

Some Memories of Trotsky

--Special for Asahi

by Raya Dunayevskaya

Because of the heroism of the mold of the former ^{Russian} Commissar of War, the rigors of exile when Stalin won the struggle for power, and the tragedy of Trotsky's assassination at the hands of a GPU assassin, much that has been written about Trotsky's later years has a subjective air about it. His last years seem to have provided a field day for psychological approaches even on the part of political analysts.

Recently, a novel has been published --and a TV "special" based on it-- which imputes to Trotsky a change in political outlook which allegedly he was unwilling to admit. Only people who have no thoughts of their own can so mischievously misstate the thoughts of others.

Leon Trotsky at no time let the subjective factor enter into any of his analyses of objective situations. Quite the contrary. I remember one incident during the Moscow Trials, when "the General Staff of Revolution" was killed off by Stalin, and Trotsky himself was accused of the most heinous crimes. The Russian bureaucracy had the state power --and the Lubyanka; the money, the brutality, the total disregard for history and, most of all, the time --a whole decade-- in which to fabricate the greatest frame-up in all history.

The Mexican press would hold open two columns of space for Trotsky to answer the charges levelled against him at the Moscow Trials in 1937-38. He had only a couple of hours in which to write his answers--and that only by virtue of the fact that President Cardenas intervened in his behalf and asked the press to inform Trotsky of the charges as they came in on the teletype. ^{Trotsky} He never knew what the accusations would be, nor what the year was in which he was alleged to have done this or that crime. Moreover, the Trials ~~had~~ had come at a time of the greatest personal grief in the Trotsky family for the long arm of the GPU had reached out to kill the only living son of Trotsky, Leon Sedov. It was a predetermined, insidiously planned feat of a master intriguer, calculated to give Trotsky the blow that they hoped would render him incapable of answering the accusation against himself, that they knew would come in two short weeks.

On Leon Trotsky - 2-

Indeed, the death of Leon Sedov inflicted the deepest wound, and in the most vulnerable spot. Lev Davidovich and Natalia Ivanovna locked themselves into their room and would see no one. For a whole week they did not come out of their room, and only one person was permitted in--the one who brought them the mail, and food of which they partook little.

Those were dismal days for the whole ^{secretarial staff,} ~~household~~. We did not see either L.D. or Natalia. We did not know how they fared, and feared the consequences of the tragedy upon them. We moved typewriters, the telephone, and even door bells to the guard house, out of sound of their room. Their part of the house became deathly quiet. There was an oppressive air, as if the whole mountain chain of Mexico was pressing down upon this one house.

The blow was the harder not only because Leon Sedov had been their only remaining living child, but also because he had been Trotsky's closest literary and political collaborator. When Trotsky was interned in Norway, gagged, not permitted to answer the charges levelled against him in the first Moscow Trials (August 1936), Sedov had penned Le Livre Rouge, which, by brilliantly exposing the Moscow falsifiers, dealt an irreparable blow to the prestige of the GPU.

In the dark days after the tragic news had reached us, when Lev Davidovich and Natalia Ivanovna were closeted in their room, ~~she~~ ^{he} wrote the story of their son's brief life. It was the first time since pre-revolutionary days that Trotsky had written by hand.

On the eighth day, Leon Trotsky emerged from his room. I was petrified at the sight of him. The neat, meticulous Leon Trotsky had not shaved for a whole week. His face was deeply lined. His eyes were swollen from too much crying. Without uttering a word, he handed me the handwritten manuscript, Leon Sedov, Son, Friend, Fighter, which contained some of Trotsky's most poignant writings. "I told Natalia of the death of our son," read one passage, "in the same month of February in which, 32 years ago, she brought to me in jail the news of his birth. Thus ended for us the day of February 16, the blackest day in our personal lives.... Together with our boy has died everything that still remained young within us..."

12640

But even this great grief did not dim Trotsky's ardor for the revolutionary cause. The pamphlet was dedicated "to the proletarian youth." If the GPU had counted on this blow to disable him, they counted on the wrong man.

The following morning, the papers carried the announcement of the Third Moscow Trials (March 1938).

Trotsky labored late into the night. One day he was up at 7 a.m. and wrote until midnight. The next day he arose at 8 a.m. and worked straight through to 3 a.m. the following morning. The last day of the week he did not go to sleep until five in the morning. He drove himself harder than any of his staff.

~~XXXX~~ "The Old Man", as we called him affectionately, wrote an average of 2,000 words a day. He gave statements to the NANA, the UP, AP, Havas Agence, France, the London Daily Express, and to the Mexican newspapers. His declarations were also issued in the Russian and German languages. The material was dictated in Russian. While I transcribed the dictation, the other secretaries checked every date, name, and place mentioned at the trials. Trotsky demanded meticulous, objective research work; ~~for~~ the accusers had to be turned into the accused.

Yet so unused to subjectivism was this revolutionary that he was deeply incensed when the daily press printed "rumours" that Stalin had, at no time, been a revolutionist, but had always been "agent of the Tsar" and was now "wreaking vengeance." When I brought him the newspapers which carried this explanation of the blood purge resulting from the Moscow Trials, Trotsky exclaimed, "But Stalin was a revolutionist!"

"Wait a moment," he called to me as I was leaving the room, "We'll add a postscript to today's article." Here is what he dictated:

"The news has been widely spread through the press, to the effect that Stalin allegedly was an agent provocateur duxing Tsarism, and that he is now avenging himself upon his old enemies. I place no trust whatsoever in this gossip. From his youth Stalin was a revolutionist. All the facts about this life bear witness to

this. To reconstruct his biography ex post facto means to ape the present reactionary bureaucracy."

Again, when the John Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made Against Leon Trotsky had brought in the verdict: Not Guilty, and a press conference was called, Trotsky was asked: "Do not pessimistic conclusions in regards to socialism flow from the Moscow Trials and the verdict of the Commission?" Trotsky replied:

"No. I do not see any basis for pessimism. It is necessary to take history as it is. Humanity moves forward as did some pilgrims: two steps ahead, one step back. During the time of the backward movement, all seems lost to skeptics and pessimists. But this is an error of historical vision. Nothing is lost. Humanity has developed from the ape to the Comintern. It will advance from the Comintern to actual socialism. The judgment of the Commission demonstrates once more that the correct idea is stronger than the most powerful police force. In this conviction lies the unshakable basis of revolutionary optimism."

Unfortunately, optimism, no more than subjectivism, is at the root of political attitudes. It is theory--the philosophical premise for it--which is decisive. Because his theory that Russia still remained a workers' state, "though degenerate" and must be "defended" when World War II broke soon after the Hitler-Stalin Pact was concluded appeared to me to be at variance with both the reality of state capitalism in Russia and its total perversion of the Humanism of Marxism as a theory of liberation I broke with Trotsky. My break from Trotsky's politics in no way changed my attitude toward him as one of the greatest revolutionists of our age, one who, with Lenin, led the great October Revolution. He remains "the man of October."

Toyota, Japan
December 11, 1965

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12642