

HISTORICAL NOTES  
ON THE STRUGGLE  
TO FOUND  
THE FOURTH  
INTERNATIONAL

1934 - 1938

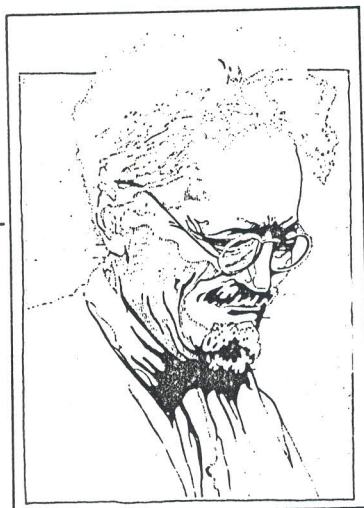
by Pierre Broue

VOLUME THREE

June 1936 to February 1937

Extracts from the French-language text of introductions to  
"Leon Trotsky: Oeuvres"  
Volumes Four to Eighteen

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*Leon Trotsky*

The Introduction to  
"Leon Trotsky: Oeuvres"

Volume Ten

by Pierre Broue

JUNE and JULY 1936

The months of June and July 1936 were really the last of the calm, industrious life which he had enjoyed since June 1935. None the less they were months of great anxiety. In addition to having at all costs to complete "The Revolution Betrayed", he had also to keep to a programme of work for the international pre-conference, which it had been decided to hold. It was in the process of developing simply into the international conference and the outcome of the efforts to construct the Fourth International, more particularly since the "Open Letter for the Fourth International" had been drafted and published. As Trotsky was aware, there was much at stake. The obstacles were no less considerable, internal ones among them. The ill-temper of the leaders of the Dutch RSAP since January and their objection to the decision of the Workers' Party of US to enter the American Socialist Party were now turning into provocative non-co-operation, nearing sabotage. The Dutch - the same people as were responsible in principle for acting as the secretaries who should prepare the conference - did not answer letters and stayed away on all kinds of wretched pretexts. All the evidence is that they had again turned their gaze towards the London Bureau; they also undertook the role of defending its latest recruit, the POUM, which, according to Trotsky, had committed an act of "betrayal" when it signed the programme of the Popular Front.

He had to prepare in several ways for the conference, first of all by drafting the main documents in good enough time for them to be discussed. He then had to lead, or, at any rate to advise the International Secretariat in theoretical matters of principle, as well as in tactical problems, and he also had discussions with leaders such as the American Muste, who visited him. The obstinacy of the Dutch prevented the representative pre-conference of the essential forces of the Fourth International from being held at Hønefoss as he intended. However, he worked no less intensely with Muste, with his secretary, Erwin Wolf and with the German exile, Walter Held, to make all ready to hold what has come to be known as the "Geneva" Conference - which was held, in reality, in the Salle Pleyel in Paris.

However, nothing is simple. In spring 1936 came the long-expected explosion of the working class. The wave of strikes in France and Belgium, the blows which the workers in Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece and even Roumania inflicted on the military regimes in East and South-Eastern Europe, the ever more daring, revolutionary initiative of the workers and peasants in Spain bear witness to the appearance in strength of this new "revolutionary upsurge", which was finally giving the revolutionaries the objective basis for operating in the real world. Trotsky gives a sparkling account of the strike movement in France of which he was informed by radio and the press. The seizure of the journals in which this account was published immediately prevented it from being known. He began his sketch of this "French Revolution" to show what, having commenced, it could become, and showed his comrades how to prepare for the "second stage". But could the militants whom he was addressing and the organisations which were to take part in the conference rise to the level of the new situation which was developing? In this volume we have only one brief reference to the events in Poland and none to the other countries in Central Europe or the Balkans. Always there below the surface is his pre-occupation with the crisis in Spain. Trotsky waited for the International Secretariat to bring together the various threads of which it had managed to get hold, in order to re-construct the section which had been lost with all hands and cargo and joined Nin in the POUM. Finally, from the beginning of the new unified party in France, the POI, he violently opposed its leadership in connection especially with the publication of his own articles, which he went so far as to offer to Proletaire. He even considered publishing his own bulletin in French, with the aid of the faithful Van Heijenhoort. His collision with the "Molinier affair" was, at first, even more violent when it came

He did not know - though he could imagine - that the young and the not-so-young Nazis from the entourage of the Norwegian Fuhrer Quisling were preparing a "strike" against him of which they have long been dreaming. He did not know - and was to have difficulty in imagining - that the specialists of the GPU were completing their preparations for the collective trial in which Lenin's comrades and his former comrades in the Opposition would have to "confess" to their crimes - and to his. In this summer of 1936 as in Spring 1934 when he was expelled from France, the personal fate of Trotsky was sealed a second time with the sign of the alliance of Hitler and Stalin. Hell was opening for Trotsky.

The Introduction to  
 "Leon Trotsky: Oeuvres"  
 Volume Eleven

by Pierre Broue

AUGUST to DECEMBER 1936

In August 1936 the workers' and peasants' revolution rose to its full height again in Spain. The atmosphere in Barcelona and Madrid was like that in Petrograd in 1917. Red and black flags were flying, vehicles bore the initials of workers' organisations, people's militias carried arms, factories were seized and committees ruled. In Norway Trotsky had just completed drafting "The Revolution Betrayed". He welcomed this new, long-awaited revolutionary upsurge with all his heart, and perhaps dreamed that revolutionary Catalonia might open its doors and that he might find a place in the front lines in which he could act and fight. But, while he was waiting for possibilities to be decided, which he had commissioned Rous to investigate in Barcelona, he needed to take the rest needed after a long period of strain. Trotsky and his hosts went off on August 5 to a holiday lodge where they devoted themselves to the pleasures of fishing.

The first events in the tragedy which ended his stay in Norway appear in the background of this holiday which he had so long awaited to seek the desired relaxation. The impending tragedy still seemed to be no more than a farce. A large vehicle disturbingly kept in contact with the little family convoy, "tailing" them. It contained Norwegian Nazis, and not the least eminent ones, associated with Quisling's secretary, the big bourgeois Franklin Knudsen. The Hønefoss holidaymakers soon recognised them. They made sure that they were being followed and who was following. Then they quite simply shook them off by taking a ferry just before it moved off from land.

Behind the, however, at Wexhall, the second act of the farce - and prologue of the tragedy - was about to be played. The other half of the Nazi group, which had been spying for weeks on Knudsen's house, where Trotsky was living, thought the moment right to execute an exploit of which its leaders were dreaming: to break into the house, seize some of Trotsky's papers, show to the Norwegian public that the old Red Army leader was continuing from his place of refuge to stir up the wave of subversion throughout the world, and to get him driven out of the country.

The enterprise went badly. The valiant Nazi warriors encountered the Knudsen children, who had stayed behind. Hjørdis put the burglars to flight with calm courage. They were soon identified and arrested. None the less they managed to steal some articles and letters. Quisling's paper, "Fritt Folk", followed by Hitler's "Volkischer Beobachter" and the whole reactionary press, published a letter which "demonstrated" that Trotsky was continuing to guide the subversive activities of his supporters. "L'Humanite", true to itself, was to wait ten days and then to report the "visit" of the Nazis to Trotsky and the "interview" which he had with them.

Trotsky did not ignore this incident. He knew that he was encircled by enemies and how prudent he had to show himself to be. He also knew that no one is expected to achieve the impossible. He had a courteous interview with the chief of detectives who came to question him as a witness, and then renewed his momentarily interrupted holiday.

But not for long. A journalist, a friend of Knudsen, was soon to bring the incredible news, heard on the radio, that Tass announced the trial opening in Moscow: in the dock were not only Zinoviev and Kamenev, but former militants in the Left Opposition, Mratchkovsky, Ter-Vaganian and Ivan N. Smirnov, who had met Sedov in Berlin in preceding years and had supported an Opposition Bloc in 1932. Moscow radio claimed that all these men had "confessed" their crimes and denounced those who, they said, were the instigators, Trotsky himself and his son Sedov. This was the murderous amalgam which Trotsky had foreseen years earlier, the preparations for which he had detected, month after month, in the news about the repression which followed the murder of Kirov. The anticipated attack had at last been launched. None the less it was an abominable nightmare. He had to come back from his holiday, and to fight.

There could no more be any question of going off to Catalonia, where the destiny of mankind for decades was being decided, any more than of satisfying the American publisher who was screaming for the promised manuscript on Lenin. Trotsky now had to devote all his energy to exposing the lies and pretences in what was passed off as a "trial", to break down the wall of silence which the Popular Fronts and other governments complacently permitted to be built around him. He had to defend his own honour, his own life, those of his comrades and his former associates, those of his former adversaries and the image itself of the revolution of which he had been one of the standard-bearers along with Lenin and them. Very soon the cowardice of the Norwegian Government, with electoral anxieties in mind, terrorised by blackmail from Moscow and captive of its Nazi police and high officials, was to dispute his very right to defend himself in speaking or in writing.

In August and September 1936 the monstrous coalition which the Nazis and the Stalinists had put together to gag him finally found a docile instrument, in the person of a "socialist" Minister of Justice. M. Trygve Lie endorsed the interpretations and the decisions of the head of the passport bureau, now turned gaoler, the Nazi Ragnold Konstad. Trotsky first was isolated from the world's press, to whom he could no longer give interviews. Then he was cut off from his secretaries, who were brutally arrested and summarily expelled from the country. Finally he was interned at Sunby under the surveillance of a posse of policemen commanded by a Nazi. A special piece of legislation - the "Trotsky laws" - forced him into silence and helplessness, adopted by the same government as claimed to offer him "asylum". Trotsky now had only a slight hope of raising the desperate determination needed to break down the amalgam and to expose the pretence, by acting through his lawyers, and through the work of his son, Leon Sedov.

Sedov decided to write his "Livre Rouge sur les Proces de Moscou" only because his father had been rendered powerless. Sedov's book left not one stone upon another of the Moscow accusations. Trotsky's letters to Sedov, to his lawyers, Puntervold and Rosenthal, disclose his efforts, which often succeeded, to reveal the contradictions in what were presented as the "confessions", to seek out and to find the witnesses and the documents which would destroy the structure of lies and fabrications which had been put together in Moscow. It cost him suffering, because it was an immense tragedy for him to understand that through the trial he was involved in a blood-bath and with the fate of thousands of Bolsheviks. Another source of anxiety was that he had good reason to fear being handed over to Stalin or being reduced to total silence for months, or even being assassinated in the course of some tortuous process of expulsion. But suffering and anxiety did not impair the lucidity of his mind. He very quickly understood that the GPU, having failed in its first attempt simply because he was still alive and in possession of his archives, would prepare to deprive him of them. He was not mistaken. Whether he was facing the Norwegian court where he appeared as a witness in the trial of the Nazi louts who had burgled his office, or was in private conversation with the "socialist" minister who handed him over bound hand and foot to his worst enemies, he retained lucidity, breadth of vision and human dignity.

His friends and comrades throughout the world worked to get him out of the asylum which had turned into a dangerous trap. This was not an easy undertaking and he himself had no great confidence in its success. He even refused to believe that the solution had really been found when the news arrived that Mexico was ready to receive him. The devotion of his Mexican comrades, the reputation of the great painter Diego Rivera, the loyalty of the old revolutionary, General Mugica, and the sense of honour and democracy of the Mexican President Cardenas, ensured that there was one government on the planet for which Trotsky was without a visa, which would unconditionally receive the proscribed man.

The Norwegian Government closed the incident meanly throughout. Trotsky was put on the ship with no other companion than Natalia, un-armed and under the protection of a Nazi police bully, Jonas Lie. He ran the risks of crossing the Atlantic on a tanker in order to leave as quickly as possible that inhospitable land where, despite all, he left so many devoted friends.

Did Trotsky know what had been going on in the world, beyond what directly concerned him, while he was interned? We may believe not. Yet, the wheel of history had turned, and in the ranks first of all of that world-wide Opposition of which he was the leader, the "Movement for the Fourth International" - the name which he thought ridiculous. The International Secretariat had been located in Belgium and, as he hoped, Erwin Wolf, a young man in which Trotsky placed confidence, played an important part in it. Unfortunately Shachtman had gone back to USA and there was no American on the IS.

In Spain the POUM had once more given way under the pressure of the Popular Front. Andres Nin had become a minister, and had collaborated in dismantling the revolutionary forces in the committees, before he was displaced, on the orders of Stalin which reached Barcelona by way of the Soviet consul, the former "Trotskyist", Antonov-Ovseenko. Reconciliation with Nin and Andrade had for a moment seemed possible, but they now receded into the realm of the impossible. The majority of the Chilean section decided to dissolve itself into the newly-formed Socialist Party; here was the logical consequence of the policy which it had followed in the "Left Bloc", a Popular Front before that name was coined. Sneevliet's RSAP was moving further and further away. It boycotted the International Secretariat and openly supported the POUM. Sneevliet went to Barcelona to congratulate the POUM when Nin became a minister. An important fraction of the Belgian section, headed by Vereecken, took the same road, in turn. There were problems in the German emigration after Ruth Fischer and Maslow moved away. Johre and Füscher combined to oppose the "newcomer", Jan Bur. In Austria Trotskyists had been arrested and received heavy sentences. The Chinese were still in prison, old and young alike, and nothing was known about them. In Czechoslovakia a whole group had come out of the Communist Party, including a former member of the Political Bureau, Josef Guttman and the former chief editor of Rude Pravo, Zavis Kalandra. It denounced the Moscow Trial and declared for the Fourth International. In Argentina, a young intellectual who came from the Communist Party - a son of the General-President of the Republic - Liberio Justo, took the same road amid much publicity. A current in the Communist Youth in Brazil and the leadership of the Brazilian Communist Party were preparing to do the same. The Trotskyists in the camp at Vorkuta organised demonstrations against the trial. They elected a strike committee, led by Grigorii. Ia. Iakovin, and began a hunger-strike for their demands as political prisoners. Trotsky was never to know of this, any more than he knew about the friendship for the Trotskyists which his son, Sergei, experienced.

On the boat taking him to Mexico he was occupied with the first Moscow Trial. In Mexico it was to the second Moscow Trial that he was to have to devote all his energies, in the "blue house" at Coyoacan which the painter Diego Rivera lent him.

\* The Introduction to  
 "Leon Trotsky: Oeuvres"  
 Volume Twelve

DECEMBER 1936 - FEBRUARY 1937

The Norwegian Government put Trotsky on to the oil-tanker, "Ruth", which was to take him with his companion, Natalia, to Mexico, with a Norwegian Nazi policeman keeping them under constant supervision. Not yet had Trotsky really emerged from the prison in which the cowardly socialist government had held and gagged him. However, he recovered his zest for work on the boat, and for struggle, with the prospect of soon being free. Though deprived of documents, he resumed his task of fighting against the Moscow Trial and pulling to pieces the accusations against himself and the "sixteen". On the crossing, he dealt very carefully with numerous episodes in the history of the Russian Revolution and of the USSR, in his article, "Pages from a Journal" (head-lined "On the Atlantic" in the English-language "Writings of Leon Trotsky 1936 - 37" and in the French-language "Leon Trotsky: Oeuvres", Volume 12).

Their arrival in the New World was an agreeable surprise for the two exiles whose apprehensions when they were put on the ship cannot be forgotten. The consideration which the Mexican Government of President Cardenas showed, the friendly, enthusiastic welcome of the Mexican Trotskyists and the fraternal, warm reception by the Mexican people, seemed to tell them that they had come to a new and in many ways surprising world. So too was the extraordinary "blue house", where Diego and Frieda Rivera offered them hospitality and friendship at Coyoacan. Trotsky's first letters, to Cannon who was now a neighbour, to Knudsen across the ocean and, of course, to Sedov, express this deep feeling of change and the hope of being able to take up work again in relative calm.

The reprieve did not last long. The Trotsky's has been only a week on Mexican soil when the despatches of the Tss agency announced a second Moscow Trial. The nightmare started again. On the defendants' bench there was again an old friend and comrade, N. I. Muralov, who had not capitulated. By his side, as in the first trial, of the "sixteen", there were former comrades in battle who had capitulated long ago, some of whom had become Trotsky's irreconcilable adversaries. All rushed to confess that they had obeyed the "terrorist directives" which they had gone to demand from their "chief". The Izvestia correspondent, Vladimir Romm, explained how he had met Trotsky in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris in July 1933. Yuri Piatakov told the story of his lightning trip from Berlin to Norway in December 1935. Another journalist, Bukhartsev, helped him to point out how his journey would not have been possible without the technical aid and support of the Gestapo. The production was no less clumsy than in August 1936, but this time Trotsky did not have his hands tied. He could reply; he could speak directly to the Mexican and the North American press. But he had to act quickly, and this was not easy at such a distance from Europe and sources of information about Moscow. He had to move more quickly than those who had put the fake trial together, to pose questions which they could not answer, to pin them down and confound them by catching them red-handed. None the less, the first reports from Moscow to mention the trial arrived on January 4, six days after the principal defendants would have been executed. Trotsky had not won the race. But conditions were greatly improved. The British press in turn had opened its columns to him. His feverish activity in January 1937 was enough in any case to strengthen the current of those who suspected and rejected the "trials". This encouraged the will to resist of the small nucleus which had already resolved to fight for the truth.

At Coyacan Trotsky minutely examined the statements and brought out the contradictions and improbabilities of this structure which beyond doubt had been knocked up by a hand no less negligent than before. His criticism of Piatakov's "confession" about his "imaginary flight" left it with no more basis in reality than the "Hotel Bristol", burned down in 1917, could possess in 1936. But he also understood how large a volume of testimony, evidence and material proofs he had to collect, in order to leave no stone of

the Stalinist edifice standing on another. Therefore, while he was crossing swords day by day, he also set to work on the general counter-attack which he regarded as indispensable. This was the Commission of Enquiry, which was to conduct a "counter-trial" (to borrow the very fortunate expression of Thomas A. Poole, who had made a study of it).

Remote from Europe, he decided to collaborate fully with the American Defence Committee and to concentrate all his resources behind it, expecting it to take the initiative in creating the Commission. Problems were already appearing in this undertaking. The devotion of the Americans was equal to every demand, but they made many concessions to "liberal" circles, believing that "neutrality" could be a guarantee of honesty, and they tried to convince some who could not be convinced. When the "Nation" weekly, the editor of which, Frieda Kirchwey, had just resigned from the Committee, declared that it must essentially "suspend judgement" on the second trial, Trotsky wrote a sharp, contemptuous letter to it, breaking off relations. His New York friends, and in particular Herbert Solow, complained to him that it complicated their work. Trotsky answered him with the magnificent formula: "I am not a member of the Defence Committee. I am Trotsky". In any case, his concern at seeing the Americans reveal an excessive tendency to conciliation and to turn their backs on working-class milieus where clear answers were called for, was not to leave him from that time onwards.

His concerns in connection with France were of a different order. He had been demanding depositions about the stay in Copenhagen at the end of 1932, but these did not arrive. Leon Sedov refused to make contact for the purpose of the defence with Henri Molinier, as his father requested. Trotsky was furious and spoke of criminal negligence and irresponsibility. He looked for people he could rely on, people who would fulfill their undertakings. He sought the help of Held and Wolf, the latter of whom had thought on his own initiative of making statements to the press at the time of the second trial about how he knew that the accusations could not possibly be true. But new, no less difficult conflicts were ripening with the tension and the passion of those painful days.

Trotsky reconstructed round himself the crisis staff which he sought to make as effective as possible. The American Trotskyists had spared him a young man named Bernard Wolfe, a brilliant intellectual. Jan Van Heijenhoort had arrived at the same time as the Trotsky's, with once more the other utterly loyal one, Jan Frankel, who knew best the history of the movement and its archives.

When Frankel arrived with his news of a meeting on the Mediterranean with one of the Sobolevicius brothers, Senin, and the role of this man and of his brother, Roman Weil, who had been prominent in the German Left Opposition and in the International Secretariat, began to become clear. They had broken away to go back to Stalinism, but seemed never to have been anything more than GPU agents, infiltrated to work for Stalin. The same hypothesis seemed to apply to Maxim Lieber, Trotsky's literary agent in New York, who played dead and refused to hand over the least document that could be useful to Trotsky in his defence. At the same time, there was no real proof, but there were strong presumptions, of which Trotsky took note.

It appears that in Trotsky's first two months in Mexico nothing occupied his mind but the two Moscow Trials, recent revolutionary history and the crimes of the GPU. There was one exception: the war in Spain, to which he made one or two allusions. In fact the urgency of the tasks which the second Moscow Trial imposed upon him took up the whole of the time in which he had intended to bring his work up to date. This was, anyway, not the life of Lenin, which he had long since promised to Doubleday Doran; he set himself to draft a second volume on the USSR, "The Stalin School of Falsification". After the wretched victims were executed, Trotsky none the less could have a few weeks' respite, which he needed, to take up again the train of the work which had been so maddeningly interrupted during months that were crucial in world history.