

## Part Six

## Trotsky's Last Year

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*This is the sixth and final part in a series. The first part was published on August 20, the second part on August 21, the third part published on August 25, the fourth part on August 29 and the fifth part on September 2.*

During the final year of his life, Trotsky grappled with critical questions of historical perspective raised by the outbreak of World War II. Why had the 1917 Revolution in Russia—which had been proclaimed by the Bolsheviks as the harbinger of world socialist revolution—been followed by the defeats of the working class in Italy, China, Germany and Spain, to name only the most consequential of the political disasters? Why had the Great Depression—the greatest economic breakdown in the history of capitalism—led not to socialism, but, instead, to fascism and war? And, finally, why had the workers' state founded on the basis of the October Revolution degenerated into a monstrous totalitarian regime?

The answer given by legions of petty-bourgeois intellectuals and erstwhile radicals was that the defeats proved the bankruptcy of Marxism and the entire perspective of socialist revolution. Trotsky, in an article written in March 1939, had described the political psychology and outlook of these layers:

Force not only conquers but, in its own way, it “convinces.” The onset of reaction not only wrecks parties physically, but also decomposes people morally. Many Radical gentlemen have their hearts in their shoes. Their fright in the face of reaction they translate into the language of immaterial and universal criticism. “Something must be wrong with old theories and methods!” “Marx was mistaken...” “Lenin failed to foresee...” Some even go further. “The revolutionary method has proved itself bankrupt.” [1]

The greatest error of Marxism, the demoralized intellectuals concluded, was that it had attributed to the working class a revolutionary mission that it could not fulfill. The essential cause of all the disasters of the 1920s and 1930s was to be found in the nonrevolutionary character of the working class.

The founding document of the Fourth International began with an explicit repudiation of the defeatist and ahistorical perspective of the anti-Marxists. The fundamental problem of the epoch of capitalism's death agony was not the absence of a revolutionary class, but, rather, the absence of revolutionary leadership capable of leading the working class to the conquest of power.

“The world political situation as a whole,” Trotsky wrote, “is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.” [2]

This well-known declaration is often read as merely an exhortation, intended to inspire the cadre of the Fourth International with a soaring rhetorical declaration of the party's political mission. Such an

interpretation misses the real significance of the statement, which is a concise summation of the essential lesson that was to be drawn from the defeats of the working class.

In the second *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx wrote in 1845: “The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which isolates itself from practice is a purely scholastic question.” [3] Reworking this fundamental concept of philosophical materialism in the context of the fate of the socialist revolution, the formulation employed by Trotsky in the opening of the founding document of the Fourth International states, in essence, that all discussions of the revolutionary or non-revolutionary character of the working class, apart from the examination of the practice of its leading parties and organizations, are abstract, devoid of political content and false.

The essay upon which Trotsky was working at the time of his death was devoted to a substantiation of his concept of the crisis of leadership. It was titled “The Class, the Party and the Leadership: Why was the Spanish Proletariat Defeated? (Questions of Marxist Theory).” The article, which abruptly concludes midsentence, was published in the December 1940 issue of *Fourth International*, four months after Trotsky's death. Though incomplete, the essay—considered from both a philosophical-theoretical and political standpoint—ranks among the most profound expositions of the dialectical relationship between the objective and subjective factors of the revolutionary process in the epoch of capitalism's death agony.

Trotsky's essay was written in response to a hostile review, published in the French radical journal *Que Faire*, of a pamphlet titled *Spain Betrayed*. The pamphlet's author was Mieczyslaw Bortenstein, a member of the Fourth International, who wrote under the pseudonym M. Casanova. Bortenstein had fought in Spain, where he witnessed the Stalinist sabotage of the revolution. The pamphlet, while fundamentally influenced by Trotsky's exposure of the Popular Front and his criticisms of the centrist politics of the POUM, drew upon the author's personal experiences in Spain. Apart from this one pamphlet, there is relatively little information available on Bortenstein's political activities. However, it is known that his life ended tragically at the age of 35. Following the Nazi takeover of France, Bortenstein was arrested by the Vichy government and eventually deported to the extermination camp at Auschwitz, where he was murdered in 1942.

Bortenstein wrote his pamphlet following the surrender of Barcelona by the Stalinist-dominated Popular Front government, without resistance, to the fascist army led by Franco. The surrender of what had been the citadel of the workers' revolution was the culmination of Popular Front treachery. In the pamphlet's introduction, Casanova-Bortenstein wrote:

I have to explain what has just happened on the basis of my own experience. I have to report the facts. I will describe how strategic positions of crucial importance were abandoned without a fight, how defence plans were handed over to the enemy by a

treacherous general staff, how the war industry was sabotaged and the economy disorganised, how the finest working class militants were murdered, and how Fascist spies were protected by the “Republican” police, in order to explain how the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat against Fascism was betrayed and Spain was surrendered to Franco.

My analysis and the facts I shall describe all go back to one and the same theme: the criminal policy of the Popular Front. Only the workers’ revolution could have defeated Fascism. The whole policy of the Republican, Socialist, Communist and Anarchist leaders worked to destroy the revolutionary energy of the working class. “First win the war and make the revolution afterwards!”—this reactionary slogan was to kill the revolution only to lose the war afterwards. [4]

It was critical that the lessons of the Spanish catastrophe be learned, Casanova-Bortenstein declared. “Neither Socialism nor Marxism failed in Spain, but those who so criminally betrayed it.” [5]

The hostile review of Bortenstein’s pamphlet published in *Que Faire*, a journal produced by dissident former members of the Communist Party in France, exemplified the cynical attitude of petty-bourgeois centrists. It attacked Bortenstein for concentrating on the parties and policies responsible for defeat, rather than focusing on the attributes of the Spanish working class—above all, its “immaturity”—which rendered it incapable of defeating fascism. “We are ushered,” claimed *Que Faire*, “into the domain of pure demonology; the criminal responsible for the defeat is the chief Devil, Stalin, abetted by the anarchists and all the other little devils; the God of revolutionists unfortunately did not send a Lenin or a Trotsky to Spain as He did in Russia in 1917.” [6]

Trotsky subjected *Que Faire’s* attack on Bortenstein’s pamphlet to a scathing criticism. The “theoretical haughtiness” of *Que Faire’s* review, he wrote, “is made all the more magnificent by the fact that it is hard to imagine how so great a number of banalities, vulgarisms, and mistakes quite specifically of conservative philistine type could be compressed into so few lines.” [7]

The central purpose of *Que Faire’s* review was to absolve the parties, organizations and individuals in the leadership of the working class of all responsibility for the debacle in Spain. Blame for the “false policy of the masses” was to be placed not on its political authors, but on the working class, which as a consequence of its “immaturity” was inclined to follow an incorrect political line. This argument devised by the author of the *Que Faire* review was a contemptible apology for the architects of defeat. Trotsky wrote:

Anyone searching for tautologies couldn’t find in general a flatter one. A “false policy of the masses” is explained by the “immaturity” of the masses. But what is the “immaturity” of the masses? Obviously, their predisposition to false policies. Just what the false policy consisted of, and who were its initiators, the masses or the leaders—that is passed over in silence by our author. By means of a tautology, he unloads the responsibility on the masses. This classical trick of all traitors, deserters, and their attorneys is especially revolting in connection with the Spanish proletariat. [8]

But even if the leaders of the Spanish working class were bad, argued the apologists, was it not the fault of the masses that they followed the bad leaders? In response to such pernicious sophistry, Trotsky—substantiating Bortenstein’s eyewitness account—pointed out that the working class

sought again and again to break through the political barricades erected by the Stalinists, Social Democrats and anarchists; and that whenever the working class was on the verge of taking the offensive, their treacherous leaders deployed force in support of counterrevolutionary policies. The May 1937 uprising of the working class in Barcelona against the Popular Front government’s treacherous policies was ruthlessly suppressed. Trotsky wrote:

One must understand exactly nothing in the sphere of the interrelationships between the class and the party, between the masses and the leaders, in order to repeat the hollow statement that the Spanish masses merely followed their leaders. The only thing that can be said is that the masses who sought at all times to blast their way to the correct road found it beyond their strength to produce in the very fire of battle a new leadership corresponding to the demands of the revolution. [9]

Trotsky recalled the overused epigram that every people gets the government it deserves. Applied to the sphere of social struggle, this argument would hold that every class gets the leadership it deserves. Thus, if the workers have bad leaders, that is what they deserve; for they are incapable of producing better ones. Trotsky responded to this formal and mechanical argument.

In reality leadership is not at all a mere “reflection” of a class or the product of its own free creativeness. A leadership is shaped in the process of clashes between the different classes or the friction between the different layers within a given class. Having once arisen, the leadership invariably rises above its class and thereby becomes predisposed to the pressure and influence of other classes. The proletariat may “tolerate” for a long time a leadership that has already suffered a complete inner degeneration but has not as yet had the opportunity to express this degeneration amid great events.

A great historical shock is necessary to reveal sharply the contradiction between the leadership and the class. The mightiest historical shocks are wars and revolutions. Precisely for this reason the working class is often caught unawares by war and revolution. But even in cases where the old leadership has revealed its internal corruption, the class cannot immediately improvise a new leadership, especially if it has not inherited from the previous period strong revolutionary cadres capable of utilizing the collapse of the old leading party. The Marxist interpretation, that is, the dialectical and not the scholastic interpretation of the interrelationship between a class and its leadership, does not leave a single stone unturned of our author’s legalistic sophistry. [10]

Bourgeois criticism of Marxism—especially as it is propagated in the academy—generally claims that deterministic philosophical materialism pays insufficient attention to the “subjective factor” in history. Marxism, preoccupied with the socioeconomic and class structure of society, does not take into account the influence of consciousness, especially in its suprahistorical and irrational manifestations, in the chaotic development of society. This criticism, which attributes to Marxism a rigid separation of objective and subjective factors, combines ignorance with distortion and outright falsification. A central theme of Trotsky’s writings over a period of many years had been the crucial role of the subjective factor—assigning particular significance to the role of political leaders—in

determining the outcome of revolutionary struggles. Most famously, in an entry in a diary he kept in 1935, Trotsky had emphasized the critical role that Lenin had played in the victory of the October Revolution. "Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place—on the condition that Lenin was present and in command." [11]

In his refutation of *Que Faire*, Trotsky returned to the role of Lenin in the October Revolution. He dismissed the review's substitution of "mechanistic determinism for the dialectical conditioning of the historic process" and "the cheap jibes about the role of individuals, good and bad." The class struggle does not unfold as a supra-human process. Real human beings are involved, and their actions play a role—in some cases, a decisive one—in determining whether the revolutionary insurrection meets with success or failure, or even whether it occurs at all. "The arrival of Lenin in Petrograd on April 3, 1917, turned the Bolshevik Party in time and enabled the party to lead the revolution to victory." [12] Trotsky continued:

Our sages might say that had Lenin died abroad at the beginning of 1917, the October Revolution would have taken place "just the same." But that is not so. Lenin represented one of the living elements of the historical process. He personified the experience and the perspicacity of the most active section of the proletariat. His timely appearance on the arena of the revolution was necessary in order to mobilize the vanguard and provide it with an opportunity to rally the working class and the peasant masses. Political leadership in the crucial moments of historical turns can become just as decisive a factor as is the role of the chief command during critical moments of war. History is not an automatic process. Otherwise, why leaders? why parties? why programs? why theoretical struggles? [13]

In his pamphlet, Bortenstein noted bitterly that all the parties and individuals whose political errors and even outright treachery ensured the defeat of the Spanish Revolution claimed in its aftermath that no other outcome was possible. "If we listen to the explanations of the leaders of the Popular Front, including the Anarchists, and if we take these explanations seriously, all we can do is to despair of everything and lose hope in the revolutionary capacities of the proletariat, its future and even its historic mission." [14] There was no shortage of excuses for the defeat.

According to our petty-bourgeois Popular Front democrats, everything was inevitable. The Republicans and Socialists justified the defeat by the military superiority of the Fascists, and the Communists by the existence of a pro-Fascist bourgeoisie (a discovery, this!) which, by its policy of non-intervention, favoured Franco. They forgot to add that they supported the Blum government, which inaugurated this policy. The Anarchists justified their capitulations and repeated betrayals by the blackmail exercised by the Russians through the weapons that they were sending to the Republicans. As for the POUM, it too joined the fatalist chorus and said: "We were too weak, and we had to follow the others, and above all we could not break unity." Thus everything was inevitable. What happened had to happen, and it was written in advance in the Koran ... [15]

Trotsky, in a magnificent passage, endorsed wholeheartedly Bortenstein's indictment of the self-justifying fatalism of those who led

the Spanish workers to defeat:

This impotent philosophy, which seeks to reconcile defeats as a necessary link in the chain of cosmic developments, is completely incapable of posing and refuses to pose the question of such concrete factors as programs, parties, and personalities that were the organizers of defeat. This philosophy of fatalism and prostration is diametrically opposed to Marxism as the theory of revolutionary action. [16]

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Trotsky continued to work on his biography of Stalin. The last chapter of the uncompleted volume is titled "The Thermidorian Reaction," in which he presented a devastating portrait and appraisal of Stalin and his entourage.

Generally, in the camp of Stalinism, you will not find a single gifted writer, historian or critic. It is a kingdom of arrogant mediocrities. Hence, the ease with which highly qualified Marxists began to be replaced by accidental and second-rate people who have mastered the art of bureaucratic manoeuvring. Stalin is the most outstanding mediocrity of the Soviet bureaucracy. I cannot find any other definition than this. [17]

The transformation of Stalin into a "genius" was the work of the bureaucracy, which found in him a brutal instrument of its striving for privilege. The myth of Stalin, developed out of lies, was the creation of the bureaucracy. "This massive, organic, unconquerable character of the lie," Trotsky observed, "is the undeniable evidence that it is not merely a matter of personal ambitions of an individual, but something immeasurably greater: the new caste of privileged upstarts had to have its own mythology." [18]

The entire cultural development of the Soviet Union was being suffocated by the bureaucratic regime. "The literature and art of the Stalinist epoch," Trotsky wrote, "will go down in history as examples of the most absurd and servile Byzantinism." [19] Even the genuinely gifted artists were compelled to prostitute themselves in the service of Stalin. Trotsky cited a poem by Alexis Tolstoy where Stalin is depicted as a deity: "Thou, bright sun of the nations, /The unsinking sun of our times," etc. Commenting on these lines, Trotsky wrote, "To call things by their right name, this poetry is more reminiscent of the grunting of a pig." [20]

Even Soviet architecture was distorted and degraded by Stalin. The House of Soviets, built to Stalin's specifications, was "a monstrous building that, with its imposing uselessness and crude grandiosity, provides the concrete expression of a brutal regime devoid of any ideas or perspective." [21] As for films, their directors and actors were compelled to take instructions from Stalin. Their sole purpose became the glorification of the dictator. "In this way Soviet cinematography, which made such a promising start, has been killed stone dead." [22]

As for Stalin the man, to the extent that the living person could be separated from the myth in which he was encased, his essential characteristic, Trotsky emphasized, "is personal, physical cruelty, which is usually called sadism." [23]

Unable to appeal to the best instincts of the masses, Stalin appeals to their basest instincts—to ignorance, intolerance, narrow-mindedness, primitiveness. He seeks contact with them through

coarse expressions. But this coarseness also serves as a camouflage for his cunning. He puts all his passion into carefully-nurtured plans, to which all else is subordinate. How he detests authority! And how he loves to impose it! [24]

Of his own subjective attitude toward Stalin, Trotsky wrote on the penultimate page of the biography:

The point which I now occupy is unique. I therefore feel that I have the right to say that I have never entertained a feeling of hatred toward Stalin. There is a lot said and written about my so-called hatred for Stalin which apparently fills me with gloomy and troubled judgments. I can only shrug my shoulders to all this. Our ways have parted so long ago that whatever personal relationship there was between us has long ago been utterly extinguished. For my part, and to the extent that Stalin is the tool of historical forces, which are alien and hostile to me, my personal feelings towards Stalin are indistinguishable from my feelings towards Hitler or the Japanese Mikado. [25]

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The world of 1940 seemed to be living through a nightmare. How fragile and helpless civilization appeared in the face of advancing barbarism! Under the pressure of reaction, even the most intelligent, sensitive representatives of the European intelligentsia abandoned all hope. Walter Benjamin, living in a precarious exile, translated his personal despair into a morbidly demoralized "On the Concept of History." Hitlerism was not the negation of civilization, but its true essence. "There is no document of culture," he opined, "which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another." [26]

Benjamin called attention to the artist Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*. In this work, the real nature of the historical process was depicted: "His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage, and hurls it at his feet." [27] Benjamin's despair led him to cynicism, which he directed against the perspective of socialist revolution. "Marx's epigones," he wrote bitterly, "have derived (among other things) the notion of the 'revolutionary situation,' which, as we know, has always refused to arrive." [28]

What course of action, then, was left to Walter Benjamin but to take his own life? Fleeing Vichy France, and in sight of the Spanish border, Benjamin—convinced of the hopelessness of his situation—committed suicide on the evening of September 26, 1940. Had he waited but one more day, the writer would have passed safely across the border.

Trotsky doubtlessly would have felt great empathy for Benjamin. But feelings of despair were alien to the revolutionist. His powerful sense of history enabled him to place the bestialities of his time in their appropriate context. In a section of the Stalin biography that bears the heading "A Historical Parallel," Trotsky observed: "In this period of capitalist decline, Europe's regression produces many of the traits of capitalism's infancy. Present-day Europe strongly resembles 15th century Italy." [29] Of course, that was an era in which the small states "represented the baby steps of an infantile capitalism." But the period of the Renaissance resembled the modern era in one important respect: "It was an epoch of transition from old to new norms—an amoral, and *per se*, immoral period." [30] Cardinals "wrote pornographic comedies and the Popes produced them in their courts." [31]

Corruption was the keynote in Italian politics. The art of governing was practised in cliques and consisted in the gentle arts of lying, betrayal and crime. To fulfil a contract, to keep a promise, was considered the height of stupidity. Slyness walked hand-in-hand with violence. Superstition and lack of confidence poisoned all relations between the heads of the states. It was the period of the Sforzas, the Medici, the Borgias. But it was not only the period of treachery and forgery, of poison and craftiness. It was also the period of the Renaissance. [32]

As in the period of the Renaissance, modern man finds himself

on the border of two worlds—the bourgeois-capitalist, which is suffering agony and that new world which is destined to replace it. Now, once again, we are living through the transition from one social system to another, in the epoch of the greatest social crisis which, as always, is accompanied by a crisis in morality. The old has been shaken to its foundation. The new has scarcely begun to emerge. Social contradictions have once more achieved exceptional sharpness. [33]

Such periods impose immense pressure on individuals.

When the roof has collapsed and the doors and windows have fallen off their hinges, the house is bleak and hard to live in. Today, stormy winds are blowing across our entire planet. [34]

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Trotsky viewed his survival of the May 24 assault as no more than a reprieve. He knew that the GPU would make another attempt on his life. Harold Robins, in a discussion with this writer, recalled that Trotsky requested a meeting with the guards in early August. The world news was dominated by the air attacks launched by Nazi Germany against Britain. Trotsky told the guards that he expected that Stalin would seek to take advantage of the public's distraction by attempting as soon as possible another assassination. A well-known Mexico City journalist, Eduardo Tellez Vargas, who wrote for *El Universal*, met several times with Trotsky after the May 24 raid. In an interview conducted with the International Committee in December 1976, Tellez Vargas recalled his final meeting with Trotsky, which occurred on August 17, 1940, just three days before the assassination. Feeling sincere admiration for the great revolutionary, Tellez Vargas was deeply troubled by what Trotsky told him.

There came a moment when Trotsky trusted absolutely nobody. He trusted in no one. He didn't specify or name names, but he did say to me: "I will be killed either by one of them in here or by one of my friends from the outside, by someone who has access to the house. Because Stalin cannot spare my life." [35]

On the day of Tellez Vargas' last interview with Trotsky, there was another visitor to the villa on the Avenida Viena. Jacques Mornard, this time without Sylvia Ageloff, was admitted to the compound. Mornard claimed that he had written an article, which he wanted Trotsky to read. Trotsky, who had several brief encounters with Mornard, had already

indicated that he did not like the man. Mornard had taken to speaking in Trotsky's presence of his "boss" who had become rich through business speculations. In her autobiographical account of her life with Trotsky, Natalia Sedova recalled that he "was utterly indifferent" to Mornard's talk of his boss's exploits. "These short conversations used to irritate me," Sedova wrote, "and Leon Davidovich disliked them as well. 'Who is this fabulously rich boss?' he asked me. 'We should find out. After all, he might be some profiteer with Fascist tendencies and it might be best to stop seeing Sylvia's husband altogether....'" [36]

The meeting with Mornard on August 17 intensified Trotsky's concern. Trotsky emerged from his office after only ten minutes. He was disturbed by Mornard's behavior. Trotsky noted that Mornard had failed to take off his hat upon entering the office and then proceeded to sit on the corner of Trotsky's desk. This was strangely inappropriate behavior for a man who claimed to be Belgian and to have been raised in France. Trotsky, after only a few minutes with Mornard, had doubts about the visitor's nationality. As recounted by Isaac Deutscher:

Who was he [Mornard-Jacson] really? They should find this out. Natalya was taken aback; it seemed to her that Trotsky "had perceived something new about 'Jacson,' but had not yet reached, or rather was in no hurry, to reach, any conclusions." Yet the implications of what he had said was alarming: if 'Jacson' was deceiving them about his nationality, why was he doing it? And was he not deceiving them about other things as well? About what? These questions must have been on Trotsky's mind, for two days later he repeated his observations to Hansen, as if to ascertain whether similar misgivings had occurred to anyone beside himself. [37]

The fact that Trotsky, after only a few minutes alone with Mornard, developed doubts about his nationality and suspected that he might be an impostor, leads one to wonder why Alfred and Maguerite Rosmer, both French, never developed similar suspicions—even though they spent a far greater amount of time with the man who was to be Trotsky's assassin.

In the late afternoon of Tuesday August 20, Mornard, without an appointment, again came to see Trotsky. Despite the concerns conveyed to him directly by Trotsky, Joseph Hansen—whose GPU connections were to be exposed nearly forty years later—approved Mornard's entry into the compound. Although the weather was warm and the sky cloudless, Mornard was wearing a hat and carrying a raincoat. Concealed within the coat was a knife, automatic gun, and an alpenstock. Mornard was not searched. He was allowed to accompany Trotsky into his office. He gave Trotsky what he claimed to be a redraft of the article that he had presented on August 17. As Trotsky read the article, Mornard withdrew the alpenstock from the coat and brought it crashing down on Trotsky's skull. Though mortally wounded, Trotsky rose from his chair and fought off the assailant. Harold Robins, having heard Trotsky cry out, raced into the study and subdued the assassin.

While en route to the hospital in Mexico City, Trotsky lost consciousness. He died, with Natalia at his side, the following evening.

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Six months before his assassination, on February 27, 1940, Trotsky had written his *Testament*. He intended the statement to be published after his death. Though his capacity for work remained undiminished, Trotsky believed that he did not have long to live. In addition to the ever-present threat of assassination, he was suffering from high blood pressure, for which there was, at that time, no effective treatment. The *Testament* rejected "the stupid and vile slander of Stalin and his agents: there is not a single spot on my revolutionary honor." [38] He expressed his conviction

that future revolutionary generations would rehabilitate the honor of Stalin's victims "and deal with the Kremlin executioners according to their deserts." With evident emotion, Trotsky paid tribute to Natalia Sedova: "In addition to the happiness of being a fighter for the cause of socialism, fate gave me the happiness of being her husband." [39] Trotsky then restated for posterity the purpose, principles and philosophy that had guided his life work:

For forty-three years of my conscious life I have remained a revolutionist; for forty-two of them I have fought under the banner of Marxism. If I had to begin all over again I would of course try to avoid this or that mistake, but the main course of my life would remain unchanged. I shall die a proletarian revolutionist, a Marxist, a dialectical materialist, and, consequently, an irreconcilable atheist. My faith in the communist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today, than it was in the days of my youth. [40]

Trotsky's humanity and breadth of vision found its consummate expression in the conclusion of the *Testament*:

Natasha has just come up to the window from the courtyard and opened it wider so that the air may enter more freely into my room. I can see the bright strip of grass beneath the wall, and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence and enjoy it to the full. [41]

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Eighty years have passed since the assassination of Trotsky. And yet the passage of time has not diminished his stature. The shadow cast by this political giant of the twentieth century looms even larger in the twenty-first.

History has vindicated Trotsky and vanquished his enemies. The edifice of Stalinism has been smashed to bits. The name of Stalin is now and will be forever associated with criminal betrayals. The damage that his crimes did to the Soviet Union—politically, economically, and culturally—was irreparable. Stalin will be remembered only as one of the two most monstrous figures of the twentieth century, a counterrevolutionary mass murderer of socialists, surpassed in evil only by Hitler. Trotsky was right: "The vengeance of history is far more terrible than the vengeance of the most powerful General Secretary." [42]

Trotsky's place in history endures and grows ever larger because the basic tendencies and characteristics of contemporary capitalism and imperialism correspond to his analysis of the dynamic of global capitalist crisis and the logic of global class struggle. His writings—indispensable for an understanding of the contemporary world—remain as fresh as the day they were written. Trotsky's life and struggles, his unyielding devotion to the liberation of mankind, will live on in history.

The world has not passed beyond Lev Davidovich Trotsky. We still live in the epoch he defined as the death agony of capitalism. The solution that he advanced to the crisis of capitalism—the world socialist revolution—provides the only historically progressive way out of the existential crisis of the capitalist system.

But this *solution* requires the *resolution* of the crisis of revolutionary leadership. This is the task to which the International Committee of the Fourth International rededicates itself as it commemorates the eightieth anniversary of Trotsky's death.

## Concluded

- [1] "Once Again on the 'Crisis of Marxism,'" in *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938–39* (New York: 1974), p. 205
- [2] *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (New York: 1981), p. 1
- [3] *Marx-Engels Collected Works* Volume 5 (New York: 1976), p. 6
- [4] Mieczyslaw Bortenstein (M. Casanova), *Spain Betrayed: How the Popular Front Opened the Gate to Franco*, Introduction at <https://marxists.architexturez.net/history/etol/document/spain2/index.htm>
- [5] Ibid
- [6] Citation by Trotsky from *Que Faire* article in "The Class, The Party, and the Leadership," *The Spanish Revolution 1931–39* (New York, 1973), p. 355
- [7] Ibid, p. 355
- [8] Ibid, pp. 355–56
- [9] Ibid, p. 357
- [10] "The Class, the Party, and the Leadership," in *The Spanish Revolution 1931–39* (New York: 1973), p.358
- [11] *Trotsky's Diary in Exile 1935* (New York: 1963), p. 46, Emphasis in the original
- [12] "The Class, the Party, the Leadership," p. 361
- [13] Ibid, p. 361–62
- [14] *Spain Betrayed*, Chapter 21, at <https://marxists.architexturez.net/history/etol/document/spain2/index.htm>
- [15] Ibid, Chapter 21 at <https://marxists.architexturez.net/history/etol/document/spain2/index.htm>
- [16] "The Class, the Party, the Leadership", p. 364
- [17] *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence*, translated by Alan Woods (London: 2016), p. 663
- [18] Ibid, p. 671
- [19] Ibid, p. 671
- [20] Ibid, p. 671
- [21] Ibid, p. 671
- [22] Ibid, p. 671
- [23] Ibid, p. 667
- [24] Ibid, p. 667
- [25] Ibid p. 689 [There is an error in the English translation of the original Russian text, which has been corrected in the Spanish edition of the biography. The text as it appears in this essay incorporates the correction.]
- [26] *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, Volume 4: 1938–1940 (Cambridge and London, 2003), p. 392
- [27] Ibid, p. 392
- [28] Ibid, pp. 402–03
- [29] *Stalin*, op. cit., p. 682
- [30] Ibid, p. 682
- [31] Ibid, p. 683
- [32] Ibid, p. 682
- [33] Ibid, p. 689
- [34] Ibid, p. 689
- [35] International Committee of the Fourth International, *Trotsky's Assassin At Large* (Labor Publications, 1977), p. 16
- [36] Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova Trotsky, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky* (New York, 1975), p. 265
- [37] *The Prophet Outcast, Trotsky: 1929–1940* (New York: 1965), pp. 498–99
- [38] *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939–40*, p. 158
- [39] Ibid, p. 158
- [40] Ibid, pp. 158–59
- [41] Ibid, p. 159
- [42] *Stalin*, op. cit., p. 689



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