

BOOK REVIEW

Leon Trotsky Speaks

BY LEON TROTSKY

Reviewed by: L. Sinclair

LUNACHARSKY described him as “probably the greatest orator of our age.” Yet, apart from a very few and rare sound films and news reels in French and German, and a gramophone record in English, cut to mark the founding of the Fourth International, there are today few sound reproductions of Trotsky's voice available. It is rumoured that there are still to be heard in the West recordings of speeches in Russian that he made to the Red Army, but this is difficult to substantiate. So we are left today with only published writings, not forgetting that many of his speeches were never transcribed and that others were transcribed but remain locked in the files of Soviet authorities, etc.

The present illustrated volume sets out to justify the orator's enormous reputation. It provides in chronological order a selection ranging from 1906 to 1940. If some of the items are not, strictly speaking, speeches, they fit the spirit of the volume and the intentions of the editor. The book opens with Trotsky's defence of the Soviet deputies for their part in the Russian revolution of 1905, passes to the Zimmerwald Manifesto against the First World War addressed to the workers of the world, and goes on to speeches made before and on the seizure of power in 1917; the section is headed Preparing the Revolution

The second section, Defending the Revolution, opens still in 1917 with a call for peace to the toilers of the world caught up in the 1914–18 war, rallies the Soviet population to help restore the country, reports on the wounded Lenin, addresses the Red Army and teaches it to distinguish between friend, ally and foe (1918–19), defines the tasks of the Russian Communist Party in 1923, outlines perspectives for the Comintern in 1924, and in 1927 defines the stand of the Russian Opposition for the defence of the Republic in the event of war against the Soviet Union.

The final section, after the final exile from Russia, is titled Building Anew. Trotsky writes an Open Letter to the Workers of the USSR in 1929, is interviewed in 1931, speaks after many years from a platform, in Copenhagen in 1932, bids farewell to Prinkipo in 1933, thunders against the Moscow juridical frame-ups in 1937, celebrates in 1938 the Founding of the Fourth International, manifests the revolutionary implications of the Second World War, and concludes with his Testimony, in 1940.

To what extent Trotsky regretted not having a public platform can be gauged from an interview he gave to the Danish press on the eve of his Copenhagen speech in defence of the Russian revolution. Unfortunately, it is not translated here. This point, emphasized by the few extracts from the Russian volume 1917—some translated here for the first time into English—raises the question: how much of Trotsky's writings are indeed translated? Remarkably little. Of the Collected Works published in the Soviet Union officially (12 volumes in 15 parts), only one, Volume XII (Basic Problems of the Proletarian Revolution), can be said to be fully available in the major languages of Europe. Of his volumes on The Arming of the Revolution, half have appeared in French and Italian but only a few

pieces in English or German. Of his many pre-1914 writings only morsels can be savoured. His *War and Revolution* is almost unknown. *Literature and Revolution* awaits a full English rendering. The list can be extended. In this respect, the post-1929 works come out better. *Trotsky Speaks* meets its own criteria. The editing and notes by Sarah Lovell are graceful, accurate and concise; the appended list of works in English available in 1972 cannot but be useful. The editor should take encouragement from the certain success of this first selection and prepare a second. The temptation to provide here a list of suggestions is avoided!