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# A Revolutionist's Career

## [March 1917]

by Leon Trotsky

Published in *St. Louis Labor*, whole no. 889 (Feb. 16, 1918), pg. 2

*Every move that is made by Leon Trotsky is watched by the world. Every word he utters is carefully weighed by statesmen and leaders of men. Who is this man Leon Trotsky? The answer is given by Leon Trotsky himself, who last spring wrote the following sketch of his life a week before leaving New York to return to Russia.*

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I was born 38 years ago in a little Jewish colony in Southern Russia, in the *guberniia* of Kherson. When about 14 years of age I entered the gymnasium of Chernigov, and like most of the impressionable youth of Russia soon became interested in the revolutionary movements. Here in America schoolboys seem to spend most of their time in sports, baseball and football. In Russia, the boys — and girls, too, for that matter — use their leisure for reading books like Buckle's *History of Civilization*, Marx's *Capital*, Kautsky's *The Social Revolution*, and our own great classics that throb with the passion of revolt. Our pastime is chiefly attending underground Socialist meetings and spreading the propaganda among workingmen in the city and peasants in the country.

I was no exception to the rule. The revolutionary cause gripped me early in life and has never

relaxed its hold. There was, indeed, a great deal of work to do. When I was a little more than 20 years old, the Russian Revolution blazed up into a mighty flame. Most of the young people of Russia with any education were enlisted in the fight against the unspeakable Tsarist system, determined to put an end to the wrongs it inflicted upon the Russian people.

My university education was interrupted, for I soon plunged deep in the work of propaganda, which left no time for anything else. I continued, however, to apply myself to the study of sociology, political economy, and history and soon became a convinced Marxian Socialist. When the Russian Social Democracy split up into two sections on the issue of tactics I did not identify myself with either the Mensheviks or the Bolsheviks, but continued to work for the general cause, for the overthrow of Tsarism and the cause of Socialism. Since the division in the party was not based on fundamentals, but only on a difference of opinion as to the method to be applied in gaining the same ends, I used all my efforts to effect a reconciliation between the two wings. However, I leaned strongly on the radical side. In other words, I was a Menshevik of the



extreme left, or a near-Bolshevik.

My ability as a writer and as a speaker soon drew me into the very center of Socialist activity. I wrote for the party press, composed pamphlets, and carried on personal propaganda, chiefly among the city populations.

Naturally, I did not escape the general fate of Russian Revolutionists. I was arrested and imprisoned, and as I did not give up my work for the cause after my release I became what the Russian authorities called an "illegal" person, and had to live under an assumed name. My first jailer was called Trotsky, and the idea occurred to me to take his name.

When the Revolution broke out in full force in 1905, I was made president of the first Soldiers' and Workingmen's Council in Petrograd to succeed the first incumbent in that position. I remained president until the defeat of the Revolution, when I was arrested and sent to imprisonment and exile in Siberia. From there I succeeded in making my escape, and went to live in Switzerland.

In Switzerland I founded a Socialist paper, called *Pravda* (The Truth), which was published both in Russian and in German. I also established an international news service for the dissemination of truthful news of current political and revolutionary events in Russia.

In 1910 I went to Germany, where my revolutionary activity incurred the displeasure of the Prussian authorities. Three days before the outbreak of the present war found me in Vienna. On the advice of Dr. Adler, the Austrian Socialist leader, I left Austria-Hungary, and was in Serbia when that country was invaded by the Austro-Hungarian troops, and was present at the Serbian parliament, the *Kupchina*, when the vote for the

vote for the first war credits was taken.

I returned to Switzerland and was later summoned to Paris to edit the Russian Socialist paper there. When a Russian division of troops mutinied and killed the general, I addressed a severe letter of criticism of the French government of Jules Guesde, a Socialist member of the cabinet, for the savage punishment that was meted out to the Russian troops. This so displeased the French government that I was ordered out of France. I then went back to Switzerland, but Switzerland feared complications with the Tsarist government and would not let me in. I then turned to Spain. Spain would not have me either. I was detained at Barcelona, where I was to be deported to Cuba, where I knew no one, and where I should have found myself completely stranded. Later the Spanish government decided to let me go where I pleased, provided only that I left Spain. Every country in Europe practically was now closed to me, and so I turned my gaze across the Atlantic, and arrived at Ellis Island at the end of December 1916.

Here in New York I lived with my wife and two children in three rooms in a Bronx tenement, wrote for the *Novy Mir*; the Russian Socialist daily, and spoke at Socialist meetings. I do not expect my stay here to be very long, however, for a revolution is bound to break out in Russia in a short time, and as soon as that happens I shall hasten to my home country and help in the work of Russia's liberation.

My book *The Bolsheviks and World Peace* expresses in full my convictions on the world war. It is the result of wide and deep study and the program laid down there is the only solution that I can see to the problems that confront humanity.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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