

A Timely Book:

Trotsky Exposes The Lie Machine

The Stalin School of Falsification by Leon Trotsky. 368 Pages. \$2.50—Pioneer Publishers, New York.

Reviewed by Hal Draper

"ORDJONIKIDZE: Why did you dwell so long on your biography?"

"TROTSKY: ... I was not the one who first brought up the question of my biography. Nothing was further from my mind. There are enough questions as it is. But it is precisely the Stalinist faction that has substituted the question of my biography for all political questions. And I reply to fictions with irrefutable facts."

Therefore this book. There will be liberals who will see nothing in all this except more proof that the Trotsky-Stalin struggle is only a personal quarrel. But the left wing has learned through its own experiences in the Socialist Party, with the Altman and Clarity schools of falsification, that when mud is thrown instead of principled arguments, it is because the latter ammunition is lacking.

Trotsky goes at the task with a bitterly ironic pen and a mass of fact and evidence upon which to exercise it. In the "Letter to the Bureau of Party History" he marshals document after document to answer such questions as: Why didn't Trotsky join the Bolsheviks immediately on returning to Russia? Who organized the insurrection? What is the truth about his alleged disagreements with Lenin? Thus he covers the main Stalinist slanders in the period 1917-1927. An interesting appendix by N. Markin takes up the latter-day tale that it was Stalin who won the civil war, practically single-handed, with a little help from Voroshilov.

Suppressed Documents

Two suppressed documents are reprinted: the report of the March, 1917 Party Conference (just before Lenin returned) and of the November, 1917 session of the Petrograd Committee. It was in March that Stalin took his first flyer at being the party boss; he took over control of Pravda and made the main report at the Conference. The result was: endorsement of a defensist attitude toward the war; political support of the Provisional Government; steps toward unity with the Mensheviks. The atmosphere of this conference which took place under the theoretical guidance of Stalin may be judged from what happened when a misguided delegate made so bold as to mention, timidly to be sure, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the question of power:

"KRASSIKOV: ... If we think that the time has now come to realize the dictatorship of the proletariat, then we ought to pose the question that way. We unquestionably have the physical force for a seizure of power. I believe that we will have sufficient physical force both in Petrograd as well as in other cities. (Commotion in the hall. Shouts: "Not true.") I was present...

"THE CHAIRMAN (interrupting): The question under the discussion involves the practical steps for today. The question of the dictatorship of the proletariat is not under discussion.

"KRASSIKOV (continues): If we do not pose the question that way then we ought to take steps in relation to the Provisional Government which...

The Chairman deprives him of the floor.

The revolution was not on the agenda at any time during this first conference of the Party. And today too the program of the Comintern may be summed up in Chairman Nogin's succinct way: The revolution is not on the agenda.

Stalin's Biography

The section on the "Political Biography of Stalin" is rightly called only a "contribution." Souvarine's work; notably, has added greatly to our information, but the essential points that Trotsky makes, if in a sketchy form, are only more thoroughly proved by others' researches: Stalin's Menshevik deviations even before 1917, his record of constant intrigue and treachery, his failure to formulate a single independent idea or to develop a correct line a single time on his own hook, etc.

Souvarine has given further evidence for Trotsky's deduction that Stalin began political life as a Menshevik; but on the other hand, he defends Stalin against Trotsky's attack on his letter of 1911, in which he (Stalin) spoke of Lenin's fight against Menshevism as a "tempest in a tea-pot," worthy only of disdain by practical workers.

"Trotsky tries in vain," writes Souvarine, "after the event, to describe this state of mind as indifference to theory or the myopia of a practitioner," because, forsooth, this was the general condition of the radical workers, which Stalin merely reflected! In his "On the Road of October," Stalin makes exactly the same defense for himself regarding his March 1917 line: the majority of the party held this position too, and he, Stalin, only reflected this. This way of evading responsibility is exactly the same, in turn, as that of the German Social Democratic leaders, who blamed the social-patriotism of the masses for their own betrayal in war-time.

Stalin's Ethics

Much of the book, in effect, matches Trotsky's political biography against Stalin's. And from the mass of detail, one picks out the outlines of Stalin's moral physiognomy. Lenin has already characterized him in his last "Testament". Trotsky gives his own opinion as follows: "... a man in whom energy, will and resoluteness are combined with empiricism, myopia, an organic inclination to opportunist decisions in great questions, personal rudeness, disloyalty and a readiness to abuse power in order to suppress the party." Souvarine sums him up: "... a will to power out of proportion to his will for knowledge... an oriental dexterity in intrigue, absence of scruples, unfeelingness in personal relations, scorn for men and human life."

Fellow Prisoner Testifies

A former prison companion, S. Verechtchak, has given a concrete picture of Stalin as a congenital and disloyal intriguer (in an article excerpts from which were reprinted by Pravda as a reliable tribute to Stalin!). Verechtchak had been president of the Soldiers Soviet of Tiflis, where Stalin had worked as a

An open Letter to Alfred Baker Lewis On the Mass Expulsion of the Left Wing

By John Hall

I received your letter informing me of my expulsion from the Party a la Stalin. I say "a la Stalin" because I have received no charges and have had no trial, or opportunity to answer your accusations. And I say "expulsion" because you, apparently hoping that I would be as unprincipled as your payroll patriots, have given me until Oct. 1st to recant my heresies. I have no intention of doing so. I remain a revolutionary socialist.

You make a fuss about Left wing violation of discipline. You say the NEC acted to expel us because we were "an opposition political party within the SP" and we "violated a National Convention decision forbidding factional papers..." by publishing, the Socialist Appeal. Let's take the second charge first. You know: 1.—That the decision you refer to was an agreement conditioned by the promise of an internal discussion organ open to all groups in the Party, which organ has not yet appeared,—after six months. 2.—That the right-centrist NEC has refused to carry out that agreement, hoping to muzzle the left. 3.—that the Call is a factional organ of the right and center and has given not one line to the left since the Convention. 4.—That there is no rule of the SP forbidding comrades starting even a public journal if they feel it is needed. If there were, the Call would not have been started. So this charge is hokum.

Hypocritical Charges

On the other, you are inconsistent, not to say hypocritical. Though pathetically anxious to keep the corrupt and worthless Old Guard in the Party, you did help caucus activity against them. You made a pledge to the militant caucus to support me as militant organizer, though you fretted lest I offend Arkin, Bearak and Reivo. Comrade Coolidge might make your complaint, for I heard that he, being

Bolshevik for many years (leaving it a Menshevik stronghold), and where he had been unanimously expelled from the party for intriguing against the leaders of the organization thru systematic spreading of calumnies. "This aptness at striking secretly, by other people's hands, while himself going unperceived, made a shrewd combinationist of Koba (Stalin), one who drew the line at no methods, and evades all accounting, all responsibility. This character of Stalin is evident in the character of all his affairs'. And among Stalin's "affairs", Verechtchak gives details on several intrigues of Stalin involving his denunciation of other comrades to the authorities.

It is clear that the Stalin School of Falsification has not only a political *raison d'être* but also a personal origin. The least one can say is: the Moscow trials of Stalin and his latest tool, Yezhov, and the unprecedented, systematic viciousness and calumny which informed them, are of one piece with Stalin's whole record. It is quite in order therefore that Comrade Shachtman should have devoted his Introduction to the question of the recent Trials, calling the roll with cumulative impressiveness of the Bolshevik Old Guard "liquidated" by Stalin. For the Stalin School lays bare both the political and personal contexts from which the Moscow nightmares appeared and exposes the organizational methods that made their execution possible.

an honest man, sent Arkin the same size check that he gave us. You saw no harm in a left wing caucus with its "own dues system, contributions, and membership regulations". You see no harm in it today, for you maintain such a caucus in Mass, today, and make your heavy contributions to it both locally and nationally. So you know we were and are organized legally as a caucus, and have every right to continue. Finally, why were 125 expelled in New York, and eight brought up on charges in Mass. long before either the launching of the Appeal or the decision of the NEC?

On the second page of your letter you say we failed to support the campaign and national office last year. You know that's a lie! The best meeting for Thomas in this section was in Lynn,—arranged by Trotskyists! Thomas told a group of us in Lynn after the campaign that his worst meetings were those arranged by the efficient ashcan-collectors of Wisconsin, and the best in the "Trotskyite" state of California. You know that Altman, your political ally, excluded left wingers from campaign activity. And let your National Secretary, Roy Burt, explain the standing of the states in the Fund Drive, which showed the Trotskyite strongholds at the top of the list, and the LaFollette Socialists at the bottom. The saboteurs were your political allies, who were afraid to fight Roosevelt, as they now fear to fight LaGuardia.

Referendums Sabotaged

Again you lie when you say we "made no effort to start a referendum against the NEC resolution on Spain." It was initiated by Local San Francisco and endorsed by thousands of members, along with another on the gag-rule. And you know that the National Office, NEC and the Call have all refused to take the action made mandatory by the Party Constitution.

Again you lie when you say that "When charges were preferred against individual members for so violating discipline, the locals and branches involved declined to hear the charge." Lynn, Boston Central, and Worcester, gave hours to hearing your charges and found the defendants not guilty. Because they refused to become parties to your bureaucratic, undemocratic wrecking, you use your graveyard majority on the SEC to expel them.

Such frantic dishonesty must have a powerful urge behind it! You admit its nature. You cannot endure our loyalty to three basic principles of revolutionary Socialism: 1.—Dictatorship of the proletariat. 2.—Independent policy in the trade unions. 3.—Independent working class political action. With your customary display of ignorance, you phrase them as follows: 1.—"They rejected democracy under worker's control... and insisted that dictatorship by one party only, their own, was the road to power." 2.—"... the discredited communist position that it is necessary to drive a wedge between the leadership and membership of unions." 3.—"... further declared that any Farmer-Labor Party is reformist in character and must be opposed as bitterly as the Democratic and Republican parties."

What "democracy under worker's control" means I can't hope

to say. Neither can you,—certainly not until you find out the meaning of democracy. But you could find out the meaning of dictatorship of the proletariat if you could ever bring yourself to read the classics of Marxism, instead of the Nation. It has no resemblance to the fantastic caricature you make of it. But how can I hope to explain this principle to you when you haven't learned the other two?

No Crawling to Bureaucrats

You demand that the party give a blank check to John L. Lewis & Co. in the unions. You started fighting about our opposition to this right after you found that the jobs of some of your supporters might be in danger from certain trade union bureaucrats. You sent out a crawling, bootlicking letter to these same fakers, asking them please to be nice to you, and giving half a dozen examples of good work done by Socialists, most of which were actually done by the Trotskyites, whom you denounce like any stoop-pigeon. How quickly the injuries suffered by hundreds of militants in the United Mine Workers from Lewis's thugs, strong-arm men, and cops, have healed! To the man who built one of the most ruthless machines in the labor movement, you would entrust industrial unionism in America! We refuse to sell out. The party must and will fight for militant class struggle policies in the unions, and will never hesitate to criticize the conservative leadership, let the jobs fall where they may!

But in your third complaint against us, the heart of your treacherous campaign is exposed. Rather than waste time on the pious phrases in which you try to bury the truth of your policy, let me bring up its application in practice. Today you and your clique are selling out the SP to cheap politicians like LaGuardia, and demand our consent to the sellout. You have protested that you are not backing LaGuardia, but are backing the ALP. Forgive me if I refer that distinction without a difference to the College of Cardinals, to put beside the dual nature of the Pope. You will give up Socialism to support LaGuardia, author of the NYC sales tax, loyal ally of red-baiter George Harvey, sturdy defender of capitalism and honored guest of Italian Fascist organizations, candidate of the bankers and real-estate men, who demand and get lower taxes at the expense of the workers. You would give us this rotten flunkey of big business as a substitute for socialism! You would do this because you are afraid of the hardships of carrying on the fight for socialism, because you have faith neither in the working class nor in socialist principles, because you are not a socialist.

But you may succeed in expelling the revolutionists. In that case you are welcome to the hodge-podge of muddleheads, pie-card artists, and nineteenth century liberals that will remain. The Party name is only two words. We will defend the honor of that name as long as we can. But if you succeed in your campaign to cover that name with dishonor, revolutionary socialism will carry on under another banner, though you cast aside all principle and even common honesty to destroy it. The revolutionists, the overwhelming majority of the active socialists, are with us. We will build the revolutionary party. We will achieve socialism!