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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,