

THE
QUARTERLY REVIEW

No. 535. JANUARY, 1938.

Art. 1.—THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED.

1. *The Revolution Betrayed*. By Leon Trotsky. Translated by Max Eastman. Faber, 1937.
 2. *The Defence of Terrorism*. By L. Trotsky. New Edition. Allen & Unwin, 1935.
 3. *Problems of Life*. By L. Trotsky. Translated by Z. Vengerova, with an introduction by N. Minsky. Methuen, 1934.
 4. *Lenin*. By Leon Trotsky. Authorised translation. Harrap, 1935.
 5. *I was a Soviet Worker*. By Andrew Smith. Robert Hale, 1937.
 6. *A False Utopia*. By William Henry Chamberlin. Duckworth, 1937.
- And other works.

THE title and authorship of the work which gives its name to this Article appear strangely incongruous. That Trotsky, arch-revolutionary, second only to Lenin in world-wide notoriety, should proclaim the moral bankruptcy of that very Soviet system of which he was a conspicuous founder, is indeed startling. Let us consider whether anything in his previous history throws light upon this transformation.

Leon Bronstein was born, it is said, about 1877 in a village of the Ukraine. His father, a Jewish 'colonist,' was a man of strong character, pronounced ability, and little education, who preferred agriculture to business and ran successfully a farm of 3,000 acres, including a mill. He was the worst man in the world to father so instinctive a rebel, who from the first never evinced the

slightest sympathy for the family creed or the family's very business-like outlook. In Trotsky's case, however, it could be said, more truly than in most, that the boy was father to the man. Eastman's 'Portrait of a Youth' is happily named. In a sense, indeed, Trotsky has never grown up. From the first he displayed the characteristics which distinguish him at sixty: a dauntless spirit, great personal charm, a certain natural fastidiousness of taste, a hard and brilliant if superficial intelligence, and the constructive genius of an engineer. One feature of his youth, however, has long since atrophied in him (as in all Marxians) under the bonds of his political creed. His instinctive partisanship for the 'under dog' now restricts itself to 'under dogs' who sport the Marxian collar.

He had, however, no reason to consider himself as an 'under dog' from any point of view. In the course of a good, though rambling, education, he passed into the best school in Odessa; in which commercial and cosmopolitan town anti-Semitism was by no means the fashion. Nor was his 'fiery eagerness to excel' insufficiently sated; for he was always at the top of his class. With his fellows he was popular, with his teachers less so; for though as a rule exemplarily well-behaved, he early evinced the spirit of revolt by organising school strikes against apparent injustice. 'That's a bad boy,' declared an old German among the masters; 'he has all the boys of the school in his power. That boy is going to be a dangerous member of society.' We might, indeed, declare him the *enfant terrible* of Bolshevism, with an equal emphasis on either word. At eighteen he passed into a high school at Nikolaev. A bit of a dandy, 'very handsome, very bourgeois,' and eager for a boisterous good time, he was also, as was natural in a lad of his date, surroundings, and temperament, an avowed Republican. As was equally natural, however, he soon drifted into touch with the rising Socialist undercurrent; which 'gave him companionship in those peculiarly strong feelings of social sympathy and revolt which he had brought with him out of his childhood.' A fellow student introduced him to a little group of 'Narodniki' enthusiasts: those milder and more elementary revolutionaries whose interests centred in the peasantry.

Not unnaturally this unorthodox connection soon reached the ears of his father, who thereupon 'invaded Nikolaev like an army' and bade his son choose between these undesirable associates and himself. 'If any last touch was needed,' says his biographer, 'to drive Trotsky into the camp of the revolution, it was this act of parental tyranny. To assert himself as a grown man was to assert the revolution.' He accepted the ultimatum, moved over to the house which served his new friends as a meeting-place, and advertised himself as a private tutor. His host, the head of the little circle, a cultivated man, and a gardener by profession, made a precarious livelihood by the sale of fruit and vegetables; and the biographer describes with some humour 'this simple and most genial man—with his big beard and big brow,' whose relation with the 'brood of young rebels' who surrounded him was 'that of an appreciative but prudent father.' Trotsky, still only a lad of sixteen, of course took this 'communal Utopia' with complete seriousness. Abandoning all the minor elegancies of life (fastidious cleanliness excepted), he existed on the precarious results of the above-mentioned 'private tutorship,' which often left him on the verge of hunger and, indeed, beyond it.

The main occupation of those young Socialists consisted, of course, in endless discussions, very much *à la Russe*, on the ethics and practice of Socialism; and it was not long before there broke upon the mild and somewhat sentimental Socialism of these Narodniki, the strident notes of Marxian ideology. Alexandra Lvovna, 'gentle eyed, iron minded,' six years older than Trotsky and the most attractive member of the little circle, was 'a resolute adherent of this new and more coldly scientific method for the regeneration of . . . the world.' Marx, as we know, proposed—to quote Mr Eastman's synopsis—to replace all evangels with a science of historic engineering. . . . If, he urged, 'you wish to mould future history, you must calculate [economic] forces as a mechanic calculates the forces of nature and . . . guide . . . them [like] a technician . . . a cool and practical engineer.' Now Trotsky's brain, as we have said, was essentially that of an engineer; and the materialism of Marx was eventually to master his reason. But to his youthful ardour, its instincts of sympathy not yet dis-

torted, this 'dry, narrow, impractical teaching' was thoroughly repellent. Many and fierce were the intellectual battles which ensued; but Alexandra wielded a weapon of which no doubt she took little account. She was beautiful. The whole group fell in love with her, Trotsky more passionately than all. Gradually and in the long run he succumbed to the double appeal. But Eastman very justly points out that Trotsky never belonged to that section of Marxists who embrace their arid creed because it enables them to deny the 'finer values of life.' He, on the other hand, accepted Marxism reluctantly, as true in fact and as affording a solid basis for action; but on this basis he proposed to re-establish and develop the 'finer values of life': art, friendship, the satisfaction of every adventurous, every intellectual interest. So far, as we shall find, these hopes have not been realised.

Meanwhile his father returned to the attack with vigour, not to say violence. Eventually terms of compromise were arranged. Trotsky was allowed to take up his abode with a 'prosperous but liberal' uncle in Odessa, and to attend preliminary engineering lectures at the University. Here (according to expert report) he displayed 'a lightning aptitude for mathematics, a restless constructive imagination, (and) a commanding personality' which would have carried him to the head of the profession. But it was not to be. He preferred 'organising revolutionary "circles" among the workers in his uncle's factory.' His activities were, of course, not very serious; but they seem to have attracted the attention of the police. Persuaded by his friends to quit Odessa, he returned (inconspicuously) to the house of his early mentor at Nikolaev; where under the renewed influence of Alexandra he seems to have definitely passed the Marxist Rubicon. With her he founded an embryonic 'South Russian Workers' Union.' Their activities soon brought upon them and their circle, and this time seriously, the unwelcome attentions of the police. Though they contrived for some time to evade arrest, they were all eventually traced, and Trotsky had his first experience of prison life. Two years of preliminary incarceration followed, in successive Tzarist gaols; where he soon learned the ways of secret com-

munication with his fellow captives. These years also afforded him ample opportunity for reading and, strange to say, a fairly wide choice of books from the prison library. Here he discovered Darwin, whose 'minute, precise, conscientious and at the same time powerful thought' completely 'intoxicated' his young reader. This confirmed him in his materialistic outlook; though, much to his astonishment, he found that Darwin had been able to retain his belief in a God.

The young conspirators had rendered themselves liable to twenty years' hard labour. Actually, however, they were not brought to trial, but were simply shipped off under a four-year sentence to the northern villages of Siberia, and there set at liberty under police surveillance. Among them was Alexandra Lvovna, to whom he had been legally married in prison, by Jewish rites; not, says his biographer, from any desire for the blessings of a church or the law, but that they might be exiled to the same village. The transfer took nearly a year, and it was not till August 1900 that they reached the appointed district; where (to quote his biographer) they lived a 'romantically tranquil life,' passing from one pleasant village abode to another, receiving 19 roubles (pre-War) per month from the Imperial Government, and being cooked for by a fellow-exile—who, however, was only too frequently drunk. Their agreeable solitude was soon enlivened by the successive advent of two baby daughters, by the periodical receipt of books and newspapers, and by occasional meetings with fellow-exiles on their ways to and fro. Among these he remembered most vividly Uritsky—the first head of the still notorious Cheka—'with his unchanging, tranquil, kindly smile'; and Dzerzinsky, of the 'beautiful and spiritual countenance,' whose 'pure strength of character' (we quote once more the biographer) made him at length the pre-siding genius of the still more notorious 'G.P.U.'

Here too, by careful study and continuous practice, Trotsky laid the foundations of that vigorous and vivacious literary style for which he is distinguished among Soviet writers. The local review accepted his first essays in journalism. He contributed attractive articles on general subjects; but occasionally diverged into revolutionary polemics. It is not surprising that

these activities were soon brought to an end by the intervention of the Petersburg Censorship. By this time, however, he had succeeded in getting into touch with various scattered Marxist groups in Russia proper; especially those which, under Lenin's influence, as exerted from London, were to develop into the extreme or Bolshevik section of the movement. Eager for action, he contrived to escape from Siberia under the ægis of a forged passport and the hurriedly assumed designation of Trotsky. After a short spell of work in Russia, he succeeded in crossing the frontier and in reaching Paris. There—his family having remained behind in Siberia—he formed a connection with a young Russian revolutionary of noble birth who is the mother of his sons. Alexandra Lvovna, whom he did not divorce, remained—says his biographer of 1926—also his friend.

In London, where he arrived in 1902, he met for the first time Lenin, seven years his senior; and succumbed, once and for all, to the impact of that powerful intellect, that genius for organisation, that daring and implacable will. Not that his submission was either servile or complete; as to tactics they frequently differed, and at one time Trotsky deserted to the opposite, or Menshevik, camp. Lenin, on the other hand, despite these alarms and excursions, remained fully responsive, then and always, to the charm and genius of his more brilliant junior. 'The relation . . . formed between you when you came to us in London from Siberia,' so wrote Lenin's widow to Trotsky a short time after Lenin's decease, 'never changed with him to his very death.' While to the memory of Lenin the man and Lenin the leader Trotsky has always remained conspicuously faithful. For, despite differences superficial and profound of character and intellect, they were in the main at one. Both were Marxist by conviction and without reserve; both saw in action the only justification of debate; both were prepared, without remorse or compunction, to carry Marx's prescription of the class war to its grim and hideous climax, the mass extermination of class enemies. It is this which, in the last resort, divides the Jacobin from the Girondin, the Bolshevik from the Menshevik.

With his first introduction to Lenin ends the formative, and for us most interesting, stage of Trotsky's develop-

ment; and we must pass rapidly by the revolutionary outbreak of 1905, the period of slow Liberal reform (1905-14), the War, the Revolution of 1917, the Bolshevik seizure of power; and thus come straight to the period of the Civil War in which Trotsky, as the Commissar for War, so brilliantly and successfully organised the 'Red' Forces, the 'Red Army' of to-day. But here it is necessary to remind ourselves that successful Army organisation is a matter quite distinct from the organisation of industrial or agricultural life; and that it affords no guarantee of equivalent success in these infinitely more gigantic and exacting tasks.

During the years which elapsed between the end of the Civil War and the death of Lenin, Trotsky becomes less conspicuous. Lenin takes the front of the stage, and Trotsky, as a Commissar, lives modestly with his family in the Kremlin. But, if less conspicuous than before, Trotsky took more than his share in the multi-tarious activities of those tremendous years; when chaos in the factories was succeeded by their nationalisation, and the epic strife with the peasantry was becoming acute. The famine (which Trotsky in his last volume describes as 'terrible') supervened, compelling Lenin to take in his new economic policy a sharp return to a modified and limited form of free exchange. And, meanwhile, through all these years runs the scarlet thread of the Red Terror, so horribly portrayed in Melgounov's contemporary summary; so cynically justified by Trotsky in the pamphlet which has been recently reprinted for him as 'The Defence of Terrorism.' Nothing could be more characteristic of Communist leadership than the cold callousness of this production. Here is nothing of the savage blood lust which characterised so many of its subordinate agents. It shows a mind dehumanised to the point of indifference; the inhuman class animus of a Communist manifesto, for which the 'class enemy' is but noxious vermin to be destroyed at sight.

Meanwhile the scene changes. In June 1921 Lenin is laid low; and the fluctuations of his malady, watched by Trotsky with painful anxiety, terminate with Lenin's death in June 1924. Upon this event, as we all know, there followed a confused period of jealousies, rivalries, and intrigues. Part were purely personal, the struggle

among many claimants for the succession to the dead man's power. Others were really political and economic contests, between the advocates of a Right or Moderate and a Left or extreme policy in the economic and political spheres. The prize of power fell to the strongest and the most unscrupulous, the shrewdest and most ruthless, the Georgian Stalin; but, beneath his virtual dictatorship, the jealousies and intrigues of Right and Left continued to surge. For the economic position of Russia, industrial and agricultural, continued extremely precarious. The N.E.P. had called, as it were, a truce, and brought instant and temporary alleviation to the half-starved population. The dividing-line of parties on these issues is easily discerned. Those whose ministerial duties brought them into immediate touch with the basic needs of the population were compelled to concentrate their attention on the immediate requirements of Russia, and to regard attempts at World Revolution as a subsidiary issue—as a mere means of hamstringing Russia's potential adversaries. They urged the immediate conciliation of the peasants, on whom depended the production of elementary necessities, and the encouragement of the more industrious and successful farmers. The purely logical Communists, on the other hand, pressed on the cause of World Revolution—which must, they argued, react favourably on the Russian experiment—the rapid development of the nationalised industries, and the rapid replacement of individual by state and communal farms.

We need not ask on what side we may look for Trotsky. He was the protagonist of the Left; and when the Right eventually won the day, Trotsky and his principal henchmen were forced into exile, at first in Siberia and then beyond the confines of Russia; where ever since Trotsky has remained, the wandering and unwelcome apostle of the pure Communist faith. But meanwhile, from Trotsky's point of view, worse things had followed. For when the increase in grain deliveries had proved insufficient, Stalin had effected a sudden and violent *volte face*. A 'Five Year' industrialisation and militarisation plan was forced on with a speed which taxed the resources of Russia to the utmost, and reduced the national scale of living almost down to a starvation level; while the forcible 'collectivisation' of the farmers was carried

out, in the course of a few months, with a savage brutality. Trotsky is well within his rights when, in the book before us, he denounces with extreme and caustic severity these rapid and sweeping 'swings of the pendulum,' not only for their effect on the country, but as involving a peculiarly gross 'theft' of his own thunder.

Since the beginning of his exile Trotsky's pen has not been idle, nor, we suspect, have his intrigues with Russian discontent suffered any intermission. The state of feeling in Russia generally can only be surmised; but there is some reason to suspect that this discontent is widespread, and springs from many different sources. The appalling series of political trials and political executions, of which, since the Kirov assassination in 1930, Russia has been the theatre, and in almost all of which Trotsky has been cited as instigator, testifies at least to the alarm of the authorities, if it cannot prove the guilt of the accused. The fact that the most brilliant publicist which Soviet Russia has produced sounds, even from afar, the tocsin of revolt, might well shake the nerves of men with less to lose than the present rulers of Russia. Trotsky himself has indignantly denied any share in, or sympathy for, schemes of personal as opposed to mass assassination. Charges of complicity in the supposed plots of German and Japanese militarism seem even more fantastic. But that so experienced a conspirator as Trotsky should have contrived an invisible network of secret political relationship under the surface of Russian Communism seems by no means incredible; nor does it seem beyond the bounds of possibility, that in such intercourse the expedience of armed revolt may have been mooted. In any case the Government struck quickly, struck widely, and struck hard. By now, almost every potential leader among the Left, or old Bolshevik, sections of the Russian Communist party, as well as many who scarcely deserve the designation, have been summarily disposed of. It is at this juncture that the indomitable Trotsky launches his indictment of Stalin and the Administration of which he is the head; with a renewed trumpet-call to a 'New Revolution.'

Under such circumstances can we attach any importance to a denunciation so evidently inspired by bitterness and revenge? We could hardly do so, even though

Trotsky is presumably in receipt of ample, if possibly biased, reports, from secret allies in Russia, were it not that his diatribes coincide completely with such information as the world has received from more disinterested sources. For Trotsky in effect concedes the justice of every charge made by those impartial observers, who, having entered Russia with some at least prepossessions in favour of her existing system, have studied actual conditions with an open mind, for an adequate period, and equipped in nearly every case with an adequate knowledge of the Russian language. Trotsky does not deny—on the contrary he vehemently asserts—that famine, 'terrible' in its extent and intensity, has twice invaded Russia during the last twenty years; that acts of cannibalism have occurred; that the cost of production is far higher and the output far lower than in America and Western Europe; that the cost of living is high in proportion; that prostitution is common; that vast and gaudy official 'palaces' rise daily, while the slum problem and an appalling house-shortage still persist. That a million peasant farmers (not to mention their families) were exterminated during the 'collective' drives; and so on, and so on. Further, he insists as strongly as any 'Liberal' critic that the statistics and propaganda literature of the Party are totally unreliable; that Art, Learning, and Literature, lie in shackles; that the political police exercise an unbearable tyranny; that every political trial is a 'frame up' and that the abject confessions of the accused are obtained by a system of moral and mental—if not physical torture. In fact, he confirms every charge denied or condoned by those so-called 'Friends of Russia,' on whom he pours the vials of his scorn. Like them, however, this unrepentant Marxian has no word of pity for the sufferings of the unhappy 'have-beens'; while even the Kulak holocaust seems to be deprecated not so much from the humane as from the economic point of view.

Other things, too, Trotsky admits; things still more offensive to his Communist sensibilities. No trace of true Communist equality, he tells us, now exists; inequality political and economic increases daily in depth, as well as in extent. A horde of parvenu officials—we use his own adjective—of favoured Communists and of petted artisans,

batten on the rank and file. Piece-work, payment by results, and 'speeding up' in their most extreme form are rampant. Modest rights of property and inheritance have been conceded. Within the collective farms 'midget' private holdings have been scooped out by the authorities as a sop to the peasantry; these 'midget' holdings are insured for a higher total sum than the remaining 'collectivised' portions. Worse still, wealthy collectives rent land from the poorer; worst of all, the peasant puts more work into his own than the common land and relies on it for everything but bread.

The family again, as an economic and legal unit, is being, he complains, gradually re-established; divorce becomes more difficult; parental authority is encouraged and youth once more repressed. Too many evade a virtuous Bolshevik life in communal barracks for the illicit delights of a home and private meals, and, where means permit, 'white slaves'—or domestic workers—to wait on them. Anti-religious propaganda he fears has slackened: it was not, he admits, always conducted with good taste. But to Trotsky religion appears no formidable enemy. His 'Problems of Life' had declared it a rootless thing, the public theatricals of the village, to be easily ousted by the superior attractions of the cinema. In matters military he complains that the 'Militia' or 'territorial' basis of the original Red forces has been abandoned for the organisation of a Regular Army. Military titles and orders have been resurrected and the Cossack regiments, the very symbol of reaction, have been raised anew. As regards the 'Communist International,' Trotsky (whose own organisation 'Poum' it has superseded in Spain) complains that Stalin has emasculated that mighty engine for World Revolution and forced Russia to take her place in a Capitalist League of Nations.

We must now ask, To what then does Trotsky ascribe these asserted declensions from the heroic standards of Bolshevism's earlier days? First, of course, to the fact that he and his followers have not been at the head of affairs; secondly, to the criminal divagations of the egregious Stalin from Bolshevik orthodoxy; thirdly, to the rise of a vast new bureaucracy, which has usurped the powers (and vices) of the 'bourgeois' and the official.

Trotsky himself will never turn traitor. To the grim ideal of Marx he will remain faithful. To the last we shall see him the protagonist of that New Revolution ; by which all existing ' bourgeois ' disfigurement shall be reft again from the stark countenance of Russian Communism.

H. C. FOXCROFT.