

Sixty years after the assassination of Trotsky

The contemporary significance of Leon Trotsky's life and work

Public meetings in Berlin and London

7 September 2000

On Saturday September 23 in Berlin and Sunday September 24 in London the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International will be hosting meetings to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of Leon Trotsky's assassination.

The meetings will provide a unique opportunity for those who wish to know more about the political history and perspective that animates the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The featured speaker will be David North, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the US and Editor in Chief of the *World Socialist Web Site*. North has lectured extensively throughout the world on the history and principles of Marxism and the program and perspective of the Fourth International. He is the author of such works as

* *The Heritage We Defend - a contribution to the history of the Fourth International*

* *Trotskyism versus Stalinism*

* *In Defense of the Russian Revolution*

* *Anti-Semitism, Fascism and the Holocaust*

* *Equality, the Rights of Man and the Birth of Socialism*

* *Socialism and Historical Truth and the Crisis of Political Thought in the United States*

On August 20, 1940, at his exile retreat in Coyoacan, Mexico, a Stalinist police agent plunged an ice pick into Trotsky's brain. The intention of this barbaric act was to eliminate the most steadfast Marxist opponent of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow and its betrayal of the principles of socialist internationalism that had guided the working class in the Russian revolution of October 1917.

For four years before Trotsky's assassination, beginning with the infamous Moscow Trials of leading Bolsheviks, Stalin and his henchmen had waged a systematic campaign of terror, imprisonment and murder, designed to suppress all socialist opposition to the bureaucracy's usurpation of power. The liquidation of every last remnant of Lenin's Bolshevik party could not be completed, however, while Trotsky remained alive, for he was the most farsighted revolutionary thinker of his age. Trotsky was the co-leader with Lenin of the Russian revolution and the founder of the Soviet Red Army. It was he who first identified the growing danger posed to the October Revolution by the bureaucratisation of the Soviet party and state apparatus. He responded by waging a political struggle in defence of inner-party democracy and in opposition to the dangerous economic and political policies of the bureaucracy and its political leader, Joseph Stalin.

Trotsky formed the Left (Marxist) Opposition to combat the Stalinist degeneration of the Bolshevik party. He warned that the growth of a relatively privileged bureaucracy and the erosion of inner-party democracy threatened the survival of the Soviet Union, because free discussion was the life-blood of the socialist culture that had led to October. It must be nurtured and extended if socialism was to win victory on a world scale.

Against the bureaucracy's claim that they were building "socialism in one country", Trotsky defended the position that a nationally self-contained socialist state in backward Russia was unviable. Like Lenin, Trotsky believed that the Russian revolution could only be seen as the beginning of the world socialist

revolution to which end all socialists must dedicate their energies. For socialism could only be established on a global scale, utilising the most advanced productive techniques developed under capitalism.

Trotsky opposed the international policies of the Stalinist regime, which led to major defeats for the socialist workers' movement in Germany, China, Britain and elsewhere in the 1920s. Crucially, the Left Opposition fought for a United Front of the German workers' movement to take on Hitler's Nazi party. However, Stalin's divisive policies served to maintain the grip of the reformist Social Democratic Party over broad sections of workers, allowing fascism to come to power in 1933.

From these events, Trotsky concluded that the Stalinised Communist Parties had passed definitively over to the camp of counter-revolution. It was now necessary to regroup all socialist forces within a new world socialist party. Trotsky was to dedicate the remaining years of his life to the construction of that party, the Fourth International, which was founded in 1938.

By this heroic struggle, which cost many thousands of lives, including those of all Trotsky's children, the continuity of revolutionary Marxism was preserved against Stalin's efforts to destroy it. But the world was to pay a price beyond imagining for the consolidation of bureaucratic misrule in the Soviet Union. The Second World War and the Nazi holocaust were only the first and most terrible consequence of the failure of the working class to bring an end to capitalism and create a new socialist world.

The meetings convened by the *World Socialist Web Site* will seek to explain the significance of the titanic struggle between Trotskyism and Stalinism and its contemporary implications. One cannot begin to understand the history of the twentieth century without understanding the impact of the defeats suffered by revolutionary Marxism at the hands of Stalin, and how this continues to shape political events even up to the present.

Today the Stalinist bureaucracy is a discredited force all over the world. The heirs of Stalin in the USSR, Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin, have presided over the reintroduction of capitalism and a destruction of social conditions for millions without precedent outside of wartime. Moreover the parties and trade unions in the

West—whether reformist or Stalinist—that once commanded the misplaced loyalty of socialist-minded people are now open advocates of the free market and defenders of the interests of big business. To date, the beneficiaries of this have been the world's ruling classes, who have successfully capitalised on the political disorientation of the working class.

Only by reacquainting workers, intellectuals and young people with a socialist perspective and culture can a new political road forward be charted. The *World Socialist Web Site* is dedicated to this task, which it seeks to accomplish by subjecting all aspects of political, intellectual, social and artistic life to critical examination and commentary. The end product of this dissemination of a Marxist perspective amongst the most politically advanced and literate will be the assembling of the forces of the international socialist party of the working class Trotsky set out to create.

We invite all our readers to attend the meetings in Berlin or London, and discuss with us the burning questions facing humanity in the new millennium.

For details about the meetings see:

60 years after the assassination of Trotsky

The contemporary significance of Leon Trotsky's life and work



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