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LEON TROTSKY AND THE NATURAL HISTORY OF REVOLUTIONS

LOUIS GOTTSCHALK

ABSTRACT

In his recent works Trotsky draws frequent parallels between the Russian Revolution and earlier revolutions. Those parallels are intended to fit into the Marxian pattern of the inexorable historical process whereby, through ceaseless class struggle, a classless society will eventually be attained. Yet Trotsky also gives great weight as a factor in revolutionary action to the moral and intellectual character of individual leaders, attributing to Kerensky's weakness and to Lenin's strength respectively a large degree of responsibility for the temporary check and the eventual success of the 1917 movement. He maintains, however, that personalities become important only when and in so far as they embody "the objective necessity" of the historical action they propose. He nevertheless considers that historic personality reacts upon, as well as grows out of, social conditions. That concession leads him to recognize the possibility that a mere accident may sometimes determine the success or failure of a revolutionary outburst. In general he insists, however, that events "obey their own laws," two of the most important being the law of *combined development* and the law of *unevenness*. The present author questions whether there are such "laws" and maintains that, in appealing to historic laws at all, Trotsky impairs his attack upon his opponents as weaklings and traitors. The author also questions the validity of several of Trotsky's historical analogies, particularly the comparison of the present Russian regime to the Thermidorian Reaction of the French Revolution. Trotsky's unnecessarily abstruse discussion of "dual power" is likewise criticized as involving inexact comparisons. Yet his books contain some historical analogies that are illuminating. Moreover, Trotsky's analysis of revolutionary "causes" seems to be comprehensive and satisfactory, even if some of his other generalizations are less happy. The author concludes that Trotsky's efforts to force the history of the Russian Revolution into an "inevitable schematism" have not, on the whole, increased the otherwise great value of his books as historical documents.

In any discussion whether revolutions are or are not forms of social behavior which follow a general pattern and are subject to general laws, much depends upon one's definition of the term "revo-

lution." In his most recent books¹ Leon Trotsky, when he speaks of revolutions, makes clear that he usually means the several epochs in political-social history to which the name revolution is generally applied. He draws frequent parallels to the English revolutionary period in the seventeenth century, the French upheaval of the eighteenth century, and the Commune of 1871. He seems to define a revolution as a political movement which attempts to substitute one ruling group for another and, in so doing, to shift the balance of power from one social class to another. That is the usual conception of a revolution and it is a readily acceptable one.

If such is the definition of revolution, everyone will agree that the following propositions are self-evident: (1) that there are some episodes in any two revolutions which bear a resemblance to each other; (2) that there are other episodes in any two revolutions which bear no resemblance whatsoever to each other. The first proposition follows from our definition of revolution; the second follows from the nature of man's behavior. But when we have decided those two propositions we have decided almost nothing. If they are to have any meaning, they must be correlated and weighted in some way. The historian, fixing his attention upon what is particular in separate revolutions, often seems to say, "Although there are some episodes in the revolutionary movement I am studying which bear a resemblance to those in other revolutions with which I am familiar, there are others which have no such resemblance." The sociologist, fixing his attention upon revolutionary movements as types of social behavior, is obliged to say, "Although there are some episodes in the revolutionary movements with which I am familiar that bear no resemblance whatsoever to each other, there are others which bear such a resemblance."

The historian and the sociologist are equally right but they are not equally fortunate. For while it makes little difference to the historian of any given revolution whether the episodes he narrates are like or unlike those in another revolution, the sociologist has small

¹ *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (3 vols. in one; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1937) and *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?* trans. Max Eastman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1937.)

reason for writing about them at all if they do not lend themselves to generalization. The historian is under no pressure to find resemblances; the sociologist is. While the historian, therefore, often is obtuse, the sociologist, probably just as often, is mistaken. The one sins by omission, the other by commission. No one has yet been able to determine which is the greater offense.

The Marxist is in a worse position than the sociologist. To the historian it does not matter whether there is in human affairs the possibility of prediction and control; even for the sociologist, though he may often run the risk of *Sinngebung des Sinnlozes*, it is possible to admit that some aspects of human behavior do not lend themselves to generalization. The Marxian, however, is not only a sociologist but a sociologist dedicated to orthodox propositions. Regardless of how much he may agree or differ with other sociologists regarding the nature of revolution, to two things at least he is committed in advance: he must entertain no doubt that in last analysis all revolutions are caused by conflicts of classes; and he is convinced that the goal of all sociopolitical development is the creation of a classless society. Thus, regarding both means and ends, the Marxist is as definitely committed in advance as ever the Jesuit is said to have been. If he differs from other Marxists on those two matters, it is only on the questions of tempo or degree, not on fundamentals. There is no need here to repeat the oft-told tale that Marxian means and Marxian ends are mutually contradictory, that only faith can make one feel certain that classes will disappear as a result of continued class struggle. What is of more immediate interest to us is that Trotsky, wholly orthodox in those two regards, never seems to think that there can be any doubt about the eventual success of "the revolution," and is, therefore, sure that any behavior which to his mind delays the coming of the revolution is due to the perversity of men. Where the Truth is revealed, the faithful are convinced that they can distinguish between right and wrong.

That conviction, however, leads to a second paradox. If "revolutions take place according to certain laws" and the historian is compelled "to take his departure from the weighty facts of the social structure,"² it follows that those who favor any given revolution are

² *History of the Russian Revolution*, II, iii-iv.

of the rising class which hopes to benefit by the success of the revolution and that those who oppose it are of the temporarily predominant but weakening class which hopes to benefit by its defeat. Representatives of both classes ought then to be motivated chiefly by their class interests, and personal moral shortcomings should not play a predominant part in the Marxian historian's analysis of motives. Trotsky nevertheless cannot rid himself of notions of good and bad. If Milyukov and Kerensky stayed the victory of the proletariat, it was, in his mind, not only because they were bourgeois and, therefore, acting their assigned parts in the class struggle but also because they were wicked self-seekers, sly conspirators, depraved haters of mankind—in short, Compromisers (with a capital C, for Trotsky admits that he himself sometimes compromised), who constantly and deliberately delayed the revolutionary process for their own selfish ends. It is quite possible that Trotsky is right on both scores. But if the accidents of personality play so large a part in determining the tempo of the revolutionary process, what happens to dialectic?

Or are the accidents of personality only to be found on the counterrevolutionary side and therefore easily allowed for in any rational scheme? Trotsky's own answer to this question is negative. To be sure, he seldom sees any selfish motives in the bolshevik revolutionaries of 1917 (Stalin and future Stalinists excepted). But he admits—in fact, insists—that if it were not for the leadership of Lenin (and Trotsky), the October insurrection might never have taken place or would have been very different. The epic passages that deal with Lenin's genius as a leader sound almost Carlylean in both style and philosophy. Of Lenin's role in giving the bolsheviks direction after his return from abroad in April, he declares:³ "Inner struggle in the Bolshevik Party was absolutely unavoidable. Lenin's arrival merely hastened the process. His personal influence shortened the crisis. Is it possible, however, to say confidently that the party without him would have found its road? We would by no means make bold to say that. . . . The role of personality arises before us here on a truly gigantic scale." Lenin's role in October was no less decisive: "If the Bolsheviks had not seized the power in October and Novem-

³ *Ibid.*, I, 330.

ber, in all probability they would not have seized it at all.”⁴ In both instances he contends, to be sure, that there was a revolutionary situation which had been created by materialistic factors. But “a revolutionary situation cannot be preserved at will.”⁵ If Lenin had not grasped opportunity by the forelock, there would have been no revolution for Stalin to betray. “It is possible to let slip a victory at the very moment when it is within arm’s reach.”⁶

It is only fair to repeat that Trotsky does claim that Lenin could have taken his leading role only because he “more fully and resolutely than others expressed . . . the objective necessity” of the action he proposed.⁷ But by what yardstick does one determine objective necessity if it is not by success? If Zinoviev’s policy of temporary inaction had been adopted and in the end proved successful, would it not have been equally correct to maintain that he then would most fully have expressed “the objective necessity” of his proposal? Or, if it be argued (as Trotsky does not seem to argue; cf. the *History*, III, 284–85) that Zinoviev’s policy could not possibly have led to ultimate victory, then cannot Stalin’s success at the present moment be attributed to the fact that he most fully expresses “the objective necessity” of his policy? Why then does Trotsky maintain⁸ that the sources of Stalin’s success “both real and pretended” are not to be found “in the extraordinary quality of the leadership” but in the conditions created by the revolution? What can “objective necessity” be but a good guess as to what will work, and therefore best determined by the most capable leaders? Why should the discerning and the taking advantage of “objective necessity” in one case be laudatory and in another damnable?

Trotsky’s revolutions thus seem little more than dramas with heroes and villains. They work themselves out not alone in accordance with a sociological pattern but also by the accidents that determine the dramatis personae. It would be both erroneous and unjust to maintain that Trotsky is unaware that there is a paradox in his philosophy. He knows full well that revolutionary action is the result of a “complicated web of material and psychic forces.”⁹

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 154.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 165.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Revolution Betrayed*, p. 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 110.

⁹ *History of the Russian Revolution*, I, 121.

Indeed, he tries to resolve the paradox: "We do not at all pretend to deny the significance of the personal in the mechanics of the historic process, nor the significance in the personal of the accidental. We only demand that a historic personality, with all its peculiarities, should not be taken as a bare list of psychological traits, but as a living reality grown out of definite social conditions and reacting upon them. As a rose does not lose its fragrance because the natural scientist points out upon what ingredients of soil and atmosphere it is nourished, so an exposure of the social roots of a personality does not remove from it either its aroma or its foul smell."¹⁰ The admission that a historic personality reacts upon definite social conditions as well as grows out of them is an important one for a Marxist to make.

Trotsky even seems to go farther. He appears to concede that in our present state of knowledge of human psychology, since we do not know how any given social condition may affect a historic personality, there is no possibility of predicting the future of any given revolution. *The Revolution Betrayed* is in fact almost nothing but a bitter lament over the sad errors Lenin and he made in their expectations and forecasts of international revolution after the initial victory of 1917 in Russia. And at one point in his narrative of the February Revolution¹¹ Trotsky becomes almost mystical regarding the unpredictability of a revolutionary movement: "The psychological moment when the soldiers go over to the revolution is prepared by a long molecular process, which like other processes of nature, has its point of climax. But how determine this point? A military unit may be wholly prepared to join the people but may not receive the needed stimulus. The revolutionary leadership does not yet believe in the possibility of having the army on its side, and lets slip the victory. . . . The critical hour of contact between the pushing crowd and the soldiers who bar their way has its critical minute. That is when the gray barrier has not yet given way, still holds together shoulder to shoulder, but already wavers, and the officer, gathering his last strength of will, gives the command: 'Fire!' The cry of the crowd, the yell of terror and threat, drowns the command, but not wholly. The rifles waver. The crowd pushes. Then the officer points the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

barrel of his revolver at the most suspicious soldier. From the decisive minute now stands out the decisive second. The death of the boldest soldier, to whom the others have involuntarily looked for guidance, a shot into the crowd by a corporal from the dead man's rifle, and the barrier closes. The guns go off of themselves, scattering the crowd into the alleys and backyards." Trotsky here is probably thinking of 1905. "But how many times since 1905," he asks, "has it happened otherwise!" Thus the mere accident whether it is someone among the crowd or someone among the troops who has the courage to shoot first may determine the difference between 1905 and 1917! Where then are the laws of revolutions? How can a man who is as intelligent as Trotsky in detecting the variable role of personality in revolution speak of "a historic process" as if it were teleological and fixed? Experience has obviously made him a realist in examining the past but has not spoiled the conviction which keeps him orthodox in his faith for the future.

Faith results in apologetics; and apologetics take the form of appeal to sociological law and historical analogy. "Events," Trotsky tells us¹² "can neither be regarded as a series of adventures, nor strung on the thread of some preconceived moral. They must obey their own laws. The discovery of these laws is the author's task." There are two things to which Trotsky especially applies the name of law. Those are what he calls the law of unevenness, "the most general law of the historic process," and, derived from the universal law of unevenness, "another law which for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of *combined development*."¹³ By "unevenness" he means the condition to be found in every country whereby it is advanced in certain regards and backward in certain others. By "combined development" he means the process by which a backward country borrows from advanced ones and assimilates new and modern institutions though at the same time maintaining other antiquated institutions. For Trotsky "the law of combined development" reveals itself most indubitably in the history and character of Russian industry. "Thanks to this, Russian industry developed at certain periods with extraordinary speed. . . . In reality the possibility of this swift growth was determined by that very backwardness which,

¹² *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

also, continued not only up to the moment of liquidation of the old Russia, but as her legacy up to the present day."¹⁴ In the very law of combined development he sees¹⁵ the source of all Russia's glory in 1917 and sorrow since 1923: "The law of uneven development brought it about that the contradiction between the technique and property relations of capitalism shattered the weakest link in the world chain. Backward Russian capitalism was the first to pay for the bankruptcy of world capitalism. The law of *uneven* development is supplemented throughout the whole course of history by the law of *combined* development. The collapse of the bourgeoisie in Russia led to the proletarian dictatorship—that is, to a backward country's leaping ahead of the advanced countries. However, the establishment of socialist forms of property in the backward country came up against the inadequate level of technique and culture. Itself born of the contradictions between high world productive forces and capitalist forms of property, the October revolution produced in its turn a contradiction between low national productive forces and socialist forms of property."

The fact that Russia, despite its having imported an advanced industrial technique, was still primitive in its property relations certainly helps to explain why backward Russia became the scene of the world's most advanced revolutionary movement. And the fact that Russia, despite its having attempted to instal the most advanced theory regarding property, still suffered from an inadequate industrial technique and culture certainly helps to explain why that revolutionary movement was "betrayed." But neither fact would alone explain either the revolution or its betrayal. And how is either fact the result of law rather than of a particular series of historical happenings that may never again be matched in the world's history—Tartar invasion, Byzantine influence, late importation of serfdom, exclusion of the French Revolution, late importation of the Industrial Revolution, defeat in the World War, corruption in high circles, and many other factors, antecedent, consequent, and intermediate to those? "Unevenness," to be sure, and even "combined development," but why "law"? Trotsky is certainly too intelligent and too well-informed an observer of historical events to wish to simplify the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵ *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp. 299–300.

complicated processes of history by giving the dignity of "law" to any set of conditions which, if one does not examine them too closely, can be found more than once in history. And that is said without irony. For not only is Trotsky intelligent and well informed, but the argument that it is sociological law which made inevitable both the bolshevik triumph of 1917 and its "betrayal" since 1923 can be used as a retort to the many pages in *The Revolution Betrayed* in which he sears the Stalinist bureaucracy for their perversion of the true spirit of the revolution. If they are acting in accordance with the "law of combined development," then how are they traitors to the Revolution? Why, if laws determine what individuals must do, is Stalin any more than any others responsible for betraying the Revolution? Why would it not have served Trotsky's purpose just as well to portray him, or Milyukov or Kerensky, as the instrument of a historic necessity rather than as a vile traitor or weakling?

Nor is strength added to the force of Trotsky's exposition and argument by his frequent appeal to historical analogy. The analogy is sometimes a good pedagogical and literary device. It heightens interest, creates respect for the author's learning, and often adorns a tale or points a moral. But if it is to have any scientific value it must be accurately drawn and the two parts of it must coincide precisely. Little, for example, is gained by referring to the period since 1923, as Trotsky repeatedly does in *The Revolution Betrayed*, as Thermidor—unless he means merely to use a figure of speech to designate a period of reaction and return to normal. For if Russia is now going through its Thermidorian Reaction, then Trotsky was the Robespierre of the Russian Revolution. And Robespierre was not only physically dead after Thermidor, he was spiritually dead too, except as a slogan for hopeless conspirators like Babeuf to rally to, and, though restored to patriotic respectability by recent scholarship, has never become a potent factor in French politics since his death. The analogy to Trotsky may hold good even so, but certainly Trotsky, who looks for the working class in Russia "in its struggle for socialism to debureaucratize the bureaucracy"¹⁶ should be the last to admit that.

And if Trotsky is the Robespierre of the Russian Revolution, who

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

is the Barras? Stalin? But Trotsky himself implies that Stalin is the Bonaparte of Russia, and gives a whole section of his book¹⁷ to the analysis of "Bonapartism as a Regime of Crisis." "Caesarism," he exclaims,¹⁸ "arose upon the basis of a slave society shaken by inward strife. Bonapartism is one of the political weapons of the capitalist regime in its critical period. Stalinism is a variety of the same system, but upon the basis of a workers' state torn by the antagonism between an organized and armed soviet aristocracy and the unarmed toiling masses. . . . Stalinism and fascism, in spite of a deep difference in social foundations, are symmetrical phenomena." But if Stalin is Bonaparte then Russia has entirely skipped Thermidor—the period in which bourgeois control of society and government was re-established and a bureaucracy founded—and has gone directly into Bonapartism—the period of centralized bureaucracy under a dictator. It would appear that Trotsky means that Stalin was now Barras and now Bonaparte. In an article entitled "Thermidorianism and Bonapartism" in the *Militant* for January 15, 1931, Trotsky made that clearer: "Revealing in the present Stalinist régime the elements of Thermidor and the elements of Bonapartism, we are far from falling into a contradiction, as is thought by those to whom Thermidorianism and Bonapartism represent abstractions and not living tendencies, one growing over into the other." In 1931 at least, Trotsky used those terms merely as convenient labels for certain types of counterrevolutionary activity. That is legitimate and has its use. But in the present volumes, filled as they are with historical parallels, such labels become confusing because the past movements to which they refer are not sufficiently analogous to the present situations.

Incidentally, the parallel to Thermidor also lacks "punch" as propaganda. Trotsky correctly appreciates¹⁹ a point elaborated more recently in a book by Professor Georges Lefebvre, of the Sorbonne,²⁰ that the bureaucracy which the Reaction founded became the notables of Bonaparte, who in turn received places among those of the Restoration. Their descendants held on to their posts until the Third Republic and their influence is still to be traced in the bureau-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 273-79.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

²⁰ *Les Thermidoriens* (Paris, 1937).

cracy of twentieth-century France. Where Trotsky will find it hard to agree with M. Lefebvre is in the contention that the Thermidorians laid the foundations for one or two quite commendable institutions which still affect the people of France. Thermidor, nevertheless, seems to have had more lasting results, whether for good or evil, than the Robespierriest Republic of Virtue. If there is anything in revolutionary analogies, Trotskyites can derive little consolation from that. But who can say that there is in historical analogy anything more than an indication of one of the possible outcomes of a present situation?

No other analogy is pushed so hard in Trotsky's two most recent works as the one to Thermidor. There are several others, however, that are equally inaccurate and therefore meaningless. Trotsky seems to have learned his history of the French Revolution from Madelin²¹ and Jaurès.²² Madelin he regards as a reactionary historian and often cites him only to deride his conclusions. For the opinions of the socialist Jaurès he shows greater respect. But it has been over a generation since Jaurès and Madelin wrote their volumes. Much new information and many new interpretations have become available since their accounts appeared. Few historians, since Mathiez' day would believe, for example, that Danton was the leader of the insurrection of August 10, 1792, as Trotsky,²³ depending on Jaurès, maintains. And most writers now think that Louis XVI was far from the amiable imbecile he once was supposed to have been. The opinion that Louis' so-called diary revealed a "spiritual emptiness"²⁴ is based upon a document which was meant primarily as a record of Louis' luck in the chase and was intended to have no spiritual content. And Marie Antoinette is also nowadays given credit for greater ability and intelligence (at least in her later years) than she was once generally thought to have had. The close analogy that the author draws between the ill-starred French pair and their Russian counterparts therefore has greater literary than

²¹ Louis Madelin, *La Révolution* (Paris, 1911).

²² Jean Léon Jaurès (ed.), *Histoire socialiste (1789-1900)* (13 vols.; Paris, 1900-1909). Jaurès himself wrote the first four volumes dealing with the period of the Constituent Assembly, the Legislative Assembly, and the National Convention, i.e., 1789-95.

²³ *History of the Russian Revolution*, III, 363.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 92.

scientific value. Moreover, Trotsky seems able only rarely to discern any merit in an opponent. If the Tsarina Alexandra wished to take strenuous measures, it could be only because she was unimaginative and cruel; if the Tsar Nicholas wished to avoid strenuous measures, it could be only because he was weak and stupid. It is none too great a demand upon our credulity to conceive of both statements as true; but the general impression created by the author is that he is chiefly concerned with damning rather than explaining his enemy's behavior. That impression is not weakened when, to do so, he employs an analogy of dubious accuracy.

Or take the rather complicated discussion of "dual power." Trotsky, because "an illumination of it has never appeared in historic literature," discourses on "dual power" at considerable length (I, 206-15). By that phrase he designates that situation in prerevolutionary and revolutionary periods wherein an ascending class, though having secured a share of the sovereignty, is not yet sufficiently strong to oust the hitherto dominant class and is obliged to share sovereignty with it. Trotsky illustrates that situation by examples from other revolutions. In fact, as he admits himself, he is not learning from the past to understand the present; rather "the mirror-like character of the February [1917] double government has enabled us better to understand those epochs in history when the same thing appears as a full-blooded episode in a struggle between two regimes."²⁵ There can be no quarrel with a historian who, sufficiently forearmed and cautious, exploits present experience to interpret past events. Moreover, in this instance, caution is not particularly necessary, since it would seem obvious enough, without an elaborate appeal to historical precedents, that an ascending group must share sovereignty with still powerful rulers until it is sufficiently strong to oust them entirely and then must expect to have to share with other groups that are yet to ascend. When one appeals to history for analogy even of the obvious, however, one ought to be precise regarding one's historical data. But in the statement that the French Constitution of 1791 "in reality concealed from the people, or tried to conceal, a double sovereignty,"²⁶ Trotsky implies a kind of conspiracy which never existed, since almost no point was more

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

openly debated in 1789-91 than that whether exactly such "a double sovereignty" of king and bourgeoisie should be created. That was in fact the reason for "the fiction of a complete independence of the legislative and executive powers." Indeed, in his exploitation of the French Revolution, Trotsky is not even careful. Elementary chronological data are confused in the discussion of the Paris Commune, which is also made throughout its history to be an opponent of the Convention except when it dominated it.²⁷ The Girondins are said to have ruled the Convention "with the hand of Terror."²⁸ Furthermore, the use of such phrases as "armed plebians" to describe Cromwell's army and "lowest depths of the petty bourgeoisie" to describe the Levellers²⁹ reveals how easy it is to read present notions into past conditions if one starts out to prove rather than to test a hypothesis. On the other hand, the analogies drawn to the July days, when the Kerensky government succeeded in preventing Leftist demonstrations, are quite striking.³⁰ They reveal several interesting points of comparison with the massacre of the Champ de Mars in 1791, the June days of 1848, the Commune of 1871, and Spartacus week of 1919, though Trotsky fails to distinguish sufficiently between these movements which were only momentarily checked and those which were entirely arrested.

The author's weakness for historical analogies is a natural result of what he calls³¹ "the inevitable schematism" of his chapters. To the same cause can be traced the numerous generalizations that dot his books. Some of them seem entirely valid. On the analysis of the causes of revolution there are many penetrating pages scattered throughout the volumes. In general, though he has nowhere "schematized" on that subject,³² it appears that he attributes revolutions chiefly to three antecedent conditions. Those are the weakness of the ruling classes, the discontent of the oppressed classes, and intelligent leaders among the revolutionary minority. Receiving less space but equally important to Trotsky are two other antecedents, resulting in part from the first three. Those two are the spread of a revolutionary spirit among the people, or, in other words, the solidi-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 77-82.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I, xx.

³² Cf., however, *ibid.*, III, 173-75.

fication of public opinion, and a revolutionary program. It is especially significant that Trotsky does not identify the solidification of public opinion with class consciousness. "In reality," he says,³³ "classes are heterogeneous; they are torn by inner antagonisms, and arrive at the solution of common problems no otherwise than through an inner struggle of tendencies, groups and parties. . . . An example of one party corresponding to one class is not to be found in the whole course of political history. . . ." Such an analysis of revolutionary "causes" seems to be sufficiently comprehensive and satisfactory.

In some of his other generalizations Trotsky is, however, less happy. When he says³⁴ that "not one serious revolution yet . . . has let the deposed monarch escape over the border," he seems to deny seriousness to England in 1688 and Germany in 1918. Or when he asserts,³⁵ "In the revolutions and military uprisings of all countries the sailors have been the most explosive material," one wonders how this applies to revolutionary movements in such countries as Switzerland or Mexico. The contention that "the masses take part in events not at the bidding of doctrinaires, but at whatever time this flows inevitably from their own political development" may be true, but how would Trotsky go about establishing its truth to a skeptic? Though it is a penetrating observation on the whole, it smacks somewhat of overstatement to maintain that "the history of all revolutions and civil wars invariably testifies that a threatened or an overthrown ruling class is disposed to find the cause of its misfortunes, not in itself, but in foreign agents and emissaries." To quote approvingly³⁶ Machiavelli's dictum that "whoever wants to found a republic in a country where there are nobles can only do thus if to begin with he exterminates them all" is, after the creation of the Third French Republic, to be guilty of an anachronism. Unless one uses the term "revolution" in such a sense as to exclude the Dutch and American wars of independence, it is certainly not "sufficiently well known that every revolution up to this time has been followed

³³ *Revolution Betrayed*, p. 267.

³⁴ *History*, I, 236.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 4.

by a reaction, or even a counter-revolution.”³⁷ The Third French Republic, Mussolini, and Hitler too might be regarded as exceptions to the generalization made in the last quotation, but probably Trotsky thinks of them as being themselves reactionary or counter-revolutionary. In that case, however, why does he say, almost in the next breath,³⁸ that “periods of reaction are characterized above all by a lack of courageous thinking”? And how about Napoleon? Or does Trotsky deny that any of the cerebrations of reactionaries, whether courageous or not, may be classified as “thinking”?

In short, Trotsky’s generalizations too often show the weaknesses of schematizations based upon historical analogy. If they have validity at all, they are likely to have it only within confines so narrow as to make them either commonplaces or too limited for purposes of predicting realistic developments. The author’s feeling that it was his task to discover laws led to “the inevitable schematism” which, as he himself feared,³⁹ might repel the reader. It does more than that, however. Since Trotsky readily admits his partiality⁴⁰ and anticipates his critics in that regard, and since, except perhaps for details, there is little to argue about in his presentation of the particulars of the revolution, his schematization and the resulting evaluation of personalities also provide almost the only good basis for criticism by a mere historian of an important historical document by a principal actor in the events with which it deals.

A curious error (not Trotsky’s) on the jacket of his *History* challenges a comparison: “Had Napoleon employed his desolate St. Helena hours chronicling the Napoleonic era, books might have been born comparable to this of Leon Trotsky.” Napoleon, of course, did spend many of his St. Helena hours dictating his memoirs, and the books that were thereby produced were not only comparable, they were, in one regard at least, superior to this one of Trotsky’s. Napoleon told us things about Napoleon that only Napoleon could have told us, for he was writing an *apologia pro sua vita* and not a chapter in a history of the class struggle. But Trotsky,

³⁷ *Revolution Betrayed*, p. 88.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁹ *History*, I, xx.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. xx-xxi.

probably a much more learned man and certainly a better-trained writer than Napoleon, here tells us little about Trotsky, except for what he betrays of Trotsky's character and parades as Trotsky's philosophy. It is, of course, unfair to hold Trotsky responsible for an error committed by his publisher's advertising staff. Moreover, it is only fair to recollect that Trotsky has already given us a quite intimate account of his own role in the revolutionary movement.⁴⁷ Of his two more recent books, and especially of *The History of the Russian Revolution*, it is nonetheless true that, because Trotsky chose to indulge in dialecticism rather than in memoirs, sociology is not much the richer and history is indeed the poorer.

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⁴⁷ *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York, 1930).