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The Introduction to Part III of
"Leon Trotsky: Le Mouvement Communiste en France (1919 - 1939)
Documents Selected and Presented by
P i e r r e B r o u e

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The year 1924 marks in two senses a turn in the history of the Communist movement. On the one hand, the hopes which had been placed in a victory of the revolution in Germany, the "German October" awaited since 1918, collapsed lamentably. Everywhere the bourgeoisie resumed the offensive, while it became clear that the Social-Democracy had survived the war and the revolutionary crisis. On the other hand - though, of course, the two phenomena are closely linked - the 13th Conference of the Russian Communist Party, held in January 1924, a few days before the death of Lenin, sealed the defeat of Trotsky and of the Opposition which had been formed in 1923 on the question of the internal regime in the party and in favour of a democratic "new course". This was a victory for the new forces which emerged from the party apparatus, from the hierarchy of its secretaries and full-time officials, which expressed itself more and more openly through the mouth of Stalin, who had been General Secretary since 1922, over the Opposition, which the old Bolshevik spirit still animated.

In October 1924, the coalition of the victors, the "troika", Zinoviev-Kamenev-Stalin, opened up a virulent campaign against Trotsky on the occasion of the publication of his "Lessons of October". At the end of 1925, the "bloc" of the victors broke up and Stalin, supported by the right-wing fraction represented by Bukharin, crushed the "New Opposition" of his allies of yesterday, Zinoviev and Kamenev. He needed two years' sharp struggle to finish off the Unified Opposition in which Zinoviev and Kamenev joined Trotsky and the Opposition of 1923. The victory was won at the end of 1927, with Trotsky sent into exile at Alma-Ata. Almost immediately Stalin opened up the struggle against the right, the elimination of which was completed in 1929, the same year in which Trotsky was expelled from the Soviet Union and found a precarious refuge on the isle of Prinkipo, in the sea off Constantinople.

These circumstances explain why Trotsky was kept practically without any contact with the problems of the Communist movement in France during the whole period of the struggle in Russia. It was only in exile that he could once again read the documents and study the French problems. From 1929 to 1933 he was to devote to them less time and, no doubt, less attention than to the German question, in his struggle for the "regeneration" of the politics of the International; this was the period of the rise of Hitler to power.

The victory of Stalin and Zinoviev in the Russian party in 1924 was to be a brutal interruption of the transformation of the French Communist Party, and was to divert it in a new direction, which no one - even Trotsky - had foreseen. In a few years, this social-democratic party of the old type was transformed into a party of a new type, a Stalinist party.

On the morrow of the defeat of the Russian Opposition, Souvarin, who inclined towards Trotsky's theses, proposed to the leading committee of the Communist Party a motion which was passed unanimously except for three votes against, to the effect