

Trotsky's Criticism of Stalin's State

In "The Revolution Betrayed"—And a Book by His Translator, Max Eastman, on "The End of Socialism in Russia"

THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED. By Leon Trotsky. Translated by Max Eastman. VII, 308 pp. Garden City, N. Y. Doubleday, Doran & Co. \$2.50.

THE END OF SOCIALISM IN RUSSIA. By Max Eastman. 46 pp. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 75 cents.

By MICHAEL T. FLORINSKY
IT is not without some apprehension that one opens a new volume by Leon Trotsky. He has written so many books! In connection with the recent trials in Moscow his views on the Soviet Union have received so much newspaper publicity that there would seem to be little that has remained unsaid. And the title of the new offering, "The Revolution Betrayed," may appear to justify the worst forebodings. It is therefore a particular pleasure to report that the apprehensions just mentioned prove to have been entirely without foundation. "The Revolution Betrayed" is probably the most readable, significant and interesting book that has thus far come from the prolific pen of the former leader of the Red Army. It is not, of course, a flattering picture of the Soviet Union, but it is a remarkably comprehensive and illuminating one, a picture moreover that is fortunately free from the element of personal recrimination that might have been expected under the existing circumstances.

Unlike most contemporary writers on the Soviet Union, Trotsky has an intimate knowledge of and a complete command of his subject. None of the information he produces will appear as strikingly new to those of his readers who have followed Soviet development from Soviet sources. Yet the canvas he fills is so broad and well-balanced as to be highly instructive even to those who do not limit their investigations of Soviet affairs to the reports of the correspondents.

Trotsky, needless to say, has a very definite point of view. Fortunately it is not necessary to share it in order to enjoy his book and to profit by it. It is Trotsky's fundamental assertion that the state of affairs that exists in the Soviet Union today has really little to do with socialism. Socialism, he maintains, "is a structure of planned production to the end of the best satisfaction of human needs; otherwise it does not deserve the name of socialism." What Marx meant by the "lowest stage of communism"—presumably reached today by the Soviet Union—was "a society which from the very beginning stands higher in its economic development than the most advanced capitalism." Marx, however, never foresaw that the social revolution would take place in a backward agricultural country like Russia. Hence the present predicament. What really determines in the long run the strength and stability of the competing social and economic régimes—capitalism and socialism—is "the relative productivity of their labor." In the Soviet Union the productivity of labor is appallingly low and the economic basis for the building of socialism is still lacking.

The determining factor in measuring socialism is not legal arrangements about property but

the effect of new conditions on human beings. "In any case, State ownership of the means of production does not turn manure into gold," writes Trotsky, "and does not surround with a halo of sanctity the *svetobop* system, which wears out the greatest of all productive forces: man." In a society evolving in the direction of socialism the functions of the State would be gradually dwindling; in the Soviet Union, on the contrary, the interference of the State is being continually extended. What is taking place in the former empire of the Czars, therefore, is not the building of socialism but "a ruthlessly severe fitting in of backward human material to the technique borrowed from capitalism."

In a series of brief but lucid chapters the author traces the remarkable evolution through which the Soviet State has passed since 1917. He examines the economic growth of the Union under the régime of planned economy, the financial and labor policy, the abandonment of the early practice of "Soviet democracy" within the Communist party for one of rigid centralization, the growth of social inequality and social antagonism under the present régime, the foreign policy of the Soviet State and its spectacular change of orientation since the official adoption of Stalin's theory of "socialism in a single country."

The tormented pages of Trotsky's narrative bring to the reader an echo of the passionate discussion that has taken place behind the closed doors of the high Communist bodies, discussion in which the fate of millions of human beings and of one of the largest countries of the world were decided in the light of Marxian dialectics. It is perhaps human that, in Trotsky's account, the Opposition which he led was always or almost always right; that in any event Stalin and his friends were invariably wrong. Although Trotsky in his chapter on "The Soviet Thermidor" makes an attempt to explain why Stalin triumphed, the explanation

given seems to leave the matter where it was before. The most illuminating part of it perhaps is the following parallel from the history of the French Revolution:

A revolution is a mighty devourer of human energy, both individual and collective. The nerves give way. Consciousness is shaken and characters are worn out. Events unfold too swiftly for the flow of fresh forces to replace the loss. Hunger, unemployment, the death



of the revolutionary cadres, the removal of the masses from administration, all this led to such impoverishment of the Parisian suburbs that they required three decades before they were ready for the new insurrection.

Throughout his book Trotsky maintains his position as an international Marxist, his firm belief in the inevitable triumph of world revolution, which was the great point at issue between him and Stalin. It was the desertion of this principle, the sacrificing of the revolutionary objective of

The Park of Rest and Culture.



Women Factory Workers.

Drawings by Leo Manes for "I Visit the Soviets," by E. M. Delafeld. (Harper & Brothers).

October, 1917, that led the present rulers of the Soviet Union, the Stalin "bureaucracy," along the path of reaction. Trotsky finds the betrayal of the revolution in every field of the activities of the Soviet Government. In his criticism only rarely does he go beyond his evidence, as, for instance, when he maintains that the right of "perpetual use" of land granted to the collective farmers "differs little from group ownership"; and again in his extremely questionable statement that "the inequality in the pay-

ment of labor in the Soviet Union has not only caught up, but has surpassed the capitalist countries."

One should not imagine, however, that Trotsky is an enemy of the Soviet system. Far from it. What he hates is Stalin and his "bureaucracy." But he foresees that the day of reckoning is rapidly approaching and that a new revolution—far less thorough than that of 1917, when the entire political, social and economic system of the country had to be rebuilt from top to bottom—will restore the control of the Soviet Union to "Soviet democracy." He expects that the triumph of revolution in Europe will prevent the otherwise inevitable defeat of the Red army in the next war and will wake up and electrify the Soviet masses. Trotsky therefore turns hopefully toward Spain.

His truly remarkable faith in the infallibility of his own method is perhaps the most striking feature of his book. There is, however, little in the history of the last twenty years to give encouragement to the Marxists of the Trotsky school. Leaving entirely aside the vicissitudes of his personal career, the invariable failure of his political prophecies would probably have discouraged a man of less fanatical convictions. Trotsky, however, from Oslo in 1936 and from Mexico, D. F. in 1937 faces the future with the same confidence that he displayed in Moscow in 1917. He believes that world revolution cannot fail him.

"The End of Socialism in Russia" is a reprint of a much-discussed article by Max Eastman that appeared in a recent issue of Harper's Magazine. Trotsky's translator gives a brilliant picture of contemporary conditions in the Soviet Union, as he sees them, a picture that fully agrees with that of the exiled Bolshevik leader. The books of neither Trotsky nor Eastman can be recommended to Moscow's foreign sympathizers who, according to Trotsky, "have a professional habit of collecting impressions with closed eyes and cotton in their ears." Their affection for the Soviet paradise, moreover, requires careful nursing. For Trotsky is in large measure right when he says that "the hostility to criticism of the majority of official 'friends' really conceals a fear not of the fragility of the Soviet Union, but of the fragility of their own sympathy for it."