

Letter on Trotsky anniversary meeting

29 September 2000

Dear Editors,

Last Saturday I attended the meeting in Berlin to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the assassination of Leon Trotsky. As expected, the four main speakers WSWS reporters and authors whose work I've long considered to be outstandingly principled and illuminating delivered penetrating lectures to illustrate the contemporary relevance of Trotsky's writings.

But a point made in an anecdote by David North had a particular impact on me. North told us that, during his student days some thirty years ago, he heard from the lips of an elderly but respected professor of Russian studies and a rather right-wing one by the way, that Leon Trotsky was the greatest exponent of Russian literature since Tolstoy.

Without wanting to draw up a league table of literary greats, may I say that David North was extremely lucky to have come into contact with at least one member of the bourgeoisie honest enough to admit to the genius of Trotsky's prose.

I well remember the deep but conflicting feelings I experienced ten years ago after reading Trotsky's *The Russian Revolution*. On coming to the end of a great work of human culture, I (at least) normally have what I can only refer to as a feeling of elation, a sense that, despite the horror and tragedy that seems to underlie our existence, major artistic accomplishment renders a philosophy of despair untenable. Each great literary achievement seems to have one foot in its own grievously troubled times; another in a world of the artist's imagination where a very different future beckons. Trotsky's historical work certainly left me with this feeling.

But against this, I had to contend with real upwelling of anger and frustration which only increased as I became acquainted with more of Trotsky's writings. How could it be I asked myself that I had to live half my life before coming across this particular genius? How could all my teachers, university lecturers, all

those literary critics, all the great and not-so-great writers of the 20th Century have failed to recognise and draw from the monumental heritage of Leon Trotsky?

Of course, any answer to this question will only lay bare the despicable moral bankruptcy of bourgeois academia over the last 60 years culminating in its current post-modernist idiocy. But maybe, as the universities decay and the Internet becomes centre stage for the development of human culture, the truth about the genius of Trotsky's art and science will emerge to the vast readership it deserves.

And when that happens I'll venture to say Goethe's poetry of "becoming", Thomas Carlyle's colourful and panoramic sweep in his *French Revolution*, the powerful organising forces of the unconscious found in the prose of D. H. Lawrence, and much else of what we find worthy of literary merit in bourgeois culture—all of this will have to be measured against comparable qualities in the works of our greatest Marxist writer.

RH

26 September 2000



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact