The 80th anniversary of the death of Leon Trotsky

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It is 80 years today since Leon Trotsky, aged 60, died at 7.25 pm in a hospital in Mexico City from a wound inflicted the day before by Ramón Mercader, an agent of Joseph Stalin the then all-powerful dictator of the Soviet Union. Stalin had directly ordered the murder having already murdered two of Trotsky’s sons, Sergei and Lyova, his first wife, thousands of his followers in the USSR and several in Western Europe, too.

Mercader, was sentenced by a Mexican court to 20 years in prison. When he was released in 1960, he was welcomed to Cuba by Fidel Castro and awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union medal by the Russian politburo. Thus, world Stalinism confessed its complicity in the murder of one of the two most prominent leaders of the October Revolution and the founder of the Red Army.

Trotsky had lived for over three years in Mexico City thanks to the refuge granted him by the country’s left wing populist president, Lazaro Cardenas. After an attempt to assassinate him on May 24, 1940, led by the famous muralist and Stalinist, David Siqueiros, Trotsky’s supporters in Mexico and the USA had fortified and guarded his small villa on the Calle Viena in the suburb of Coyoacan. Trotsky’s grandson, Seva Volkov, then 14 years old, was in the house during both attempts, and recalled that the measures were hardly professional. Mercader had gained access to the house by striking up a relationship with Sylvia Ageloff, a young woman supporter of Trotsky,

Trotsky’s Record

Stalin, as the leader of mass parties on all continents, bolstered by a huge network of secret service agents (the NKVD) had long been directing an incredible campaign of lies and hatred against the man whose record as a revolutionary put his own in the shade. Trotsky had worked on the paper Iskra in London with Lenin in 1902, building the foundations of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP).

However, at its founding conference in 1903 he made the worst political mistake of his life, siding with the Mensheviks against Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Having broken with them a little over a year later, he took up a ?non-factional? position, calling for the reunification of the two organisations, a position he held until the outbreak of the 1917 Revolution. His role as a ?conciliator? often involved him in sharp polemics with Lenin, later used by his opponents to blacken his record. This was despite Lenin saying, in October 1917, that since he abandoned this conciliator role, “there has been no better Bolshevik than Trotsky?.

In the 1905 Revolution, which Lenin called the dress rehearsal for 1917, Trotsky was the chair of the St Petersburg Soviet. In 1917, he once again became the chair of the Petrograd Soviet and, working alongside Lenin, he led the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet, which organised the October insurrection. He went on, as War Commissar of the world’s first workers’ state, to found the Red Army and played a key role in its victory in the Civil War.
During the post war years, he was a central figure at the congresses of the Communist International, drafting many of its manifestos and declarations. He played a key role in winning the new CI sections in western Europe to the tactics of the united front which were vital to enabling them to take on the still powerful forces of social democracy and Labourism.

Years before Antonio Gramsci’s counterposing of a “war of position” to a “war of manoeuvre” and his blaming Trotsky for trying to impose only offensive tactics on the Western communists, the latter fully recognised that to overthrow the “western” bourgeoisie, richer and more firmly rooted in social institutions than had been the case in Russia, would require patient united front tactics to win over the reformist parties’ mass support.

Calling on these parties and their leaders to fight on issues important to the whole working class not only increased the effectiveness of workers’ struggles but, if and when the reformist leaders misled or betrayed them, this strengthened the communist parties at their expense.

During Lenin’s final illness in 1923-4, Trotsky’s opponents within the Bolshevik leadership; Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Joseph Stalin and Nicolai Bukharin, succeeded in sidelining him from the leading role he had played when Lenin was active. This was possible because of the defeats the revolutionary movement suffered in these years and the isolation and bureaucratisation the young workers’ state was undergoing.

Lenin, struck down by a stroke, had, from his sickbed, proposed the removal of Stalin from his position as General Secretary, which gave him control of the party apparatus. Trotsky, again a fatal decision, did not push Lenin’s testament and the party leadership covered it up.

In Opposition

Despite this serious error, Trotsky and the Left Opposition of 1923 soon went on to develop proposals to democratise the party and to control the bureaucracy which was crystalising around Stalin.

Trotsky also criticised the far-reaching mistake the Communist International made in Germany in 1923 when Zinoviev, fully supported by Stalin, let slip the opportunity to work towards the seizure of power. A “German October” could have ended the isolation of the USSR, aided its rapid economic development and led to the spread of the European, indeed the world, revolution.

In Britain, he criticised the Communist Party’s uncritical boosting of the left trade union leaders on the TUC General Council who, in the 1926 general strike, effectively let the right wing leaders betray it without serious opposition. Meanwhile, the Russian unions maintained the Anglo-Russian Committee with the TUC until a break from it was too late to have any effect.

In 1926, in the Soviet Union, Trotsky formed the United Opposition with Zinoviev and Kamenev, despite their role in 1923-5 in isolating and slandering him as an opponent of Leninism and even calling for his expulsion from the CPSU. The United Opposition attacked the "snail's pace? industrialisation promoted by Bukharin, in alliance with Stalin, and their strangling of democracy in the party and the soviets, as well the extension of bureaucracy and purging of opponents in the other sections of the Communist International.

In the same year, he criticised the fatal strategy that Stalin and Bukharin imposed on the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, which led to its near destruction by Chiang Kai-shek in the massacres of 1927.

The tenth anniversary of the October Revolution saw Trotsky, together with Zinoviev and Kamenev and thousands of their supporters in the party and the Young Communist League, expelled from the party.
Trotsky, his companion, Natalia Sedova, and his 22 year old son, Leon Sedov, were forcibly deported to Alma Ata, in central Asia. Zinoviev and Co soon capitulated but, because the "Trotskyists? continued oppositional activities, a year later the little family group was deported from the Soviet Union to Turkey.

Exile

They settled on the small island of Prinkipo in the Sea of Marmara near Istanbul and this became the base for communicating the critique of Stalinism made by the International Left Opposition to the world. Here, he was joined by a handful of young supporters from France, Germany, Czechoslovakia and the USA. With their help, Trotsky laid the foundations of an international political tendency, which he called an "expelled faction" of the Communist International, based on trying to reform the world?s communist parties.

Any communists who came out in his support were rapidly expelled from the CI sections and subject to slanders and physical assaults. In reality, this marked an enforced turn to building small propaganda groups. The largest of them, in France and the USA, were only a couple of hundred or so strong. Those who sneer at this should explain whether they think it would have been better to do nothing or to remain an isolated litterateur. For a revolutionary, the very idea of doing either would be unthinkable, particularly in the wake of the Wall St Crash when world capitalism was entering the Great Depression and Hitler and the Nazis were marching toward power and the destruction of the most powerful labour movement in the capitalist world.

In any case, this was far from the first time that revolutionaries had had to start from quality, from a few trained cadres and a programme worked out by them. Marx and Engels had done so with the Communist League in the 1840s, as had Lenin with the Iskra organisation in the 1890s and early 1900s.

These tiny groupings had first to concentrate on the analysis of the situation and the development of a strategy for conducting the class struggle, in short, a programme. Above all, this had to be directed at the vanguard of the workers' movement, at that time in the communist parties. From the outset, they sought contacts with an influence within the working class movement. In this sense they were not sects. Their propaganda was never abstract or timeless but focused on burning issues of strategy and tactics for the workers' movement in all the major struggles of the time.

To this end, Trotsky, from his enforced isolation on Prinkipo, wrote a series of brilliant works that are amongst the major classics of Marxism, including The Communist International After Lenin, which collected the key works he had written in Russia. The Permanent Revolution, combined with a translation of his 1906 work Results and Prospects was one of the first new works. The latter had brilliantly foreseen that the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in Russia (democracy, land to the peasants, the eight hour day etc.) could only be achieved by the workers themselves seizing state power in alliance with the peasantry. This was exactly what happened in 1917 after the Bolsheviks adopted essentially the same perspective in Lenin?s April Theses.

Permanent Revolution expanded this perspective to the largest part of the world, the colonies and semi-colonies, where bourgeois revolutions had not taken place or were only beginning to develop. It was based on the experience of the Chinese Revolution where, once again, the futility of relying on the national bourgeoisie to lead a democratic revolution was proved, at the cost of the slaughter of the flower of the young Chinese workers? movement.

At the same time, the Comintern?s illusions in the revolutionary character of the Kuomintang, and its subordination of the Chinese Communist Party to it, testified to the fact that it was Stalin and Bukharin who had adopted the position of the Mensheviks in 1905 and 1917 rather than Trotsky. To emphasise this, his
supporters in Russia and internationally called themselves Bolshevik - Leninists.

From his Turkish exile (1929-33) Trotsky also wrote an autobiography, My Life, partly to earn money for his political work but also to clear his name from the slanders of Stalin and Co. and to explain what the Left Opposition's struggle in the Soviet Union was about. Here, too, he wrote his magnificent History of the Russian Revolution, to draw out all its rich lessons of October for future generations as well as to expose the inflated role and mendacious accounts emanating from Stalin and his acolytes.

Towards a New International

From Prinkipo, he also analysed the disaster of the Comintern's so-called Third Period line, which had forbidden the world's Communists from operating the united front with the leaders of the reformist and centrist parties. In Germany, which he called the key to the international situation, Fascism was making giant strides towards power, thanks to mass unemployment and the ruin of the petty bourgeoisie.

Stalin imposed on the German Communist Party (KPD) his infamous dictum that social democracy and fascism were twins?, that the German SPD had become social fascist? and was a more dangerous enemy than the Nazis. In 1931, the KPD even joined with the NSDAP in a referendum to remove the SPD led government in the largest German federal state, Prussia. A whole series of Trotsky's articles and pamphlets (collected in The Struggle Against Fascism In Germany) brilliantly analysed fascism as a mass social movement of the petty bourgeoisie which could be used by the imperialist bourgeois to pulverise the workers' movement. In the pamphlet What Next? he wrote;

?When the social crisis takes on an intolerable acuteness, a particular party appears on the scene with the direct aim of agitating the petty bourgeoisie to a white heat and of directing its hatred and its despair against the proletariat. In Germany, this historical function is fulfilled by National Socialism (Nazism), a broad current whose ideology is composed of all the putrid vapours of disintegrating bourgeois society. Trotsky warned that if Hitler came to power, he would smash to pieces not only the KPD but the Social Democracy and the trade unions, all the achievements won by the German workers over a period of 70 years. KPD leaders dismissed this as pessimism and even suggested that if Hitler were to come to power, his regime would soon collapse and it would be, our turn next?.

In fact, the KPD, the CI and the SPD did not unite their massive forces and were destroyed almost without a fight. Wilhelm Pieck, one of the oldest of the KPD leaders, once said at a meeting when other Comintern leaders later sneered at the KPD for being cowards, for not fighting in 1933; ?Moscow ordered us not to resist?. From then on, Trotsky was sure that the world was hurtling towards a second world war, in which Germany would attack the USSR.

The only hope was for the remaining revolutionary situations that developed in Spain and France in 1936 to succeed. Again, he devoted enormous energy to analysing events and developing strategy and tactics for these revolutions in the making ? ones, however, that Stalinism was to contribute massively to aborting.

Because the very mission statement of the Third, as opposed to the Second, International was to lead revolutions, Trotsky concluded that the German disaster, coming on top of the Chinese debacle, especially when its Executive Committee in Moscow declared the tactics in Germany had been completely correct, had proved beyond doubt that the CI was dead for revolution. The task for the International Left Opposition, ILO, now was to work to build a Fourth International.

Groups for Propaganda and Action

Many on the left, both then and now, attack this decision as utopian. Internationals, they say, can only be
built by mass national parties or "when the time is ripe". This ignores the fact that this method, the one on
which the Second International was built, failed dramatically in 1914. Moreover, Lenin, in September 1914,
pronounced the Second dead and immediately raised the slogan Long Live the Third International. Indeed,
when the Third was founded, in 1919, it had few if any mass parties? beyond the Bolsheviks.

Of course, Trotsky did not immediately found the Fourth but set out to win substantial forces to the
project, via discussion on what its programme should be. One of these attempts was the Declaration of the
Four made with four sizeable parties including the German Socialist Workers Party (SAP). A similar
attempt was made with Andreu Nin and what became the Party of Marxist Unification in Spain (POUM).
But these parties proved unstable, oscillating between the ILO and the Second and Third Internationals
and insisting it was premature to found a Fourth or work on a new programme. They proved to be, in
Trotsky?s term, "incorrigible centrists?.

Trotsky?s judgment of the work he undertook in the last seven years of his life often astonishes those on
the left who judge success to mean building mass parties or participating in great events. In his Diary in
Exile, written in France to where he moved in 1933, he stated;

"I think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature,
is the most important work of my life, more important than 1917, more important than the period of the Civil
War or any other. ?? Thus, I cannot speak of the indispensability of my work, even about the period
from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is indispensable in the full sense of the word? There is now no one
except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method, over the
heads of the leaders of the Second and Third International."

Under Trotsky?s guidance, his supporters and defenders in other countries like France, the USA and, to a
lesser degree, in Britain, did build groups a few hundred strong. In the case of the US group, the
Communist League of America, they intervened vigorously in the great Minneapolis Teamsters? strike,
providing it with very a model of leadership and winning. As result, over the next few years, the US section
grew to over 2,000 members.

The Trotskyist groups also translated and published his works and articles, engaged in polemics with the
Stalinists and, most crucially, trained a new generation of young cadres, tough and resilient as a result of
swimming against the stream?. With a few exceptions, they did not remain in self-satisfied isolation but,
like the US section, threw themselves into struggle wherever they could. In China, in the Anti-Japanese
war, they formed a brigade, though this was later liquidated by the Maoists.

Entryism

In February 1934, in the wake of a fascist provocation that triggered a general strike and mass mobilisation
against the French Fascist leagues, the French Trotskyists, on his advice, entered the French Socialist
Party (SFIO) as an open faction, initially recognised by its leadership. Here, they gained a powerful
influence and recruited members, especially in the Young Socialists where they helped initiate antifascist
defence groups.

However, when the Comintern abandoned the sectarian line of calling the socialists social fascists and
proposed first a united and then a popular front with the SFIO (and the bourgeois Radicals), the price they
exacted was that the Socialists expel the Trotskyists. Unfortunately, opportunist and sectarian currents
within the latter led to splits which frittered away many of forces gained by this work.

In the USA, the Trotskyists fared better. First, they fused with another leftward moving group, A J Muste?s
American Workers Party, and later they entered the US Socialist Party, this time as individual members.
When they were expelled, they took a significant number of militants with them.

Many commentators then and now attack the Trotskyists' willingness in certain conditions to enter (i.e. join) mass reformist parties, especially when the latter are moving leftwards and their leaders even invite revolutionaries to join their "broad church? or ?big tent? parties. There is nothing exclusively or originally Trotskyist in this. Marx and Engels, when they set out to create a communist group or party in the 1840s, for which they wrote the famous Manifesto, also recognised the importance of working with or in the mass workers' movements, like the Chartists and they always sought to join or influence the latter.

A propaganda group of a few hundred, if it is not a sect content with abstention from the class struggle or passive teaching of its ideas, cannot simply counterpose itself to such workers' parties. It cannot ignore or turn its back on reformist workers' organisations but must seek to strengthen their class independence from all bourgeois parties and try to win them patiently and democratically to a communist programme.

Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, Stalin, faced with grain strikes by the rich peasants (the kulaks) strengthened by the slow pace of industrialisation, had swung violently to the left in 1928, adopting elements of the Left Opposition's programme but without the expansion of workers' democracy it had proposed.

The Five Year Plans were launched under the slogan of building ?socialism in one country? and were accompanied by the ?liquidation of the Kulaks?, that is, a brutal forced collectivisation of the peasantry that led to a famine in which millions died. The breakneck pace of industrialisation led to great suffering and the need for the bureaucrats to suppress any opposition. Stalin started to round up and send to concentration camps, workers who spoke out and all his political opponents, right or left.

Trotsky?s places of exile changed after Turkey, from France to Norway and finally in 1937 to Mexico. In France, he witnessed and criticised the turn of the Comintern to the policy of the Popular Front; applied in France to block off a potentially revolutionary situation and even more disastrously in Spain where suppression of the social revolution in the name of defending the bourgeois republic led to the brutal suppression of the anarchists and the POUM in Barcelona in 1937. The NKVD was let loose in Spain as a version of the purges then underway in its homeland. This all contributed in no small measure to the victory of Franco.

After 1936, Stalin began murderous purges against supposed ?enemies of the people?, in which it is likely that 750,000 were executed and over one million were sent to labour camps. This Great Terror centred on a series of show trials in which the accused, including Lenin?s close companions like Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek and Bukharin, confessed to grotesque crimes such as plotting to murder Lenin.

Trotsky was billed as the fomenter and organiser of these crimes in conjunction with the Gestapo and other foreign agencies. The several thousand Trotskyists in the ?isolator camps? located in the arctic tundra were eliminated by firing squads between 1938 and 1940. Stalin?s great terror extended abroad where Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov, his secretaries, Erwin Wolff and Rudolph Klement, were assassinated by NKVD agents.

In 1936, whilst in Norway, he wrote The Revolution Betrayed which defined the USSR as a degenerated workers' state. Whilst the economy remained in the hands of the state and subject to a bureaucratic plan and a monopoly of foreign trade and, thus, suppressed the operation of the law of value, political power lay in the hands of a vast bureaucracy or rather in its elite around Stalin. All independent thought and democracy had been crushed out of the CPSU.
Trotsky called for a political revolution to overthrow Stalin and the bureaucratic elite and to restore the democracy of the soviets (workers' councils). However, he called for defending the state-owned and planned economy against restoration from within (by sections of the bureaucracy) or from without (by the imperialist powers). In the event of a war, he declared his unconditional defence of the USSR though it might (would) be necessary to remove Stalin to prevent defeat. He predicted that, unless the working class made a political revolution, eventually the bureaucracy would restore capitalism, breaking up the planned economy. Though this perspective seemed indefinitely postponed after 1945, four and a half decades later, under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, this was exactly what happened.

Founding the Fourth

The founding conference of the Fourth International took place in Alfred Rosmer’s villa in the village of Périgny, 23km from Paris on September 3, 1938. It was held in deep secrecy because Stalinist agents had that February murdered Leon Sedov, the European organiser of the work and the editor of the Russian language Bulletin of the Opposition. In July, Rudolf Klement, the secretary of the Movement for the Fourth International, responsible for preparing the congress, was kidnapped and his dismembered body turned up in the Seine. Tragically, the person Mark Zborowski, (party name Etienne) who had almost certainly directed these killings, a Ukrainian who had infiltrated the Trotskyist movement, then became the Russian delegate to the founding conference.

Only twenty or so were present and the proceedings lasted only one day. The conference passed a series of documents, the most important of which was the programme of the International, The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, thereafter known as the Transitional Programme. The founding conference claimed 5395 members in the Fourth International, nearly half of whom were in the US Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

In the Death Agony, Trotsky described the conditions facing the working class; a historic global crisis of capitalism, undermining the productive forces it had previously created by mass unemployment and war. This, in turn, led to crises in one country after another which repeatedly posed the question of power to the labour movement with the alternative of terrible defeats like that in Germany or that which was looming in Spain.

Last, but most important for revolutionaries, there was a global crisis of working class leadership. Two Internationals within 25 years had failed, but their sections still dominated and misled the working class. However, another imperialist war was impending, more destructive than the last. It could, like the latter, undermine the hold of the Social Democrats and Stalinists and open opportunities for the Fourth International to become a mass force.

Trotsky’s perspectival estimate was not a Nostradamus-style prophecy or an Old Moore’s Almanac as many light-minded critics claim. Rather, it was a reasoned prognosis. Although Stalinism and Social Democracy did survive the war and, indeed, after 1945, expanded and flourished, and though there was not a revolutionary wave comparable to that of 1919-21, this was far from a likely outcome viewed from 1938, indeed not from 1941.

Trotsky did say elsewhere that if the working class failed to seize power in the years ahead, capitalism might on the basis of terrible destruction witness another phase of expansion. It was this alternative which wrecked the post-war Fourth International through its leaders’ inability to re-elaborate the programme and their opportunist or sectarian responses to revived Stalinism and Social Democracy. A twenty five year boom in the imperialist heartlands, the expansion of the Stalinist model to Eastern Europe, China, South East Asia, and Cuba, sealed this. At the same time, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle replaced
Europe as the centre of the revolutionary picture. Important as prognoses and perspectives are to a revolutionary programme, they have to be tested, corrected or rejected in the light of real developments.

The core of the Transitional Programme nonetheless remains of immense value today. Trotsky had to address the very nature of a revolutionary programme and compare it to those developed by the previous Internationals. In the period of the Second International (1889-1914) a chasm had opened between the so-called maximum and minimum programmes of its sections, the model for which was the German Social Democracy’s Erfurt programme of 1891, drafted by Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein.

The ‘maximum programme’ came to be treated as a description of a socialist society based on the expropriation of the capitalist class. How or when this would be achieved, however, was left open. The more radical believed it would come through a cataclysmic breakdown of capitalism, the less radical that it would drop like a ripe plum into the waiting hands of a party with a huge number of MPs.

The ‘minimum programme’ however contained all the immediate demands the working class needed to fight for within capitalist society. This allowed for preaching a socialist future on May Day whilst working for reforms entirely unconnected to this via elections to parliament and routine trade union work. Bernstein, as early as 1896, argued that since the party was engaged wholly in working for reforms it should ‘dare to say what it really is, a party of social reform’ and thus join in governments with Liberals to enact it. Though Bernstein was defeated, and the SPD remained an orthodox party, its practice did not change and the outbreak of war forced it to bring its theory into line with its practice.

The Bolsheviks had always worked on a different basis, because of the immediacy of the revolutionary tasks they faced, which therefore interacted with their immediate tactics. In 1917, they used demands related to workers’ control over the economy and the workplaces, as shown in Lenin’s pamphlet The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat it. Codifying and developing this ‘transitional’? method became part of the work of the Comintern between 1919 and 1923. Thus, the Resolution on Tactics of the Third Congress of the CI aptly described the essence of a transitional demand system;

“In place of the minimum programme of the reformists and centrists, the Communist International puts the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands which in their totality disintegrate the power of the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat, represent stages in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, and each of which expresses in itself the need of the broadest masses, even if the masses themselves are not yet consciously in favour of the proletarian dictatorship.”

This summed up the very method Trotsky was to re-apply in 1938 programme.

The strategic task of the next period, a pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organisation, consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard, the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation. It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.

1939 witnessed not only the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe but also the treacherous Nazi Soviet Pact. Publicly, this was billed as a non-aggression pact and Stalinists excused it by claiming that Britain and France had rejected a defensive pact with the Soviet Union. This was more or less true, since the two countries were venomously anti-Soviet, but they were also well aware of the threat presented to
them by a rearmed Germany, a process in which British arms manufacturers made considerable profits. The real crime, however, was that in reality it was a pact whose secret clauses meant the military carve up of Poland.

When the pact was signed in Moscow by Ribbentrop for the Third Reich and Molotov for the USSR, Stalin not only joined them in proposing several toasts to the Pact and saying "he knew how much the German people loved their Fuhrer" but the members of the Communist parties in the West were suddenly and inexplicably told to abandon their Anti-Fascist Popular Fronts with the democracies? which now became imperialist robbers again. And when the Reichswehr invaded Poland and occupied Warsaw, Stalin congratulated them on their achievement as he in turn seized eastern Poland.

These events (and the preceding Soviet attack on Finland) started a major faction fight in the Fourth International's largest section, the SWP. An opposition, led by James Burnham, Max Shachtman, and Martin Abern, demanded the abandonment of the defence of the USSR if it was drawn into the war and developed the view that it had ceased to be a degenerated workers' state and was a curious new form of class society called bureaucratic collectivism. Thus, Trotsky's last battle, embodied in the articles later collected as In Defense of Marxism, was in defence of the dialectical formula of the degenerated workers' state, and the method of materialist dialectics which underlay it, against the eclectic notion of bureaucratic collectivism.

In February 1940, as a result of his high blood pressure, which he felt might result in a sudden heart attack or stroke, Trotsky had penned a short farewell.

"For 43 years of my conscious life I have remained a revolutionist; for 42 of them I have fought under the banner of Marxism ? I shall die a proletarian revolutionist, a Marxist, a dialectical materialist and consequently an irreconcilable atheist. My faith in the Communist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today than it was in the days of my youth. Natasha has just come up to the window from the courtyard and opened it wider so that the air may enter more freely into my room. I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall, and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full.

In conclusion

On the 80th anniversary of his death we can list his achievements thus:
The theory of uneven and combined development and the strategic perspective of permanent revolution.
The defence of internationalism against the utopian reactionary project of building socialism in one country.
His leading role in the 1905 and 1917 and the historical lessons they gave the international working class.
His understanding of, and ceaseless struggle against, the bureaucratic degeneration of the world's first workers' state.
The analysis of fascism and the tactics necessary to defeat it.
His defence of the tactics of the workers' united font and his critique of its disastrous opposite, the Popular Front.
The development of the transitional method of demands which start from today's struggles, relate to the consciousness of still reformist workers, but which, if pursued, reveal the need for the taking of power by the working class.
And last, but not least, his training of an international network of courageous revolutionaries.

In the Transitional Programme he wrote that "these cadres are pledges for the future. Outside these cadres there does not exist a single revolutionary current on this planet really meriting the name. If our International be still weak in numbers, it is strong in
Some of those cadres survived the war ? heroically standing up to murderous attacks by fascists, Stalinists and imprisonment by the "democratic imperialists", too. They reconstructed the Fourth International and the links between its sections. How and why they were unable to successfully analyse the post war world and re-elaborate Trotsky?s programme for it, is a separate subject that can be read in

The Death Agony of the Fourth International ? soon to be reprinted [1]
https://fifthinternational.org/content/publications/pamphlets/death-agon...

and in Trotskyism in the Twenty First Century [2]
https://fifthinternational.org/content/trotskyism-twenty-first-century

Whatever their deficiencies, whatever the errors that we who have come after them can now see, it was their courage and their sacrifices that kept alive the tradition of revolutionary Marxism - and that they were able to do that was ultimately the greatest achievement of their teacher and their inspiration: Leon Trotsky, who wrote,

"The highest human happiness is not the exploitation of the present but the preparation of the future."

Source URL: https://fifthinternational.org/content/80th-anniversary-death-leon-trotsky

Links:
[1] https://fifthinternational.org/content/publications/pamphlets/death-agony-fourth-international