

A founder of American Trotskyism

Albert Glotzer dead at 90

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Albert Glotzer, a founder of the Trotskyist movement in the US who was the reporter at the historic hearings of the Dewey Commission in Mexico in 1937, died on February 18 at the age of 90. He was the last survivor among the major American participants in the struggles of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International in the 1930s.

Although Glotzer broke with Trotskyism nearly 60 years ago, he remained a valuable witness to the great historical events in which he was a participant. This history always remained vivid for Glotzer. He continued to acknowledge the principled struggle conducted by Trotsky, and the impact of his years in the revolutionary movement left their impact.

For more than a decade Glotzer was at the center of the struggle to build a new revolutionary leadership against Stalinism. Between 1928, when Trotsky was first sent into internal exile and then banished from the Soviet Union, and 1940, the year of Trotsky's assassination by an agent of Stalin, Glotzer was an active and leading member of the revolutionary opposition to Stalinism. During these years he met and worked with Trotsky on three separate occasions.

In October 1931 Glotzer arrived in Turkey, the first of four countries in which the Russian revolutionary leader spent his final years. Glotzer spent six weeks working with Trotsky, having extensive discussions with him on the work of the Left Opposition as well as handling English-language correspondence and assisting with security duties. Trotsky was evidently impressed with the young worker from the United States, recognizing his energy, intelligence and wide knowledge, along with organizational skills and dedication to the cause of the international working class.

In 1934 Glotzer traveled to France, Trotsky's next place of exile. There he prepared for a youth conference which had been proposed by the youth section of the Independent Socialist Party of Holland. The Trotskyists participated as part of the struggle to build a new

international after the collapse of the Comintern in the debacle of Hitler's victory.

When the Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials convened in Mexico City in 1937 Glotzer, who had been trained as a professional court reporter, was called on to report and transcribe the testimony at the hearings. This body, initiated by the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, became known as the Dewey Commission, after its chairman, the illustrious philosopher and American liberal John Dewey.

Trotsky gave many hours of testimony to the Commission over a period of eight days, painstakingly refuting Stalin's frame-ups, whose main targets were Trotsky himself, along with his son Leon Sedov. Glotzer's work of reporting and transcription made possible the publication of *The Case of Leon Trotsky*. This volume, along with *Not Guilty*, the verdict issued in book form by the Commission some months later, had an enormous impact in exposing the Stalinist frame-ups before world public opinion.

Like many others, Albert Glotzer came to the revolutionary movement from an immigrant working class background. He was born in a small village in Byelorussia in 1908, and came to the US with his family when he was four years old. They settled in Chicago, joining his father, who had emigrated earlier. Glotzer and his family were deeply affected by the revolution which took place in his native country in 1917, as well as by the development of social and political struggles in his adopted country. In 1923, at the age of 15, he joined the youth section of the American Communist Party.

It was at this very time that the Russian Revolution, besieged by enemies and increasingly isolated, began to be strangled by a reactionary nationalist bureaucracy which eliminated party democracy and repudiated the struggle for international socialism. Lenin died in 1924. The bureaucracy contributed to defeats of revolutionary struggles in Germany, Britain and China between 1923

and 1927. Stalin tightened his grip on the Soviet party and state apparatus. After Trotsky and his supporters were expelled from the Communist Party and the Communist International, Glotzer joined the American supporters of the Trotskyist opposition, led by James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman.

By the time he was 20 Glotzer had already been expelled from the CP. When he first met Trotsky he was only 22, but he had more political experience behind him than others twice his age.

Glotzer's career as a revolutionary ended in 1940. The outnumbered forces of Marxism had been unable to overcome the combined forces of imperialism and Stalinism. The triumph of Hitler, followed by the massive Stalinist purges and the betrayal of revolutionary struggles in Spain and elsewhere, had ushered in the Second World War. A section of the Trotskyist movement, led by Max Shachtman and including Glotzer, concluded that it was no longer possible to defend the Soviet Union against imperialism. They left the Fourth International and over the next two decades moved sharply to the right, supporting the capitalist West in the Cold War and serving as advisers to the anticommunist bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO. Until the death of Shachtman in 1972, Glotzer was the closest collaborator of this leader of the tendency which moved from Trotskyism to right-wing Social Democracy.

In *Trotsky: Memoir & Critique*, a book published when he was 80 years old, Glotzer holds Trotsky and Lenin politically responsible for the rise of Stalinism. Despite the unbridgeable political differences separating him from the revolutionary movement, however, his early history exerted a powerful influence and continuing pull on Glotzer. In his late 80s he was eager to describe the experiences of his youth and young adulthood, when he sought to change the world.



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