

Sixty years after the assassination of Trotsky

The contemporary significance of Leon Trotsky's life and work

Public meeting in Sydney, Australia

21 October 2000

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party in Australia invite WSWS readers to attend a public meeting in Sydney to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of Leon Trotsky's assassination.

The commemoration, to be held on Sunday, December 3, follows highly successful public meetings held in London and Berlin in September, and will provide a unique opportunity for those who wish to know more about the political history and perspective that animate the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The keynote speaker will be David North, chairman of the Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the US. 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

Perestroika versus Socialism

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, 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 and its betrayal of the principles of socialist internationalism that had guided the working class in the Russian Revolution of October

1917.

During the 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.

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 very survival of the Soviet Union. Free discussion, which had been the life-blood of the socialist culture that had led to October, had to be nurtured and extended if socialism were to be victorious on a world scale.

Against the bureaucracy's claim to be building “socialism in one country”, Trotsky defended the position that a nationally self-contained “socialist” state in backward Russia was totally inviable. Like Lenin,

Trotsky believed that the Russian Revolution could only be seen as the beginning of the world socialist revolution, to which all socialists must dedicate their energies. Socialism, he explained, 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 counterrevolution. 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 consequences of the failure of the working class to bring an end to capitalism and create a new socialist world.

This public meeting will seek to explain the significance of the titanic struggle between Trotskyism and Stalinism and its contemporary implications. One cannot begin to comprehend the history of the twentieth century without understanding the impact of the defeats suffered by revolutionary Marxism at the hands of Stalin, and its shaping of political events 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 the

unprecedented destruction of social conditions for millions. 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 have been the world's ruling classes, which have successfully capitalised on the political disorientation within 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 cultural life to critical examination and commentary. Through the dissemination of a genuine Marxist perspective amongst the most politically advanced and literate, the forces of the international socialist party of the working class that Trotsky set out to create will begin to assemble.

We invite *World Socialist Web Site* readers to join with us in discussing the burning questions facing humanity in the new millennium.

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Public meeting in Sydney, Australia

Sunday December 3, 2000 at 3 p.m.

Tom Mann Theatre

136 Chalmers Street, Surry Hills (near Central Station)

Tickets: \$8, \$5 students & unemployed

For tickets or further information, contact:

Socialist Equality Party national office:

Telephone (02) 9790 3511, email: sep@flex.com.au

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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