International Commemoration of Leon Trotsky

Trotsky’s years on Prinkipo and the journey of *My Life* in Turkish

Ula? Sevinç
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The fourth annual International Commemoration of Leon Trotsky was held on August 16, 2026, at the Ta? Mektep venue on Büyükada (Prinkipo), hosted by the Adalar (Princes’ Islands) Municipality with the support of Mehring Yay?nc?l?k (Books) and the World Socialist Web Site*. The featured speaker at the event, attended by over 100 people, was David North, Chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board and National Chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US), who addressed the audience by video with a speech entitled “Trotsky’s* My Life*: An imperishable contribution to Marxism and world literature.”*

The event was opened by Medine Pamuk, Acting Mayor of Adalar. Pamuk began by conveying the greetings of Adalar Mayor Ali Ercan Akpolat, who was unable to attend because he is imprisoned on political grounds and without any legal basis, and said that Akpolat had very much wanted to take part in the gathering and to commemorate Trotsky’s Büyükada years together with those present. The acting mayor thanked the Socialist Equality Parties and the WSWS for their international solidarity with and support for Akpolat.

Stressing that Büyükada occupies a place not only in Istanbul’s cultural and natural heritage but also bears the traces of world history, Pamuk recalled that after Trotsky’s arrival in Istanbul in 1929 he carried out his work largely from the island until 1933. She noted that these were years of intense writing and reflection for Trotsky, that he followed developments in the Soviet Union, the political transformations in Europe and the international workers’ movement closely from Büyükada, and that he wrote letters and produced analyses from there.

Devoting particular attention in her remarks to the works of this period, Pamuk said that My Life *is far more than a biography, and that in it Trotsky examined the 1905 Revolution, the October Revolution of 1917, the years of the civil war, the establishment of Soviet power and the struggles he waged together with Lenin through the prism of his own experience. She drew attention to* The History of the Russian Revolution *and to the theory of permanent revolution, on which Trotsky worked while on Büyükada.*

Pamuk emphasized that Büyükada is remembered as a historic place where Trotsky wrote, thought and continued his work on revolution, and that what was produced there did not remain merely the memory of an era but became an important part of Trotsky’s intellectual legacy.

Below we publish the speech delivered after Acting Mayor Medine Pamuk by Ula? Sevinç, editor of Mehring Yay?nc?l?k and chairman of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International).

Dear guests,

Welcome to the International Commemoration of Leon Trotsky, which we are holding this year for the fourth time. We thank the Adalar Municipality for hosting this event, which has by now become a tradition, and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality for making the Ta? Mektep venue available for it. We also thank both municipality workers.

Last year’s commemoration was opened by the mayor of Adalar, Ali Ercan Akpolat. He is not among us this year. He was taken into custody on the morning of June 19, jailed on June 23 and subsequently removed from office. Following his detention, a mass protest and march involving thousands of people was held here on Büyükada, where the participants declared that this was a political arrest and that Akpolat must be released. Without concealing our political differences in any way, we repeat that demand here once again and call for the release of all political prisoners.

In addition to his contributions to the organization of this event in 2024 and 2025, Mr. Akpolat was an important supporter of the project to restore the Trotsky House in a manner worthy of this great revolutionary and to transform it into an international cultural center accessible to people from all over the world. We reaffirm our support for the continuation and completion of this project.

Trotsky, who together with Vladimir Lenin led the October Revolution of 1917—an event that broke new ground in the 20th century and in the history of humanity as a whole—spent the longest continuous period of his exile, from 1929 to 1933, on this island. Among the developments inspired by the conquest of power by the Russian working class under the leadership of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, and by the chain of events they set in motion that brought the First World War to an end, was the war of national liberation that was to begin in Türkiye in 1919.

In an interview he gave in Istanbul in 1929, Trotsky recalled the support he had given to Türkiye’s war of national liberation by sending General Frunze to Ankara as the representative of the Red Army and expressed his satisfaction with the outcome. The decisive character of that support, which flowed from the internationalist policy of Soviet Russia against imperialism under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, was acknowledged by Atatürk himself. In that same year, 1929, Atatürk, founder and president of the young republic, wrote the following on a signed photograph he gave to the Soviet ambassador Yakov Zakharovich Surits:

> Had it not been for Russia’s support, the new Türkiye’s victory over the invaders … could have been won only at incomparably greater cost, or might not have been possible at all. Russia extended both moral and material aid to Türkiye, and it would be a crime for our nation to forget this aid.

My Life, Trotsky’s autobiography, which David North will examine in detail, was written on this island in 1929. It was published in Berlin in

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November 1929 and in New York the following year. It has been translated into dozens of languages. Into Turkish, however, it would be translated only forty years later.

Stalin had hoped that by exiling Trotsky to Türkiye he could silence altogether the principal opponent of the bureaucratic regime. It would soon become clear that he was mistaken. With *My Life*, Trotsky delivered an exceptionally powerful answer to the Stalinist bureaucracy's rewriting of the history of the October Revolution.

On what terms had Türkiye admitted him? He was informed that he was free to leave the country, that he could change his place of residence and that the necessary measures had been taken to ensure his safety. He was not to conduct communist activity in Türkiye, but he could write whatever he wished and have it published abroad.

In that period, communist activity and the Communist Party of Türkiye (TKP) were illegal in Türkiye. In fact, for Trotsky as well, the higher priority was to follow and to intervene politically in those places that were more critical for the development of the world socialist revolution—above all Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as the rest of Europe and the United States.

When Trotsky arrived in Istanbul in February 1929, he first stayed for a time at the Soviet Consulate. He then moved to the Tokatl?yan Hotel and afterwards to a house in Bomonti, ?i?li. The Trotsky family, including his wife, Natalia Sedeova and his son, Leon Sedov, subsequently moved to Büyükada, where they would spend the greater part of their years in Türkiye.

Their first address here was the ?zzet Pasha mansion. After a fire broke out in this house, they stayed for a short period at the Savoy Hotel on the island. Between March 1931 and January 1932, they moved to Moda, in Kad?köy. They then returned to Büyükada, to the Yanaros mansion, their final address, where they remained until July 1933.

Trotsky worked at a relentless pace on the island, making it the center of both the *Bulletin of the Opposition* and the International Left Opposition. He subscribed to newspapers and magazines from every corner of the world; all of them arrived two or three days late. In photographs of his desk one can see *The Militant*, the newspaper of the Trotskyist movement in the United States. In 1933 the novelist Georges Simenon came to this island to meet him and described the pile of newspapers on the desk, along with Trotsky's complaint: "Unfortunately, I only get the newspapers several days late."

Hitler had come to power at the beginning of that year, because of the catastrophic policy of the Stalinist Communist International and the German Communist Party. Trotsky answered this in July 1933 by declaring that the Communist International was dead for the purposes of the struggle for socialist revolution and that the Fourth International had to be founded. He issued this historic call from here, only a few days before leaving the island for France, which had at last granted him a visa.

In that June 1933 interview with Simenon, Trotsky warned that the coming to power of the Nazis had placed Europe once again on the road to war:

> Fascism, particularly German National-Socialism, brings Europe an indisputable danger of a warlike shock. Being off to the side, perhaps I am wrong, but it seems that we aren't sufficiently aware of the extent of the danger. In a period of not months, but years – and certainly not tens of years – I consider a warlike explosion from fascist Germany absolutely inevitable. It is precisely this question that can become decisive for Europe's destiny.

Trotsky also wrote the following, which reads as though it were written about the world of today:

> By analogy with electrical technology democracy can be defined as a system of switches and insulators against the too-strong currents of national or social struggle. No era in human history has been as saturated with as many antagonisms as ours. An excess of current is increasingly being felt in parts of the European network. Under too much pressure from class and international contradictions the switches either melt or blow up. These are the short-circuits of dictatorships. The weakest switches are obviously the first to fail.

We often say that Trotsky would have no difficulty whatsoever in understanding present-day conditions. Today we are witnessing the opening stages of a Third World War and, everywhere, the collapse of what remains of the democracies under the weight of class and international contradictions.

For the same reasons that gave Trotsky his powerful optimism and confidence in the future, we too see in the present situation not only mounting catastrophe and barbarism, but also the developing basis for the liberation of humanity. We look at the world economy that binds together every country and continent, and at the world working class that sets it in motion, and we conclude that the only way forward is for this immense social force to intervene consciously in history. The October Revolution was such an intervention. It was for this reason that Trotsky founded the Fourth International in 1938, and it is for this reason that this world party lives and fights to this day.

I would now like to say a few words about the fortunes of *My Life*, written by Trotsky here in 1929, in the Turkish language.

I have explained briefly the conditions that prevented the publication of Trotsky's writings in Turkish. The decisive factor in this delay, however, was the subordination of the TKP and its intellectuals to the Stalinist regime that exiled Trotsky and finally murdered him in Mexico in 1940. Far from his works being translated into Turkish, for decades his name was invoked only as that of a traitor, and Moscow's lies were repeated.

Trotsky and his works, including *My Life*, began to enter the Turkish language in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Isaac Deutscher's famous three-volume biography of Trotsky was published in this period. The first Turkish edition of *My Life* was brought out in 1970 by Köz Publishing. Its translator was Müntekim Ökmen.

Ökmen, who was born in 1915, was known as one of the foremost translators from French into Turkish and was referred to as "the translator of Herodotus" for having given the Turkish language the *Histories* of Herodotus of Halicarnassus. From an article written after this great translator's death in 2003 by his friend, the journalist Hasan Pulur, we learn that Ökmen became a communist in his youth and joined the TKP, then illegal, in the 1930s. Together with ?efik Hüsnü, one of the party's former leaders, he founded the legal Socialist Party of Workers and Peasants of Türkiye (TSEKP) in 1946, for which he spent three and a half years in prison.

Coming out of a Stalinist tradition, Ökmen would ultimately become the man who gave Trotsky's *My Life* to the Turkish language. Let us note that his translation, published in 1970, is still in circulation from Yaz?n Publishing and the K?rm?z? Kedi Publishing House. For 56 years, many people in Türkiye have been able to read this work of Trotsky's in that translation, and they continue to read it.

In conclusion, I want to stress that Trotsky's ideas and his struggle continue today to inspire a new generation of workers, young people and intellectuals across the world who want to fight against social inequality, repression and war. This includes the new generation in the former Soviet Union. They are beginning to learn of the historic struggle of the Left Opposition led by Trotsky and of the Fourth International, and of the fact that there was an alternative to Stalinism from the very beginning.

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One of the best representatives of this generation in the former Soviet countries is our 27-year-old Ukrainian comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk. Comrade Bogdan has been imprisoned since April 2024. Exactly six days ago, on August 10, 2026, a court of the NATO-backed Zelensky regime sentenced Comrade Bogdan to 15 years in prison on the charge of “high treason.” The same ruling ordered the confiscation of his property and the destruction of the socialist documents, pamphlets and leaflets of his organization, the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL).

Bogdan’s alleged crime was to publish articles on the *World Socialist Web Site* and to correspond with its editors. Bogdan’s “crime” was to defend the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war. It was to oppose the Ukrainian government’s glorification of those who collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War. Comrade Bogdan has been sentenced to 15 years for a thought crime.

This is a verdict that everyone who defends democratic rights anywhere in the world must stand up and oppose. Comrade Bogdan has the right to appeal the ruling within 30 days. We are waging a worldwide campaign demanding that the sentence be annulled and that Bogdan be released immediately. We call on everyone here today to join this campaign, to sign the petition demanding his freedom and to make this case known in your own community.

I would now like to give the floor to the main guest of today’s event, David North. As a revolutionary journalist, historian and political leader, David North’s activity within the international workers movement and the Trotskyist movement spans 55 years. A political authority on Leon Trotsky internationally, North is the author of *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century*, *Leon Trotsky and the Development of Marxism* and *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, published in Türkiye by Mehring Yay?nc?l?k, as well as of *The Logic of Zionism: From Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide*, *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century* and *The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International*.

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