regime, which they regarded as being feeble and unable to defend their class-rule. They were soon to attack the workers' and peasants' front by striking, while there was still time, at the revolutionary wave that was threatening to carry their own troops away.

At the very end of May 1936 France in its turn was to enter a "spring-time" strike, which quickly developed into a General Strike, in which Trotsky saw the beginning of the revolution in France. He had had his eyes fixed so long on France because it was there that he saw the key to a reversal of the relation of forces in Europe. And, since the revolution has the power to work miracles, a miracle took place right there without Trotsky's personal intervention. The two Trotskyist fractions in France, which had been involved since December 1935 in an open, desperate struggle, re-united on the first day of that month of "June 1936" that was to enter history. Together they decided to form a new party, the French Section of the Fourth International, the Workers' Internationalist Party, the P.O.I. But Trotsky did not expect it to work miracles.