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# Congress Militant

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## Who was Leon Trotsky?

20 August 1990 is the 50th anniversary of the assassination of one of the world's greatest revolutionary leaders, Leon Trotsky, on the orders of Stalin, ruler of the Soviet Union.

This anniversary coincides with the earth-shattering crisis taking place in the Soviet Union -- a crisis which Trotsky long ago explained would arise. It is a crisis of **Stalinist bureaucratic rule** -- which Trotsky struggled to prevent in the Soviet Union, and whose triumph led to his murder.

Trotsky's life of struggle -- against capitalism and Stalinism -- is an example for every activist in our Congress movement.

Today, more than ever, the ideas he fought for are vindicated. They are a vital weapon for taking to victory our struggle for majority rule and socialism.

### First revolution

Already, at the age of 17, Trotsky was arrested as a founder member of the South Russian workers' trade union. During terms in prison, he studied Marxism and smuggled out pamphlets.

In 1902, in exile in London, he joined Lenin in producing *Iskra*, paper of the RSDLP, the Russian workers' party. He was known for his irrepressible energy and bold style.

In January 1905, a bloody massacre of workers by government troops opened the first chapter of the Russian revolution. Trotsky returned to Russia to join it.

Strikes and struggles spread like wild fire. Soldiers and sailors bravely rose up against their generals. The ruling class was panic-stricken.

In October the revolution reached its height with a massive wave of strikes. Workers in St Petersburg formed the first soviet and elected Trotsky its president. The soviets, made up of factory delegates coming together to co-ordinate strikes, soon grew into the main political organs of the working class, and, as Lenin said, "the embryo of a revolutionary government".

Tsarism, the old regime, was on its knees. Fearing the revolution, the Tsar issued a Manifesto offering a new constitution, including a 'parliament' with limited powers, hoping to confuse the workers.

The Mensheviks (reformist wing of the RSDLP), who believed that democracy could be won by the capitalist, were inclined to accept it.

Trotsky, as well as Lenin and the Bolsheviks (revolutionary wing of the RSDLP), understood that the Manifesto was a trap to defuse the revolution.

The day after the Manifesto was issued, tens of thousands were gathered in St Petersburg, "intoxicated with the joy of their first victory," as Trotsky put it later. "I shouted to them from the balcony not to trust an incomplete victory, that the enemy was stubborn, that there were traps ahead; I tore the Tsar's manifesto into pieces and scattered them to the winds."

The Tsar had no intention of con-

By Susan van Wyk

ceding democracy. On 3 December Trotsky and other leaders of the St Petersburg soviet were arrested and charged with treason.

In the trial, Trotsky defended the actions of the soviet in organising the armed defence of workers, and preparing the overthrow of the Tsar, in front of the Tsar's own judges! The state's case collapsed. Trotsky was banished to Siberia -- but escaped.

### Permanent revolution

In prison and exile Trotsky wrote to explain the lessons of 1905. On the basis of ideas of Marx and

support the capitalist by slaughtering workers of other countries, he said, but unite to overthrow capitalism.

In February 1917 the Tsar's regime, weakened in the war, was overthrown by a workers' uprising. Soviets were re-established and spread across the country. Power was in their hands. This was the test for the theory of permanent revolution.

The Mensheviks, with a majority in the soviets, supported the formation of a capitalist-dominated Provisional Government. Conditions were not 'ripe' for the working class to take power, they said.

But, acting within the confines of capitalism, the Provisional Government could not meet the masses'

had been wrong; he had failed to see the need for a party built on implacably firm political ideas.

Joining the Bolshevik Party, he was elected to the leadership with only two votes fewer than Lenin in July 1917. This was a recognition of his role in the revolution.

The Bolsheviks became victims of a horrendous slander campaign by the Provisional Government. Lenin was accused of being an imperialist spy! He went into hiding; Trotsky and other Bolsheviks were arrested. But the revolutionary movement forced their release.

Re-elected president of the Petrograd soviet, Trotsky played a central role in planning the workers' insurrection in October. As his wife Natalia Sedova said, he "was the most popular speaker in Petrograd. He was pressed day and night by delegations to address naval crews, regiments, factories and trade unions."

Imperialism was determined to crush the young Russian workers' state at birth. Twenty-one armies were pitched against it.

Appointed Commissar for War,

revolution. The democracy of the soviets were crushed.

The bureaucracy was content to rule in privilege on the basis of nationalised and planned economy in Russia alone -- proclaiming the false idea of achieving 'socialism in one country.'

Trotsky explained that on this basis the bureaucracy could continue to develop the economy out of backwardness. **But they would come to oppose workers' revolution anywhere in the world.** His warnings of disaster have been proved correct.

The bureaucracy retreated from Bolshevism to Menshevism -- placing trust in sections of the capitalist class.

### CHINA 1925-27

In backward China, in 1925-27, workers and peasants rose up against feudalism and imperialism.

Stalin said this revolution should be led by a "national bourgeoisie". The Communist Party should dissolve itself into the "progressive capitalist" Kuomintang (KMT).

Trotsky insisted that, as in Russia, the Chinese capitalist were tied to the landlords and imperialism. This policy would bring disaster.

In 1927 workers rose up and took control of Shanghai, major industrial city. Trotsky warned that the KMT leader Chiang Kai Shek would try to crush the uprising. The Shanghai workers needed to form soviets and build a revolutionary alliance with the peasantry.

But Stalin ordered the Communists

to arm the working class internationally with Marxist ideas.

### Fascism

In 1933 Hitler's Nazis came to power in Germany and smashed the working class. Trotsky warned in advance that Stalin's policy could lead to this.

The German Communist Party was the largest in the world outside of Russia. To defeat fascism, Trotsky explained, it needed to organise **united action** with the majority of workers, who still supported reformist Social Democratic leaders. But Stalin bizarrely instructed Communists to denounce Social Democratic workers as "social fascists"!

With the working class **divided and paralysed** by such a policy, Hitler was able to come to power in 1933, in his own words: "without a pane of glass being broken."

For Trotsky, this confirmed that the bureaucracy could not be reformed. It would have to be overthrown by the working class in a **political revolution**.

In the end, if this did not take place, Russia would face the danger of capitalist restoration. Today this warning of Trotsky's is proved correct.

### Spain

More defeats for the working class followed. In 1936 Spanish workers and peasants elected a government in which the workers' parties had a decisive influence, with a programme for radical change.

They surged forward to carry out this programme by their own efforts, occupying factories, and seizing the land. All that was needed was the signal to get rid of capitalism.

But the Spanish Communist Party followed the latest turn of Stalinism: an alliance with "democratic capitalist" against fascism, the so-called "Popular Front".

Trotsky explained that the bosses tolerated this only to use the workers' leaders to hold back the revolution. Behind this smokescreen, they were preparing counter-revolution.

The Fascist general Franco staged a coup against the Popular Front. The workers armed themselves and formed militias to fight. But these were disbanded by the "Popular Front" leaders so as not to 'frighten' the capitalist. Workers who opposed this were gunned down by Stalinist police sent to Spain for this purpose.

Franco triumphed, and ruled in Spain until 1975.

Today 'Communist Parties' around the world -- including the SACP -- still put forward these same false policies of class-collaboration. **Unless our Congress movement, and the workers around the world, reject these policies and build our organisations on revolutionary lines, we can again suffer defeats like those in Spain and China.**

### Assassination

Despite all these terrible setbacks, Trotsky never lost faith in the ability of the working class to change society. He never lost faith in Marxism.

It was because of the bureaucracy's mortal fear of Trotsky's ideas that Stalin ordered his assassination on 20 August 1940.

This year we commemorate the 50th anniversary of Trotsky's death. But we do not mourn; we organise.

Millions live in barbarity under capitalism. Bureaucratic rule in the Stalinist world is in insoluble crisis. The need for world revolution is greater than ever.

Trotsky's ideas have lived on. The forces of Marxism are growing around the world in the mass workers' organisations. **With these ideas and methods, the working class will triumph!**



Engels, he developed his theory of permanent revolution.

The first task of the revolution in Russia, he said, were to smash feudalism and the monarchy. This made the revolution 'bourgeois'. **But the weak Russian capitalist class would not lead the masses to achieve this. Their interest were in conflict with democracy, and opposed to revolution.**

It rested on the working class and the poor peasants to overthrow the regime. Once in power, the workers could not stop there. To end capitalist sabotage, they would have to take the revolution beyond its original demands.

To sustain their power, they would need to take the revolution to the more advanced countries. National, and 'bourgeois' revolution would need to develop into world socialist revolution. In this sense, the revolution was 'permanent'.

### War and revolution

Trotsky, with Lenin, was among the few workers' leaders in Europe who opposed the imperialist First World War. Workers should not

demands for land, bread and peace.

Returning to Russia from exile, Trotsky told workers to "Keep three precepts in mind: 1. Trust not the bourgeoisie. 2. Control our own leaders. 3. Have confidence in our revolutionary forces". He agitated for the overthrow of the government by the working class.

Lenin, returning in April, took the same position. "All power to the soviets!", he declared.

**Neither democracy nor the social demands of the masses in a backward country can be achieved under capitalism. To achieve these requires a workers' revolution. This lesson remains vital for our movement in South Africa today.**

Before Lenin's return, the Bolshevik central committee, led by Stalin among others, had given 'critical support' to the Provisional Government. Lenin and Trotsky fought to reverse this policy.

### Bolshevism

Before 1917, Trotsky had not joined the Bolsheviks. He believed it would be possible to find a way of reconciling the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks in the RSDLP, in the interest of workers' unity. Now he admitted he

Trotsky created the five and half million strong Red Army to defend the Soviet Union. He travelled from place to place inspiring and mobilising war-weary soldiers -- and achieved victory.

Lenin remarked: "Show me another man who could organise almost a model army in a single year!"

### Stalinism

Lenin and Trotsky explained that the revolution needed to spread to more advanced countries in order to survive. The Bolsheviks built the (Third) Communist International for world revolution.

The burdens of world war, and the inspiration of revolution in Russia, brought a revolutionary upsurge of the working class through Europe. But this was set back and betrayed by reformist leadership.

The young Soviet workers' state remained isolated in a backward society. A weary working class confronted a growing caste of bureaucrats in the state. Lenin (before his death in 1924) and Trotsky fought against the rise of this bureaucracy. But, led by Stalin, the bureaucracy carried through a political counter-

in Shanghai to "bury their arms" and hand power to the "progressive" Chiang. On 12 April 1927 Chiang turned his guns on the workers, and massacred them.

A ruthless military dictatorship was established, under which 35 000 Communist Party members were murdered. This was the price paid by the masses for Stalin's policy.

### Witch-hunt

Stalin and the bureaucracy chose this time to turn on Trotsky and his hundreds of thousands of supporters. Over the next ten years they were persecuted and killed. **Stalin's rule drowned Bolshevism in blood.** Trotsky was expelled from the 'Communist' Party in 1927, and deported in 1929.

Stalin invited Trotsky to abstain from politics. Trotsky replied that would mean: "to abstain from getting ready for tomorrow. Only contemptible renegades would be capable of giving such a promise. We know our duty and we will do it to the end."

**Undeterred by persecution, by the victimisation of his family, and even the murder of his son in 1938, Trotsky remained steadfast in the struggle**

50  
YEARS

# LEON TROTSKY

Fighter against national oppression, capitalism and stalinism.

20 AUGUST 1940: MURDERED BY STALIN,  
1990: STALINISM COLLAPSING INTERNATIONALLY...



"WE SAY TO THE WORKING PEOPLE: 'UNTIL THE SOCIALIST ORDER HAS BEEN ATTAINED, REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE THE ONLY FORCE THAT IS CAPABLE OF BRINGING IT ABOUT. AND REMEMBER THAT THE RULING CLASSES OF THE WHOLE WORLD WILL YIELD NOT AN INCH TO YOU ON THE ROAD TO THAT END WITHOUT A FIGHT.

IN OUR HANDS ARE THE DREAMS OF ALL MANKIND FOR A WORLD SET FREE. AGAINST US IS

THE BOURGEOISIE OF ALL COUNTRIES, BUT WITH US IS THE WORKING CLASS OF ALL COUNTRIES, AND ITS HOPES. LET US THEN, COMRADES, BRACE OURSELVES MORE STRONGLY, CLASPING EACH OTHER'S HANDS SO AS TO FIGHT TO THE END, TO COMPLETE VICTORY, FOR THE RULE OF THE WORKING CLASS -- THAT IS THE TASK TO WHICH WE ARE ARE SUMMONING YOU!"

*Leon Trotsky -- Chief of the Red Army -- Moscow, 1918.*

**Study TROTSKY for workers' victory in South Africa.  
Socialism will rise again, Stalinism -- Never!**