

Letters on “An intellectual pygmy denounces Trotsky”

10 August 2005

The following is a selection of letters to the World Socialist Web Site on “An intellectual pygmy denounces Trotsky”

Dear Mr. North,

Thank you for your excellent articles—past, present and, hopefully, for a long time to come. Regarding the quote you took from a 32-year-old Prentice Hall textbook characterizing Leon Trotsky’s contribution to modern-day political thought—there’s no need to go back even that far: Here is how the “Encyclopedia Britannica,” the online version, sums up its entry on Trotsky:

“Trotsky was undoubtedly the most brilliant intellect brought to prominence by the Russian Revolution, outdistancing Lenin and other theoreticians both in the range of his interests and in the imaginativeness of his perceptions. He was an indefatigable worker, a rousing public speaker, and a decisive administrator. On the other hand, Trotsky was not successful as a leader of men, partly because he allowed his brilliance and arrogance to antagonize the lesser lights in the Communist movement. Perhaps he fatally compromised himself when he became a Bolshevik in 1917, subordinating himself to Lenin’s leadership and accepting the methods of dictatorship that he had previously condemned.

“Had Trotsky won the struggle to succeed Lenin, the character of the Soviet regime would almost certainly have been substantially different, particularly in foreign policy, cultural policy, and the extent of terroristic repression. Trotsky’s failure, however, seems almost inevitable considering his own qualities and the conditions of authoritarian rule by the Communist Party organization.”

Not exactly without its Establishment point of view—however, the encyclopedia certainly is not talking about someone with “primitive” ideas. Alas, we do indeed live “in interesting times.”

Thanks again for your excellent work and that of your colleagues at what is, truly, a daily must-read site for me.

In solidarity,
TF

2 August 2005

Dear Editors,

I seem to have missed our Trotsky’s fascistic essays. I am sure they are very well-written and I would be interested to see how he reconciles these views with his constant decrying of Stalin, Hitler and other fascists. Verily, it would be a fascinating read! All kidding aside, it is interesting to see that Trotsky’s ideas continue to be so feared as to necessitate such gross misrepresentation by right-wing disseminators such as Dalrymple.

Thank you, Mr. North, for the beautifully crafted defense of a great man.

CMS

Portland, Oregon

2 August 2005

It is very appropriate for you to quote “Their Morals and Ours” in response to a writer lashing out at Trotsky. The social basis for these moralizing attacks on Trotsky was really succinctly addressed by him in the same book. Every aspect of this moralizing denunciation, from its occurrence in passing in a book review to the comparison to Adolf Hitler, bears a shocking resemblance to what Trotsky himself described in that essay. As if in response to Dalrymple’s comparison of Trotsky to Hitler, Trotsky wrote, “A moralizing Philistine’s favorite method is the lumping of reaction’s conduct with that of revolution. He achieves success in this device through recourse to formal analogies. To him czarism and Bolshevism are twins. Twins are likewise discovered in fascism and communism.”

Also, Trotsky describes Dalrymple’s personality with almost shocking prescience: “If an ignorant peasant or shopkeeper, understanding neither the origin nor the sense of the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, discovers himself between the two fires, he will consider both belligerent camps with equal hatred.

And who are all these democratic moralists? Ideologists of intermediary layers who have fallen, or are in fear of falling between the two fires. The chief traits of the prophets of this type are alienism to great historical movements, a hardened conservative mentality, smug narrowness, and a most primitive political cowardice. More than anything moralists wish that history should leave them in peace with their petty books, little magazines, subscribers, common sense, and moral copy books.”

For Dalrymple to read this passage, I think, would be like looking in the mirror. It is a measure of the truth of the historical materialist school that Trotsky’s work, written 70 years ago, can still pick out the social content of anti-Marxist moralism.

Yours,

DW

2 August 2005

Dear WSWS,

David North’s recent article on columnist Theodore Dalrymple’s groundless slander against Leon Trotsky deserves compliment. That Dalrymple actually refers to this socialist internationalist luminary as a “moral monster,” a “mass murderer,” and a fascist is the summit of idiocy. Trotsky was the co-leader with Vladimir Lenin of the most democratic social revolution that unfolded in the twentieth century—a revolution which, alas, was tragically hijacked and betrayed by that bloodthirsty sociopath Josef Stalin and his band of cutthroat killers. Dalrymple is a falsifier, as any honest person who has studied history knows, as anyone who has read Trotsky’s writings in defense of the inalienable rights of economically, politically, and racially oppressed peoples the world over. There is a name for cranks like Theodore Dalrymple. They are called dancing fools.

Sincerely yours,

ADW

8/3

On “A letter and reply on an ‘intellectual pygmy’”

Yes, indeed. Your reply to the politically correct reader was spot on. One can only shake one’s head and wonder at the absurd perspective and skewed priorities of these folks. I first came across “political correctness” during the British miners’ strike of 1984/85. I was attending a rather large meeting at London’s Conway Hall. Jack Collins, the Stalinist leader of the Kent NUM, was a featured speaker. It was by then perhaps late fall, many months into the strike. The Coal Board was trying to open up the pits to handfuls of scabs. Several strikers had already been

killed, hundreds imprisoned and thousands injured. Entire families in the pit villages were missing meals. Some people had even died in slag slides, picking loose bits of coal in order to keep their homes heated.

That night in the Conway Hall, Collins called on railway workers and dockers to “black” (i.e., boycott) any shipments of coal from the scab mines. (Collins’s refusal to politically mobilize his membership in a fight against the treachery of the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress is a story for another day.) In any case, no sooner had Collins called for the boycott than a group of rather angry middle class radicals began shouting “racist, racist” and disrupting the meeting with one or another of their ubiquitous chants.

After the meeting, in a nearby pub, I was discussing the general political situation with a group of Yorkshire miners when we spotted the offending group of radicals in a very animated debate amongst themselves. One of the miners asked them what all that chanting was about during Collins’s speech. There seemed to be some disagreement amongst the radicals. While some quite aggressively denounced Collins for his “racism,” others told the miner that since “black” was no longer the proper descriptive for black people—it was now “people of colour” (not to be confused with “coloured people”)—perhaps Collins was simply a bit “out of touch.” I remember the miner turning back to our little group with the remark, “My wife warned me about coming to the big city.”

CB

Toronto, Canada

7 August 2005



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