

A German ex-radical adds to the anti-Trotskyist slanders

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German journalist Robert Misik is the latest to join in a peculiar international campaign seeking to link the activities of neo-conservative ideologues in the Bush government to the politics of Trotskyism.

The main arena of this debate has been a collection of right-wing journals in America, where a section of ultra-conservatives has attacked men like Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, former Defence Policy Board chairman Richard Perle and William Kristol, the editor of the *Weekly Standard*, as usurpers within the Republican Party, claiming that their real intellectual origins lie in the Trotskyist movement.

In an article published last month (June 18, 2003) in the German *taz*—a newspaper founded in the 1970s by layers close to the Green Party and anarchist circles—Misik joined the fray. He produced a crude bit of historical misinformation attempting to infer continuity between Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution and what he describes as the neo-conservatives' advocacy of "permanent counterrevolution."

What distinguishes Misik from the likes of Pat Buchanan and other semi-fascist elements in the US who have sounded this theme is that Misik counts himself as a former man of the "left."

In the 1980s, before taking up journalism, Misik was a member of the Austrian Revolutionary Marxist Group (RMG), which was affiliated to the United Secretariat led by Ernest Mandel. (After 1986 the group called itself Socialist Alternative).

While it referred to itself as Trotskyist, the United Secretariat emerged from a split in the Fourth International in 1953. The supporters of Mandel rejected Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism as a thoroughly counter-revolutionary force, instead postulating the "self-reform" of the Soviet bureaucracy. It abandoned the essential perspective of Trotskyism—the building of independent revolutionary parties of the working class—and sought during the post-war period to dissolve its forces into the Stalinist, social democratic and bourgeois nationalist movements.

During the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in eastern Europe, Mandel and his affiliated organisations worldwide put their hopes in that section of the Stalinist bureaucracy led by Mikhail Gorbachev which advocated policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. The end of the Soviet Union and the transformation of leading figures of the former nomenclature into capitalist managers provoked an enormous crisis in these circles.

Misik's own evolution is not atypical. After quitting radical politics, he sought to use the smattering of knowledge picked up in the Mandel organisation to further his journalistic career. He is the author, for example, of a book entitled *Marx for Managers*, in which he proclaims that a bit of Marxist economic analysis is useful for the modern capitalist manager.

The *taz* article serves a parallel purpose, with Misik offering his "expertise" as an "ex-Trotskyist" to elucidate the alleged connection between Trotskyism and the current eruption of US militarism.

Misik begins his article, titled *Dashing like Trotsky*, by referring to the Red Army's intervention into Poland in the summer of 1920. He seeks to

draw a parallel between this military offensive more than 80 years ago and the pre-emptive war policy advocated by American neo-conservatives.

With regard to Poland in 1920, Misik claims: "[T]he episode corresponds to what one could describe as a 'Trotskyist mentality': absolute belief in the future, an extremism regarding the absolute faith in the feasibility of even the most ambitious of aims, and a form of voluntarism of the type: 'If something is good for the world then one has to take it on. If reality presents adverse details, then to the devil with reality.'"

Following this grotesque and stupid caricature of Trotsky's orientation, Misik argues that the neo-conservatives adopted Trotsky's critique of Stalinism as the basis for their radical hostility to the Soviet Union. On the supposed commonality of perspective between the neo-conservatives and Trotskyism, he writes: "[I]n their own ways both are obsessed with the idea of world revolution." He returns towards the end of his article to the war policy of the Bolsheviks and implies there is a similarity to the foreign policy of the neo-conservatives as expressed in the US war against Iraq.

All in all, the piece is yet another demonstration that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, particularly in the hands of professional liar.

The slender reed upon which Misik's rests his equation of neo-conservatism and Trotskyism consists of two figures whom he claims represent the living link between these diametrically opposed movements—Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz. While both have featured prominently in the activities of neo-conservative think tanks, their connection to Trotskyism is in the one case tenuous and in the other non-existent.

As a young college student in 1939-40, Kristol passed quickly in and out of the American Trotskyist movement, then represented by the Socialist Workers Party. He broke with the movement as a supporter of the Max Shachtman tendency and kept moving to the right, repudiating socialism and Marxism. Podhoretz was never involved in Trotskyist politics, beginning his political life—like the great majority of neo-conservatives—as a member of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party before undertaking his own lurch to the right.

Misik's attempts to portray Bolshevik foreign policy after the Russian Revolution, in particular the Red Army's intervention in Poland, as a precedent for the pre-emptive war policy of President Bush and his neo-conservative supporters is a gross falsification of history.

The Bolsheviks came to power in Russia in 1917 with the pledge that they would take the country out of the imperialist war initiated by Germany in 1914. Upon assuming state control, the Bolshevik leaders immediately undertook to put an end to all secret diplomacy, translated and published vital documents relating to the war, and commenced negotiations with the allied countries for an immediate cease-fire.

Following the defeat of their German rival, the allied imperialist forces began an immediate counteroffensive on a succession of fronts aimed at invading Russia and overthrowing the government led by Lenin and

Trotsky. This was the background to the conflict with Poland, which reached its peak in the summer of 1920.

In his autobiography *My Life* Trotsky makes clear that the Bolsheviks as a whole were opposed to war with Poland. “We wanted to avoid a war at all costs”, he writes, “We sought with all our strength to make peace, even at the cost of making major concessions.”

Nevertheless, under conditions where the Western imperialist countries mobilised their own armies against the Soviet Union in alliance with Josef Pilsudski, the right-wing nationalist leader of Poland, the Red Army, under Trotsky’s leadership, was forced to engage with Poland’s armed forces to defend the Soviet Union.

After a number of important military successes, a debate developed inside the Bolshevik leadership over the further course of the conflict, focusing on whether the military campaign should be pursued onto Polish soil. Following the Red Army capture of Polish-occupied Kiev, Lenin advocated a policy of pushing forward into Poland itself, confident that Polish workers and peasants would support the aims of the revolutionary forces. Lenin’s policy was motivated by his internationalist perspective and, in particular, the possibility of Russian forces being able to provide support for the revolutionary movement of the working class erupting at that time in Germany.

In his *taz* article, Misik presents Trotsky as unrealistic and prone to political fantasy. In fact, Trotsky, while sharing Lenin’s general perspective, was convinced that the Red Army had already reached the pinnacle of its possible success and made clear his opposition to military intervention in Poland. Nevertheless, within the Bolshevik leadership Lenin’s position won the day. Red Army troops marched into Poland and subsequently suffered a heavy defeat at Warsaw. The Soviet forces were forced to withdraw from Poland. In the event Trotsky’s thoroughly realistic and sober appraisal of political, social and military relations proved to be correct.

While Misik’s efforts to conjure up similarities between Trotsky’s war policy and that of the Bush administration are malicious and ahistorical, his attempts to draw a parallel between the strategic aims of the communist movement and those of the neo-conservatives in Washington are simply absurd.

Essentially, the perspective that drives the neo-conservatives is a revival of the most crude and aggressive forms of imperialist domination based on military force. This strategy, which wreaked havoc in the 20th century, found its implacable enemy in the development of Bolshevism—above all, in the perspective of Permanent Revolution elaborated by Trotsky. It is Stalinism’s betrayal of that perspective, culminating in the Soviet Union’s dissolution, that has made possible the revival of this form of militarist aggression and colonial conquest.

Misik also claims in his *taz* article that the neo-conservatives have taken over Trotsky’s critique of Stalinism. In fact, Trotsky’s opposition to Stalin and the neo-conservative hostility to the Soviet Union are based on entirely opposed perspectives. In his struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, Trotsky resolutely defended the gains of the Russian Revolution, warning that the nationalist orientation of Stalin undermined the achievements of the Soviet Union and opened it up to the danger of capitalist restoration. Trotsky waged his campaign against Stalin from the standpoint of arming the Russian and international working class with a programme for the political overthrow of the Kremlin bureaucracy, the restoration of Soviet democracy, and the creation of conditions for a revival of the socialist movement all over the world.

Trotsky’s last struggle, waged in the months before his assassination in August 1940, was precisely against those within the American Trotskyist movement, led by Max Shachtman, who, bowing to the pressure of middle-class public opinion, refused to defend the Soviet Union against imperialism.

The WSWS has previously answered this crude attempt to indict

Trotskyism for the views that it relentlessly opposed [The historical roots of neoconservatism: a reply to a slanderous attack on Trotskyism: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/may2003/shac-m23.shtml>].

Shachtman broke from Trotskyism, and Trotsky predicted in 1940 with unerring accuracy exactly where Shachtman’s path would lead him.

Whatever contribution neo-conservatives—some of them inspired by Shachtman—made to the refinement of the official US ideology of anti-communism, their rabid hostility toward the Soviet Union was rooted in class interests. It reflected the frustration of the American ruling class over the fact that a huge portion of the globe had been excluded from capitalist exploitation. At the same time, there remained the fear that a revival of socialism based on the gains of the October Revolution could threaten the bastions of capitalism itself.

Significantly, a number of Misik’s falsifications about Trotskyism echo the slanders concocted by Stalinism three-quarters of a century ago. In the struggle against the Trotskyist Left Opposition in the 1920s, Stalin and his supporters often accused Trotsky of “voluntarism” and described his internationalist perspective as “unrealistic.” In the 1930s, following a series of betrayals of revolutionary struggles of the international working class, Stalin went much further, launching his monstrous frame-ups and show trials against supporters of Trotsky, accusing them of collaboration with various imperialist powers.

This echo is hardly an accident. The group that Misik briefly joined in the 1980s, inspired by the politics of Mandel, had broken fundamentally with Trotskyism, endowing Stalinism and other non-Marxist and non-working class trends with revolutionary credentials. Demoralised by the collapse of this false perspective, many of these elements have now turned to anti-communism, reserving their most bitter hatred for the one tendency that had foreseen Stalinism’s inevitable demise—Trotskyism.

Misik has served up a concoction that is designed to please the political palate of the German bourgeoisie. It provides an “exposé” of an aggressive militarist tendency within US foreign policy that Berlin perceives as inimical to its own geopolitical interests and has over the past year brought millions into street in protest. At the same time, it slanders Trotskyism, the only socialist and internationalist tendency that advances a perspective for the independent mobilisation of the working class against imperialist war.

Misik’s trajectory is not all that different from that of Irving Kristol, the supposed “godfather” of neo-conservatism. Both had fleeting connections with organisations claiming to be Trotskyist and then turned sharply to the right, seeking to trade on their supposed “left” credentials to curry favour with the camp of reaction. Whether official Berlin will grant the German ex-radical the kind of recognition for his efforts that Kristol enjoys among Republican circles in Washington remains to be seen.



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