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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Leon Trotsky by Robert D. Warth and Leon Trotsky: The Crisis of the French Section [1935-36] by Leon Trotsky, Naomi Allen and George Breitman

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Source: *The Russian Review*, Jul., 1978, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 1978), pp. 344-345

Published by: Wiley on behalf of The Editors and Board of Trustees of the Russian Review

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has been included, presumably because it makes for telling invective. Much in the book has been taken from secondary works of dubious reliability. Most important, Shafarevich shows no appreciation for reasons that account for the recurrence of political religions of the kind he denounces. His own suggestion that this is the resurgence of instinct appears inane. Nor is his reduction of coercive systems to "socialist" ideas convincing: all ideologies, socialist and liberal, atheist and religious, Christian and heathen, have been used to justify evil deeds; and indeed they all have inspired some people to erect inhuman systems. Hence many of the accusations he hurls against socialism can also be made against liberalism, nationalism, and Christianity—all of them ideas he values.

While of no value to the scholar, the book is a testimony which demands attention. It testifies to the author's courage, desperation, and entrepreneurial skill. For an established Soviet scientist to write such a stinging indictment of everything the Soviet Union stands for takes courage of the kind people in the West have little occasion to develop; and one can only stand in awe of it. The intemperateness of the attack suggests the author's desperation. The tone of the book is bitterness laced with heavy irony. The spirit is a mixture of deep religiousness, inspired by Solov'ev, Dostoevskii, Berdiaev, and Bulgakov, Slavophile anti-Western *ressentiment*, and a Spenglerian certainty of impending doom: things are bad, but they will get worse. Strange that Shafarevich does not recognize the affinity of this spirit with that of the apocalyptic "socialists" he denounces. Incidentally, his pessimism expresses itself also in the lack of any prescription for action. He indicts the present but does not show us a way out.

The author's entrepreneurial skill is manifest in the fact that even in the Soviet Union he was able to obtain interesting material on subjects not only esoteric but also, by their nature, opposed to the ideological orthodoxies of the regime. One must admire his resourcefulness in getting hold of such sources. At the same time, the spottiness of these sources, the haphazard nature of what he managed to read, is clear evidence of the stultifying effect which any official control over people's reading habits will have. Free access to historical materials does not guarantee excellent scholarship, but lack of such access makes even adequate research well-nigh impossible.

Hence in a limited way, though very differently from the intentions of the author, the book does serve as an indictment of the system against which, rather indirectly, it is aimed.

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WARTH, ROBERT D. *Leon Trotsky*. Boston: Twayne, 1977. 215 pp. \$8.95.

TROTSKY, LEON. *The Crisis of the French Section [1935-36]*. Edited by Naomi Allen and George Breitman. New York: Pathfinder, 1977. 286 pp. \$13.00, cloth; \$3.95 paper.

Publishers' catalogues in recent years suggest that Leon Trotskii's career increasingly interests general readers as well as true believers. The former will find that Robert Warth has presented them with an admirable, brief introduction to Trotskii's life. The latter may be grateful to Pathfinder Press for a screed.

Trotskii's life story has been variously mismanaged lately in works by Robert Payne and Joel Carmichael. One is in safer hands with Professor Warth. Combining a sparkling style with a firm (and up-to-date) knowledge of his subject, using manuscripts at Harvard, Stanford, and Indiana as well as the voluminous published record, he has written a balanced and convincing interpretation of Trotskii's complex personality and equally complex historical role. Brilliant and flamboyant, pompous and tactless, the Trotskii whom Warth depicts was designed solely for an era of war and revolution. In quieter times, the same man was hopelessly at sea.

*Leon Trotsky* appears as part of Twayne's World Leaders Series, and one senses that the book's brevity is due to the publisher's specification. Such brevity exacts its toll, of course, particularly in the compressed treatment of Trotskii's major writings and wide range of intellectual interests. It is regrettable that the author, whatever the reason, could not have written at far greater length, since he has done wonders in less than two hundred pages. Warth is particularly deft in clarifying the course of Trotskii's fatal hesitations, untimely illnesses, and general tactical ineptitude during the power struggle following the collapse of Lenin's health in 1922. He has taken pains to indicate lacunae in our present knowledge of Trotskii's career, e.g., the origins and timing of his decision to become a Marxist, or Trotskii's precise role during much of the revolutionary year 1917. One should add that there is a bibliography which even the specialist will find useful.

One wonders, on the other hand, who will make use of *The Crisis of the French Section*. The book consists mainly of excerpts from the Russian leader's repetitious letters to squabbling French followers in the mid-1930s. The formation of the Popular Front in 1935 and its electoral success in 1936 deepened existing divisions within Trotskii's tiny band of supporters in France. Isolated in a Norwegian village, Trotskii attempted to give tactical and ideological direction to these obstreperous and maladroit French radicals.

For the most part, Trotskii's harangues focus on a narrow range: reject the "social-patriotism" of the Popular Front, maintain militancy, preserve ideological purity. The editors serve this up as vital guidance for the late 1970s, "useful lessons for today about Marxist politics and the nature of revolutionary parties." "The current theory and practice of some sections of the Fourth International," they warn us, "suggest that not all of their leaders have absorbed the lessons Trotskii tried to teach in 1935-36." That may well be so, but to nonbelievers, *The Crisis of the French Section* is likely to appear a tedious curiosity piece.

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ULAM, ADAM B. *A History of Soviet Russia*. New York: Praeger, 1976. viii, 312 pp.

This addition to the already monumental works of Adam Ulam may be sincerely welcomed. It adds no knowledge or insights not already available in his longer books, but may be regarded as a service to the public. It is a comparatively short survey of a vast subject, designed for beginners rather than specialists. Every writer, especially of necessarily simplified general