

Trotsky's home in exile in Norway

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On a recent visit to Norway, a German supporter of the ICFI visited the house in which Leon Trotsky took refuge some time after he was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929. This reader provided the following account of this period of Trotsky's exile.

In 1935, after the French authorities refused to allow Trotsky to stay in the country any longer, no other European country was prepared to grant him exile. At that time, France was negotiating an alliance with Stalin and was about to establish a popular front government with the support of the Stalinist Communist Party of France.

In Norway, the Social Democratic Workers Party had just come to power. This party regarded itself as standing to the left of the Second International and had even belonged to the Communist International for a time, having then broken with it in 1923.

Walter Held, one of Trotsky's supporters who lived in exile in Norway, had turned to Olaf Scheflo, a party leader who was sympathetic to Trotsky, and finally received a promise that Trotsky could stay temporarily in Norway.

After some problems caused by senior government officials who were opposed to his stay, Trotsky received a six-month visa, which was linked to a number of conditions. Trotsky had to promise the government that he would refrain from political activity and would reside some distance from the capital Oslo. As Isaac Deutscher writes, Trotsky did this on the assumption that he was being asked not interfere in the internal affairs of Norway. The government would later maintain that it had asked him to refrain from all political activity.

Konrad Knudsen, one of the editors of the social democratic newspaper *Arbeiderbladet*, tried in vain to rent a house for Trotsky and finally invited him and his

wife Natalia into his own home. Although he did not agree politically with his guest, his whole family enjoyed friendly relations with the Trotskys and did everything possible to make their stay a pleasant one. After Trotsky had partly recovered from a severe and persistent infection, he began to work on *The Revolution Betrayed*, one of his most important books, in which he made his analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet Union, the first workers' state, into a bureaucratic regime.

It was at this time that the period of murders and purges began in the Soviet Union. Not only was virtually the entire Bolshevik leadership wiped out, but also hundreds of thousands of members of the intelligentsia, the military, those active in the field of culture and countless ordinary Soviet citizens were detained in penal camps and/or murdered. The principal defendant of the show trials, with their fabricated charges and predetermined verdicts, was Leon Trotsky.

Trotsky's visa was not extended, and he had to leave Norway after Stalin threatened the Norwegian government with a trade boycott and other sanctions.

In *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky came to the conclusion that there were only two possibilities for the future of the Soviet Union: either the working class would overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy through a political revolution and restore Soviet democracy, or the bureaucracy would reintroduce capitalist property relations and become a new ruling class. Trotsky's prognosis was tragically confirmed by the realisation of the latter alternative at the end of the 1980s.

The house in which Trotsky wrote this book stands just a few hundred meters from European Route 16, which runs from Oslo to Bergen, some 60 kilometres north of Oslo. In this small locality hardly anyone today knows about Trotsky. There are no signs to indicate where he lived, and there is no commemorative plaque on the house.



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