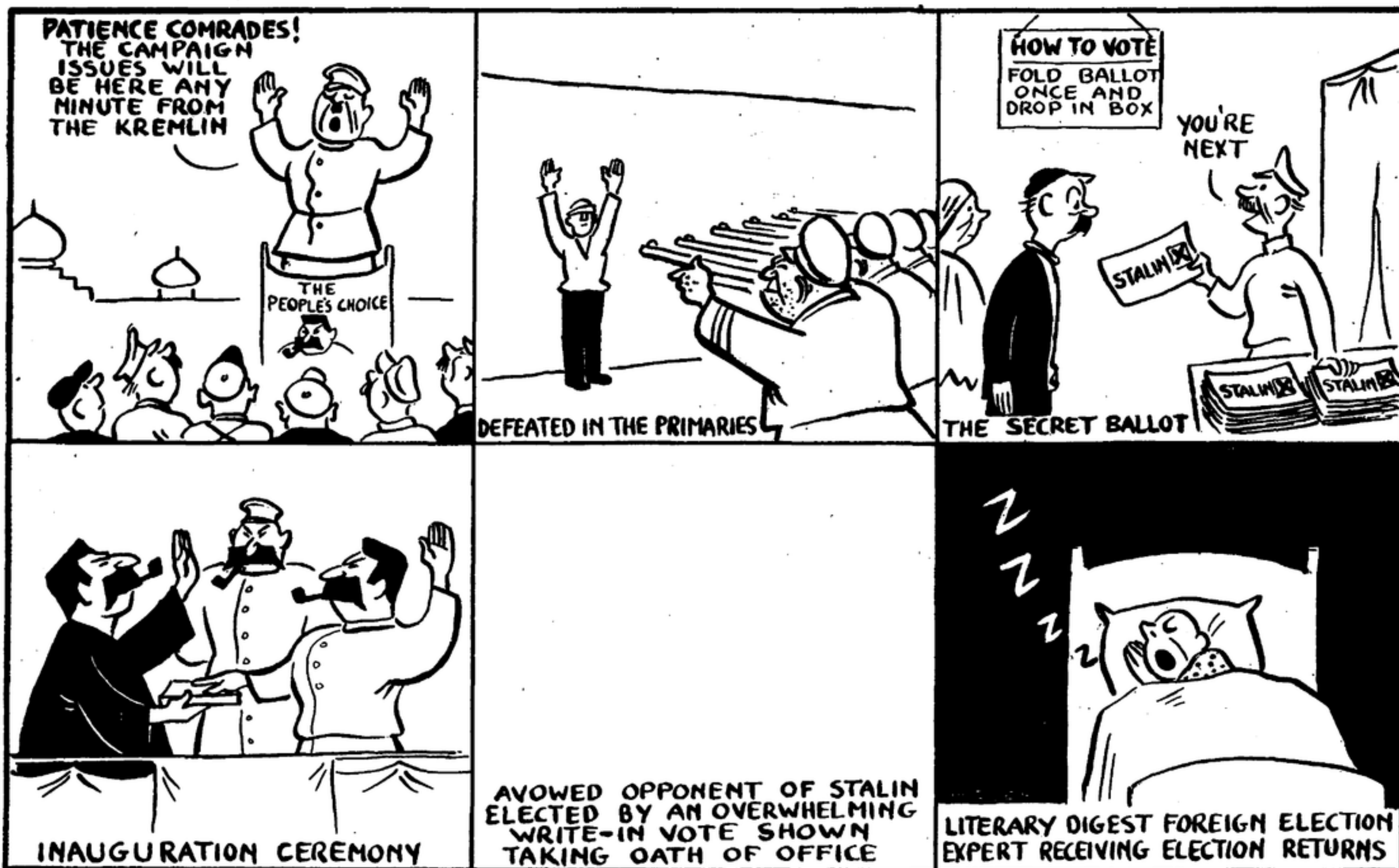


THE SOVIET ELECTIONS

By Carlo



# Bertram Wolfe On The Moscow Trials

HIS SINCERE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF MISTAKEN JUDGEMENT MAKES NECESSARY, ON HIS PART, A REEVALUATION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE SOVIET REVOLUTION

By Leon Trotsky

Bertram Wolfe writes the following in regard to the stenographic transcript of the hearings in Coyoacan (*The New Republic*, November 24, 1937):

"The writer owns that his previous position was to give credence rather to Stalin than to Trotsky, but a rereading of the Moscow confessions together with the present work (*The Case of Leon Trotsky*), or rather its closing speech carried literally overwhelming conviction that Trotsky could not have done the things charged against him in the Zinoviev-Kamenev and Radek-Piatakov trials."

Such an acknowledgement attests that Bertram Wolfe is somewhat conscientious. If Wolfe were a bourgeois jurist or a mere psychologist, one could be satisfied with this acknowledgement. But Wolfe considers himself a Marxist and is, to my knowledge, a member of a political group. A Marxist should first of all have asked himself: how, during a number of years, he could have been so deeply mistaken about questions of the highest importance, since it is not at all a question of Stalin's personal accusations against Trotsky but of the struggle between two historical tendencies: bureaucratic and proletarian. The Moscow trials were a surprise only to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois philistines. In reality, the trials were being prepared openly, before the eyes of the whole world, during a period of no less than thirteen years. The documents, collected by me in my

book *The Stalin School of Falsification*, bear partial witness to that. Neither can one be silent about the fact that the group of Brandler-Lovestone, to which Bertram Wolfe belongs, has been reared in this school of falsification, and Lovestone himself, by no means a model of conscientiousness, has done his bit in the preparation of the Moscow trials.

### Source of the Frame-Ups

This judicial frame-up, unprecedented in human history, is a result of the historically unprecedented reaction against the first proletarian revolution. Falsification—philosophical, historical, biographical, political, literary, judicial—is the inevitable ideological superstructure over the material foundation of the usurpation of state power and the exploitation of the conquest of the revolution by the new aristocracy. A Marxist who openly declares that the Moscow trials were an enigma to him until the appearance of the report of the Coyoacan hearing thereby admits that he has not understood the most important events and processes of contemporary history.

We would not begin to upbraid Wolfe a posteriori for this lack of understanding had he drawn the necessary political conclusions from his tardy discovery, i.e. had he re-examined the position he has taken during the past thirteen years. But Bertram Wolfe behaves in exactly the opposite manner. Having come to the conclusion that the Moscow accusations are a frame-up and that they thus confirm the prognosis of the Left Opposition about the degeneration and the decay of the Thermidorian bureaucracy, Wolfe demands

that... we re-examine our outlook. Unbelievable as this sounds, that is, nevertheless, what he demands. The Moscow trials and the subsequent development placed me—don't you see?—before a "new dilemma." I pointed out to the Commission and to the press that Stalin consciously brought several dozen former revolutionists to moral prostration and physical ruin with but one aim: that with their corpses he might deal a blow to the Fourth International and to me in particular. "Now it is becoming clear that he (Trotsky) has been made into a devil largely to make a case against others—leaders of a new opposition which has grown up against Stalin and his methods among his closest supporters." This is completely correct. Long before now we were aware of this "dialectic" of the frame-up. Stalin had to sacrifice dozens of his former comrades in order to create a fantastic figure of the counter-revolutionary arch-conspirator Trotsky. And then he used this figure in order to destroy all his adversaries. There were more of them than Stalin had thought. Their number is growing. It is exactly the coldly prepared bloody frame-up of innocent people, the builders of the Bolshevik party, which cannot help causing the ranks of the bureaucracy itself to shudder. There is nothing unexpected in all this. From 1931 we, the "Left Opposition," more than once foretold that the Thermidorian bureaucracy would come into deeper and deeper conflict with the development of the country and that this contradiction would decompose its own ranks. Organized control of the masses, like the democratic discipline of the party,

has long since ceased to exist. Only the completion of the Bonapartist regime can overcome the centrifugal forces within the bureaucracy. The new constitution prepares this completion. After the elections there will follow, in one form or another, the "coronation" of Stalin. Philistines will reduce all this to love of personal power. In reality, the Thermidorian regime has no perspective other than that of a Bonapartist coronation. But it is exactly now when our prognosis receives an irrefutable confirmation that Bertram Wolfe makes his completely unexpected demand—that we re-examine our views.

"What then happens," he writes, "to Trotsky's central theory that the entire military and police and party and state machinery were so degenerate that no opposition (?) could any more arise within the Party, and that a new revolution was necessary as the only road to renovation?"

We have never said that "no opposition" could ever arise within the "party." On the contrary, we have affirmed that the so-called "party," i.e. the political organization of the bureaucracy will, due to the centrifugal tendencies, further and further decompose. The right, — not Rykov-Bukharin, but the actual restorative tendencies, are immeasurably stronger in it than are the left. Under the label of "Trotskyite," Stalin is now shooting not only the remnants of the revolutionary generation but also the extremely impatient partisans of the bourgeois regime. The traditions of the October Revolution undoubtedly live in the masses. The hostility to the bureaucracy is growing. But the workers and peasants, even those who formally belong to the so-

called party, have no channels and levers through which they can influence the politics of the country. The present trials, arrests, exiles, judicial and extrajudicial shootings, represent a form of preventive civil war which the bureaucracy as a whole leads against the toiling masses and which the more consistent Bonapartist wing of the bureaucracy leads against the other less firm or less reliable elements. If the ruling clique manifestly approaches completed Bonapartism, then it is clear that every serious Left Oppositionist movement cannot help taking the road of a new revolution. But Wolfe concludes that inasmuch as Stalin is shooting many people, that shows the possibility... of a peaceful reorganization of the regime.

Bertram Wolfe saw a little piece of truth but, as has been said already, he saw it from a formally judicial and individually psychological point of view. That shows that he belongs to that generation of Marxists which is deft in organizational maneuvers and chess moves but completely unlearned in a Marxist approach to great problems. We value the sincerity of the acknowledgement of Wolfe and we say this without the least irony. But it is exactly because of this that we advise Wolfe to throw off the petty consideration of clannishness, to approach the problem without that cynicism which characterizes Brandler-Lovestone, to study anew the problem of the Soviet revolution and to re-examine his position from beginning to end. Otherwise, Wolfe will, with a delay of some years, have to make new discoveries. And time, meanwhile, does not wait. The problems are big. Important work is to be done.

Coyoacan, Nov. 25, 1937.