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In defence
of Trotsky:
Hillel Ticktin
demolishes
Robert
Service

INTERVIEW

Developing Marxist theory

The *Critique* journal is celebrating its 50th issue. Peter Manson spoke to its editor, Hillel Ticktin

What would you say have been the achievements of *Critique* over its 50 issues?

What we set out to do in 1973 was to initiate a serious theoretical study of the Soviet Union. That had been sorely lacking on the left, which had not undertaken a thorough examination based on Soviet experiences and material in Russian. Not having such experience to draw on and knowing very little about the detail of Soviet life, the left for the most part resorted to dogma.

You mean notions of the USSR as some kind of deformed workers' state or an example of state capitalism?

Yes, that's right. And we did succeed in breaking down this resistance to a more scientific approach and start to encourage the left to drop its dogmatism.

Other than that, we undertook to develop Marxist theory and apply it to current circumstances more generally. Obviously one journal cannot go very far, but that was our aim and I think we achieved some modest success.

Our first issue had a print run of over 2,500 and it sold out very quickly. We subsequently increased this to 5,000. During this time we continued to focus on the Soviet Union.

When were you in the USSR yourself?

The early 60s. Although I was critical of the Soviet Union before I went there, I was nowhere near as critical of it as I became. What I saw was in fact worse than what was being described by people either on the right or left - the great difficulties of everyday life, the atomisation, the awfulness of state control that went far beyond anything in Nazi Germany. I was also surprised by the extent of anti-Semitism.

I didn't know any Russian before I went to the USSR, but I took lessons in the language during my period as a PhD student in Moscow.

How has *Critique's* role evolved over the years?

Well, we began with the Soviet question and gradually changed in the direction of a more rounded Marxist journal. Clearly one's understanding of the Soviet Union was a key part of that.

From the beginning, *Critique* organised conferences - the latest is this Saturday. Our 1973 conference attracted 500 people, with Ernest Mandel, Ralph Miliband, myself and other speakers. Those events certainly had an impact.

At first we were probably naive. I wanted to be non-sectarian and embrace all the different views on the Marxist left. So we had, for example, members of the International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party, Paul Sweezy of *Monthly Review* and the International Marxist Group on the advisory board. Mandel was also on it. But this simply did not work.

The IS wanted *Critique* to carry articles elaborating its state-capitalist view of the Soviet Union and was unable to see beyond that. There was also a problem with the IMG. The people on the board were fine, but they did not really agree with the leaders of their organisation. A complication was that the journal had been founded by people in the Institute of Soviet Studies, but the IMG took a different approach.

It soon became clear that *Critique* had to be independent and even an

advisory board where representatives of the groups were present was a problem.

But we were certainly on friendly terms. Mandel and I had a debate in London - in 1978, I think - that went on all day. But people gradually dropped off the board and its nature changed, although Mandel remained on it.

How do you see *Critique* developing?

Originally the intention was for it to come out twice a year, but for a time it was nearer once a year. Now, however, it is published by Routledge and comes out quarterly.

The journal now has more space and we have a policy of publishing anything of sufficient quality within the Marxist tradition. The aim remains the same: to develop Marxist theory.

The features we have published around the question of capitalist crisis have been better than most published elsewhere. Most of what passes for 'analysis' in the media - and on the left - has been hopeless. There is no real explanation as to why crises take place - apart from pointing to the bubble, which does not explain anything.

The debate over the theory of crisis does, however, show that it is possible for there to be a number of different views within Marxism. In one sense there are more viewpoints within Marxism than outside it.

***Critique* has always adopted themes for exploration. In the last couple of years you have personally become involved in campaigning for a Marxist party. Do you think that the question of party might be a useful theme to explore today?**

To do that we would have to have writers of sufficient quality. The left is in a very poor state and is desperately in need of theory before a party can be formed ...

... which is in itself a question of theory.

As I say, it is not that easy to get good people to write. We could hope for the best and accept anything that comes, but I would want contributions of a high enough standard, which are not always that easy to get. So that would be a problem.

However, it might be useful to have an issue on that question. That more or less relates to the present situation - that is to say, the situation resulting from the crisis. It is fairly obvious that more people will look to socialism, but will not know how to get it. The attitude towards capitalism has clearly changed. We knew it does not work, but the present crisis has made that more obvious to many people, including those who are suffering badly as a result.

One would therefore expect a demand for change and so, yes, that puts the question of party on the agenda. That is linked to

the question of crisis - a long-term one, not merely cyclical, and one that will develop more and more powerfully.

As for themes more generally, the crisis will no doubt be an ongoing one. We have one theme per year and the current one is 'Marxism and freedom of expression', coinciding with our 50th issue. In 2011 we are planning to revisit the question of Stalinism - it just so happens that it will be 50 years since Khrushchev ordered the removal of Stalin's body from the mausoleum in Red Square.

I was actually in Moscow in 1961 - the university department where I was based was opposite Red Square and the event created a tremendous stir at the time. I went there during the session of the 22nd Congress when Khrushchev made his speech and a whole lot of people had come to Red Square. They were milling around and actually speaking to each other about politics, which was quite different from anything that had happened for more

than 40 years.

1961 was undoubtedly an important moment, and so we in *Critique* are using the opportunity of the anniversary to look back at the whole question of Stalinism. This is particularly pertinent, since there has been something of a revival of Stalinist nostalgia

in Russia.

Which says a lot about the failure of the international movement for socialism.

Yes. Hopes in both the market and for a better society have been dashed. But a residual yearning for a socialist future remains. These are some of the issues we will be discussing at our February 27 conference ●

Remembering the past, rethinking the future

Saturday February 27, 12 noon to 5pm: *Critique* seminar, London School of Economics, room B212, second floor, Columbia House, corner of Aldwych and Houghton Street, London WC1.

Speakers: Hillel Ticktin, Mick Cox. Followed by celebration of 50th issue. Organised by *Critique*: critique.journal@yahoo.co.uk.



Hillel Ticktin

REVIEW

In defence of Leon Trotsky

Hillel Ticktin demolishes Robert Service's much hyped *Trotsky: a biography* (Harvard University Press, 2009, pp600, £25)

Bob Service's book on Leon Trotsky has been very widely reviewed by left and right.

Perhaps one of the best reviews is by Paul Le Blanc ('Second assassination of Trotsky' *Links - International Journal of Socialist Renewal*: <http://links.org.au/node/1440>). He makes most of the points necessary in any competent overview: that the book has a scholarly apparatus, with many points that are useful and some that are new; that there is an element of sloppiness in a number of the assertions; and that Service appears to be driven by a political agenda, which is not dissimilar to that of the research institution where he did much of his work for this volume - the Hoover Institution, known for the rightwing views of its scholars.

Le Blanc deals with some of the assertions made over the radio and television: that this is the first full-scale biography of Trotsky, not written by a Trotskyist. That the Russian, Volkogonov, had written a critical biography some 10 years ago is well known, but Service excludes Russians in his written claim to authorship, though not when interviewed on Radio 4 in the UK. It is obvious nonsense and Le Blanc quotes the examples of Payne, Segal and Carmichael.

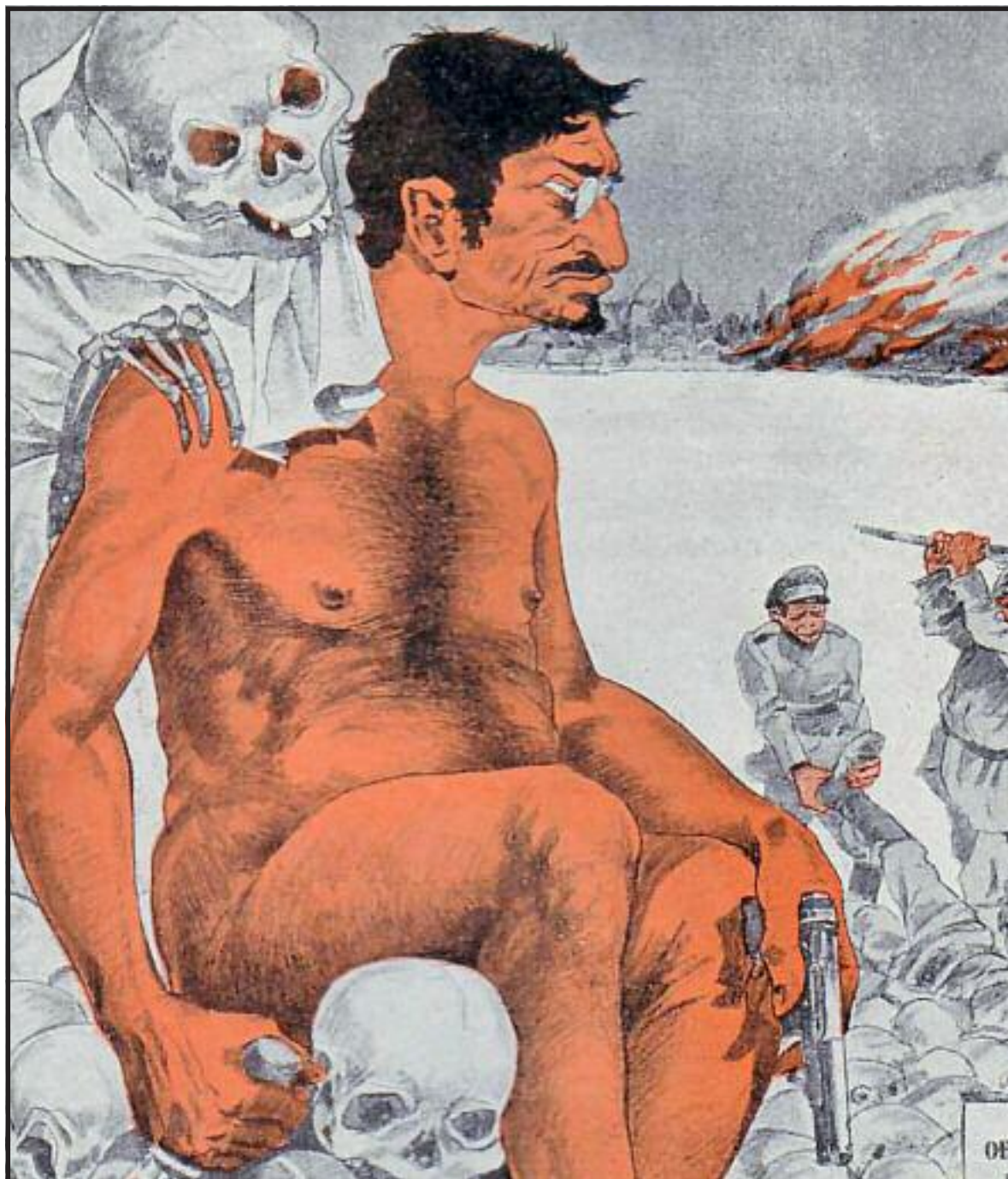
The book flows easily and keeps the attention of the reader. The reasons, however, are only partly to his credit. *Trotsky: a biography* is superficial. It has a scholarly form, but is not scholarly, whatever else it might be. Service makes assertion after assertion as to Trotsky's motivations, Trotsky's character, Trotsky's originality, his intellectual competence (not to speak of his ability as a lover) - all without sufficient reference or argumentation.

His fundamental thesis is stated at the beginning - that Trotsky belongs, along with Hitler and Stalin, among the great killers of all time. Trotsky, Service asserts, was a violent man. Secondly, he asserts that Trotsky made a career out of politics, but was a *poseur*, and an arrogant, cold, would-be leader.

His own description of Trotsky's history fails to support these theses. He shows how Trotsky turned down Lenin's offer to be prime minister, and various other prominent roles, and only reluctantly became the commissar for war. However, the one section of the book which is without the constant snide remark and which breaks with the popular Stalinist portrayal of Trotsky, as playing no role, is the section on the civil war, where Service makes clear in some detail that Trotsky built up the Red Army and was pivotal in its eventual victory. He makes even clearer Trotsky's bravery and his military prowess, citing his importance to the defence of Petrograd.

Terrorism

However, he argues that Trotsky was part of Bolshevik brutality and terrorism. He points to the fact that Trotsky did not countermand Stalin's arbitrary executions in Petrograd. Given the bad blood between them, there is every reason to believe that Stalin might have disobeyed, as he had before, and so caused a crucial breach at a time when the Bolshevik situation was desperate. While this is only supposition, we cannot lay Stalin's actions at Trotsky's feet quite so



Perpetuating anti-communist myths

simply. More serious is Service's use of Trotsky's defence of terrorism in *Terrorism or communism*.

Any scholar reading Trotsky's chapter on terror in that book can recognise that the use of the word 'terror' is not the same as its use today, referring to such terrorist groups as the IRA or al Qaeda. In the introduction to that book, Trotsky explicitly condemns terror of the latter kind. He had done so much earlier, referring to anarchist groups. Trotsky is using 'terror', in the relevant chapter, in the sense of the Russian word *ushas*, which refers to fear and horror in the first instance. He is arguing that during a period of war, particularly a brutal civil war, fear is a necessary component. He is also saying that since war is war, people are killed and executed, particularly when the regime itself is at stake, and that the whites were particularly brutal themselves.

This cannot be gainsaid. Seventy thousand Jews, alone, were killed in pogroms instigated by the whites. White terror after the Paris Commune, and after 1905 showed what the alternative was. Since then we have witnessed the extreme brutality of the right and the extreme right in many instances - of which, in the post-war period, Greece, Argentina, Chile and, in the case of the British empire, Kenya are good instances. The brutality of the right does not justify the left doing the

same and one may hope that it will never happen again. That does not deal with the question, however.

The question that Trotsky posed was whether a war can be conducted as a socialist war, in which enthusiasm replaces hierarchy, and fear and persuasion takes the place of imprisonment and execution. To ask the question is to get the answer. Within capitalism, war is war and socialists can only modify its nature to a very limited degree. At that time, World War I was conducted under the tried and tested rules, which involved shooting deserters, instilling fear into subordinates and into the enemy. Trotsky accepted these rules as the only ones likely to be successful. No-one calls this terrorism, though later generations might well do so.

In short, Bob Service has regurgitated the standard critique of Trotsky, which he has every right to do, but without the necessary scholarly discussion of the issue. Whatever one thinks of the issue itself, Service has totally failed to substantiate his argument that Trotsky was in the same league as Stalin and Hitler. Trotsky did not directly or indirectly order the killing of masses of people, although he did sanction executions and imprisonment. Had he or the Bolsheviks been of that mind, they would have lost the civil war itself.

Historical periods when millions

were killed, as under Stalin, were not induced just by one mad man, however brutal and powerful, but by the instability and irrationality of the system itself. Seven million died in the civil war, but one cannot attribute any substantial number to Trotsky himself, though one can point out that without external intervention a fraction of that number would have died.

The Bolsheviks won the civil war, to a considerable extent due to Trotsky's conduct of it, but the destruction, the massive loss of revolutionary personnel, combined with the exhaustion and inevitable disillusionment, effectively provided the basis of the subsequent Stalinist counter-revolution. The first stages of moving to socialism will always be difficult, but the conduct of a war using capitalist forms of hierarchy both for the army and for the population, in war communism, could only demoralise the population. This is why the left oppositions of the time - the military and workers' oppositions - were so militant in demanding change.

Ever since the issue has remained open. It is hard to see that Lenin and Trotsky were wrong in that the alternative would have been a repetition of the Paris Commune with its attendant horrific destruction by the right. They took a chance and changed the world. The success of the Russian Revolution, with all its defects, altered

the world forever, and it entered a long-drawn-out and bloody transition process. Service, of course, cannot see this, as his book is a pedestrian plod, bereft of ideas, but replete with snide remarks.

Intellectual

At one level, this book is Hamlet without the prince. It tries to go through Trotsky's life on a number of planes, most particularly his personal life. There is even a chapter on his sexual affairs, including an intimate quote from a letter from Trotsky to his wife on that subject. As with every other aspect of Trotsky, Service discovers him to be self-centred in love too. While this might be salacious and draw people to read the book, it is irrelevant to understanding the man.

This is partly because Trotsky was above all an intellectual, who made crucial contributions to Marxism and to thought in general; partly also because Trotsky became the living embodiment of the Russian Revolution itself. Yet if Trotsky argued this or that or undertook a particular action, Service always manages to find an obnoxious interpretation. If he had done the reverse and always cast Trotsky's actions in a positive light, he could be accused of being an acolyte or a hagiographer. The point is that any scholar worth his salt would look at all sides and interpretations in order to consider reality. Clearly, however, that is not the purpose of the book.

In this connection, Service discovers that Trotsky was not an intellectual - or at least he was not in the least original and so there is no need to discuss his ideas, as there are none to discuss. If Service were himself a better educated intellectual, there could be debate, but he quite evidently understands as much about Marxism as Winston Churchill or Count Bismarck. Marxism is not easy to grasp, particularly at the present time, and for someone who rejects the whole theory it is probably impossible to understand its analytical power. It follows that such a person could not appreciate the development of Marxist thought. Unfortunately Service tries to tackle the issue by talking of Trotsky, philosophy and Sidney Hook, and of James Burnham and Max Shachtman, without giving the substance of the debate, or apparently being aware that Trotsky had written on Marxist philosophy a number of times in his life prior to this affair.

However, Marxism is above all a mode of political-economic analysis, used as a means of understanding the world, the better to change it. In this light, Trotsky's contributions were seminal. Amazingly, Service reduces the concept and theory of permanent revolution to the simplistic idea that the workers would take power in Russia. In fact, Marx had argued, after 1848, that the revolution became permanent only when the working class took power. The working class, as Marx put it, were in capitalism but not of capitalism. (One should note that Marx and Trotsky are talking about the collectivity, the class, and not the individual workers.) As a result, there is a permanent and persistent force destabilising the society, the result of which might lead to different kinds of upheavals and to different classes trying to take power, but only when the working class takes power does the society stabilise itself. This is arguing both that the political econom-

ic structure of the society is leading to revolution and that the working class is demanding revolution.

Trotsky took this concept and applied it to a part of the world subject to capitalism but without the political forms of capitalism and argued that there was no longer a possibility that there be any other successful upheavals, or attempts at revolution, other than those of the working class. The bourgeoisie were no longer prepared to fight for their own demands. Marx and Engels had got halfway there when they spoke of the German bourgeoisie no longer having a stomach for a fight. The bourgeoisie were afraid that they would let loose the tiger of socialist revolution and consequently they preferred to keep what privileges they had.

At one level, the background of the personnel who took power in the name of the working class was irrelevant (ie, they could be soldiers, or of peasant extraction), as long as they acted in the interests of the class. Similarly, in the English Revolution the class origin of the individuals in the Long Parliament was irrelevant to the class forces that they represented. Trotsky was right against Lenin's conception before 1917, because Lenin underestimated the necessary cowardice of the bourgeoisie and the short-termism of the peasantry. Trotsky's understanding undercut the issues, because permanent revolution was not an empiricist notion, but an inherent drive built into the structure of capitalism, which Trotsky had harnessed to the concept of a declining capitalism. The latter was something Lenin made his own, though only by 1917. It was, therefore, not surprising that Lenin agreed with Trotsky against his earlier self.

Permanent revolution applies to the period after 1917-22, in that Trotsky makes two important theoretical innovations. He argues that the social democratic betrayal of 1918-19 opened up a new period of transition between capitalism and socialism. He compares the present to the times of Machiavelli. Secondly, he argues that there had been a counterrevolution in the Soviet Union under Stalin, with a new social group taking power. Underlying it all, the dynamic of a new society pushing its way forward through the medium of the working class remains. The rejection of the exploited goes underground when it cannot express itself openly, and finds new ways of undermining the system. We are therefore living in a period of ever-present revolution, the world over. For Trotsky the revolution had to be systemic and therefore global - he was arguing that the revolution in permanence was itself global.

Others have pointed to Trotsky's conception of fascism as an important contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon. It is obvious that he was right to demand a united front - unlike the Stalinists, who actually united with Nazis in governing more than one German local state. His theory of fascism was directly contrary to that of Stalinism, which saw fascism/Nazism as the rule of the bourgeoisie by force. Instead he pointed out that it was the rule of the petty bourgeoisie - which the ruling class accepted for a time, though they did not like it. (The lives of two prominent German capitalists, Thyssen and Krupp, supports this thesis. Thyssen supported Hitler, but opposed his policies and escaped from Nazi Germany, only to end up in a concentration camp. Krupp opposed Hitler until he came to power.)

Trotsky's discussion of fascism is immediately relevant today, in that it makes clear that without Stalinism and a classic petty bourgeoisie it cannot repeat itself. Authoritarianism is another matter. The theory also points to the irrationalism of a capitalism in transition and in decline. This is fun-

damental to any understanding of the epoch as a whole. Trotsky developed a particular understanding of capitalism and connected it with a theory of long waves. I have discussed this in my book on Trotsky's ideas, but Service has no inkling of any of it.

Loser?

It is curious that Bob Service should stoop to character assassination of the most trivial kind. He raises questions of morality in relation to Trotsky's relationship to his own family members. Thus he asks what kind of man would desert his wife and children in Siberia in order to escape, and then find another partner. He brings in the question of his Jewishness, his relationship to his father, etc - all of which are merely raised, leaving the reader wondering.

The problem here is that neither he nor we actually know much about these issues. If Trotsky's father was a revolutionary and taught his son how to organise, theorise or live underground, it would be important, but there is no evidence of anything of that kind. We are told that Trotsky played down his father's social position. The introduction of simplistic psychology into historical narrative is always unfortunate, but Service insists on discovering Trotsky personal faults, arrogance, stubborn belief in his own opinion, etc, as if they are undoubted, continuous and necessary traits of the character.

If Trotsky really was that arrogant it would have quickly ensured the defeat of the Red Army. What is arrogance? He was genuinely the most intellectually and organisationally capable of the Bolshevik leaders - Service makes this clear. Trotsky might well have been contemptuous of those with inflated opinions of themselves. Without a thorough study of his personality by sociologists and psychologists, it is pointless making such a remark, unless the author is intent on a process of systematic denigration.

It is a characteristic of bourgeois scholars that they see the left-right struggle in the 20s in terms of a direct fight, no holds barred, between Stalin and Trotsky. Service tries to argue that Trotsky was no politician and so was an inevitable loser. In fact, Trotsky yielded without any real fight. He was head of the army, he had the backing of Lenin and the Komsomol supported him. The genuine old Bolsheviks supported him. He could have taken power without much trouble. However, he argued that it had to be done democratically through the party and he lost in that arena. Since we know that the voting was falsified, and in any case Stalin had specially opened the party to a wide range of people, with little understanding of the issues, this made no sense.

Trotsky did not lose in any kind of battle: he never fought. He consciously decided that he should not take power in the circumstances. He justified it with the argument that Stalin was made, in what he became, by those who selected him, and he, Trotsky, would have been the same. So, when offered power by Antonov Ovsenko, chief commissar of the army, he rejected it. This issue is very poorly discussed by all scholars, to be fair to Service. However, he takes it up as proof that Trotsky was not a politician.

In American business parlance, part of present-day slang used by historians, Trotsky was a loser. But that is not how Trotsky or any Marxist would look at it. Trotsky did not want power for its own sake: he was a soldier of the revolution and, if it meant that he had to fight as part of an opposition to maintain the revolution, that is what had to be done. He accepted his fate. So much for arrogance.

In my view, with the hindsight of history, Trotsky was wrong. He ought to have taken power. Service, like Trot-

sky himself, thinks he would have been another Stalin, but that is impossible, if one understands the dynamic of the Soviet Union of the time. With the support that he had, Trotsky would have been able to maintain power for a sufficient time to alter the nature of the regime away from what it was becoming. If Trotsky had taken power, Nazism would not have succeeded, there would have been no world war, the purges would not have taken place, and it is possible that there would have been a revolution or a series of revolutions in Europe and Asia.

Even if no other revolution would have succeeded, and Trotsky would have died as Soviet ruler in 1953, world history would have been very different and almost certainly more advanced than at present. However, no-one could have imagined the utter barbarism to which the world was subjected from then onwards. It was the direct consequence of the Russian Revolution and its subsequent counterrevolution under Stalin. Trotsky clearly hoped that the Soviet left and the Soviet working class would take power and dismiss Stalin.

Unfortunately, Trotsky was not *sufficiently* arrogant in understanding that he had become the personification of the Russian Revolution itself and his dismissal symbolised the end of the revolution, but in the most objectively and subjectively debased and confusing way possible. The Soviet Union under Stalin was neither socialist nor capitalist, nor yet a transition to socialism. As a result, it was unviable, but like Frankenstein's monster it had no parent and no future. Its rulers behaved like mad people, caught in a mass of twisted tape in which they became ever more enmeshed. Cutting through the tape - short cuts, in other words - were constantly being tried and invariably made things worse.

Dogma

Trotsky did not expect the USSR to last so long nor that it would come to an end so easily, so messily and so unsuccessfully. He did say that it could not last in its Stalinist form. He did not understand the nature of the Soviet Union that came into being in the 30s, but then nobody did or probably could have done so. He was always behind the curve of its degeneration. That, again, is understandable, in that he was an optimist, like all revolutionaries. Service tries to make these points but he gets lost in his own need to run Trotsky down.

It is unfortunate that some in the Trotskyist movement have taken his words as dogma. Trotsky was not himself dogmatic, for he is not clear whether the USSR was planned, says that the nature of the USSR is undetermined, and concedes that a social as well as a political revolution is required. Trotsky himself should not be lumbered with the simple formula that planning plus nationalisation makes for a workers' state, which has then to be critically defended. Service, however, appears as an upside-down dogmatic Trotskyist, as he tries to portray Trotsky as simply insisting on the concept of a workers' state, and always wanting to defend the USSR.

Trotsky's initial analysis of Stalinism has stood the test of time - as the seizure of power by the social layer controlling the bureaucracy. That gave them control of the surplus product. Marx, of course, talked of the form of the extraction of the surplus product being crucial. Trotsky was pointing to it, but he did not go any further. Once he lost his historic role, he was no longer in touch with history itself, and his pronouncements reflected that fact. Service, however, misunderstands Trotsky's analysis and tries to argue that he adopted a Menshevik analysis of the USSR, in order to claim

that he was unoriginal. This is simply not true. The standard Menshevik interpretation of the USSR was that it was state capitalist. The Mensheviks could not adopt Trotsky's position, as that would have meant they were wrong not to have supported the October revolution.

Robert Service, James D White, Ian Thatcher, Geoffrey Swain and various others over time have accused Trotsky of condemning socialism in one country, while practising it. The superficiality of such statements makes one wonder whether it is worth arguing the contrary case. Stalinists, of which Service is not one, have always argued that Lenin wanted to build socialism in the Soviet Union. However, there is no evidence of this, except such as Stalin forged or misinterpreted. The very act of taking power in one part of the world (the Soviet Union was not one country) did imply that the Bolsheviks were establishing a base, and like all bases it had to be built up, fortified, made liveable, etc. Treaties had to be entered into. That has nothing to do with socialism. In so far as such a base was helping the establishment of socialism over the world, even if it got wiped out and was rebuilt, one could talk in loose terms of building socialism. That is not the same thing as saying that socialism was being established in the USSR.

It is ridiculous to argue that the act of rebuilding the ruined Soviet Union in itself constituted a process of building socialism. Obviously the Bolsheviks could not rebuild it as a simple capitalist country either, and that was the tragedy, which facilitated Stalin's rise to power and Stalinism. It is worth noting that Trotsky explicitly criticised Preobrazhensky, the economic theorist of the left opposition and his close ally until he capitulated, for wobbling somewhat towards the concept of socialism in one country. Preobrazhensky repudiated this, showing the technical impossibility of economic reconstruction without aid. Trotsky, however, was criticising the new economics, but he could just as well have made the remarks of Preobrazhensky's fantasy of a Soviet Union which is successful alone but then reaches the limits of socialism in one country and takes on the world.

It is not surprising that those who do not understand Marxism also do not understand the meaning of socialism itself. Since both capitalism and socialism are global systems, only a global change is possible. It can begin anywhere, but it cannot sustain itself in any part of the world until socialism has established itself as an historically superior social system.

A superficial historian or writer will take words used at face value, without comparing them to conflicting statements, often made at the same time. This, indeed, is a major fault of this book, in that Service does not look for more than one source when using controversial quotes, and he does not try to dig deeper than that quote. As we know, individuals can say any number of things, or act in a series of ways, but it is the job of the historian to determine what idea or form of action lies at the core of their operation or their being, or if there is none.

Hindsight

Trotsky saved Victor Chernov from the crowd in July 1917, but Service tells us that he only did it to avoid the left being victimised, and implicitly not because he was a decent human being. How does he know that? Could Trotsky really have been so calculating; and for that matter so convincing at the time, without including some common humanity in his speech?

There is almost no paragraph devoid of an undocumented snide remark, reflecting the author's sustained anti-Trotsky animus. This book

probably is unique in producing more personal criticisms of Trotsky than any other. Few of them make much sense, however. As indicated above, we are told that Trotsky decided on the career of a politician. Today when the word 'politician' conjures up images of corruption, betrayal of principles, men and women with views for all seasons, etc, it is an insult. However, no Marxist would ever see their devotion to the cause as a career. Politicians do have careers, but it is not a career to be a professional revolutionary, which condemns you to a life of perpetual begging, uncertainty and permanent insecurity. Clearly from the Service perspective Trotsky was an unsuccessful politician in that he lost to Stalin. He was a loser.

Service goes through the years of opposition to Stalin, but he does not seem to understand the nature of that opposition. He sees it as some form of semi-democratic debate. He does not ask why Trotsky bothered with it, since it was so much of a charade. If Trotsky took to reading books during meetings, why did he attend the meetings? Clearly Trotsky hoped that if he hung on, things would change for the better. He may have hoped against hope. The discussions among the left opposition of the time, in the secrecy of private walks or perhaps at home do not exist, but we do know that some at least were less optimistic and saw that the October revolution had suffered a defeat which, together with the betrayal of the social democrats, had opened up decades before socialism could advance again. Trotsky could not have been unaware of this viewpoint.

With hindsight we know that the situation was more critical for civilisation than anybody could have imagined, but no-one could have foreseen the future terrors of Stalinism and Nazism. The only criticism one could make of Trotsky is that he was not sufficiently 'arrogant'. He was the embodiment of the October revolution - not just as an historical figure, but as a living human being who had internalised its experience and acquired the necessary understanding - some might say wisdom - that went with it. He was honest and sincere through and through, and could never have been bought off, as Stalin was.

He ought to have trusted himself to have taken on the responsibilities thrown at him, first by Lenin as prime minister and then again by Lenin in his 'testament', or shortly before he died. The problem of the revolution was that there was no-one to compare with Lenin and Trotsky intellectually, organisationally and in all-round capability, so that Trotsky had no-one else to force his hand, once Lenin was dead. He underestimated Stalin and Stalinism, thinking that Bukharin and the bourgeoisie were the main enemy. While the ultimate opponent was the bourgeoisie, he turned out to be wrong about Bukharin as the primary opponent, partly because of Stalin himself, whose social base formed very quickly.

Trotsky sacrificed his life, all his manifold talents and abilities, to the cause of humanity. He made mistakes and misjudgements, as everyone must do, but humanity had made a giant leap forward at the time of the revolution. Even though we have been partially thrown back, the potential remains and capitalism continues to be fatally injured.

Revolutionaries are made; they are not born. Trotsky and Lenin acquired their understanding and their ability to help the revolutionary tide through involvement in the working class movement. Equally, when the tide moves out, the old leaders are left adrift, and they must necessarily lose some of their old surefootedness. But only a misanthrope will charge them with this or that misstep ●