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ON QUOTING TROTSKY

It has become the fashion amongst the exponents of the National Committee Majority Resolution to quote Trotsky "in support" of their non-revolutionary appraisal of the European situation. The quotations all relate to Trotsky's analysis of Fascism in 1932-3. I'm referring in particular to: (1) Com. Shachtman who, in his most archive-ish manner, republishes the Trotsky articles in the July 1943 issue of The New Internationalist, and (2) Com. Catos, the new discoverer of politics of other planets, in his most polemical style in the October 1943 issue of the N.I. A decade divides the quoters from the quotations. But time and circumstance seem to be the least essential elements for a historical appraisal to these National Committee spokesmen for the Majority N. C. Resolution. This decade has been analyzed most effectively in the Minority N. C. Resolution on the national question.

Trotsky is not here to cry out against the misuse of quotations from his writings. It is easy enough, however, to determine what his attitude would be. I will cite but a single instance to prove my point. That single instance is the "Old Man's" authorship of The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. We must remember that long before fascism came to power in Germany, Trotsky warned of its coming. The Stalinists laughed: there was nothing to worry about; fascism victorious was a Trotsky mirage. When fascism did triumph, the Stalinist apologists had a ready answer: after Hitler, we come. Trotsky hammered away: either the fascist dictatorship or the proletarian dictatorship is true only in a historic sense. Meanwhile, the triumph of fascism has thrown the proletariat back by destroying its organizations, has sown democratic illusions, and we shall again have to put forward democratic slogans in fascist countries.

However, when fascism triumphed in Spain, Trotsky was asked: does this then mean that the proletariat cannot win except when a war is raging. The "Old Man" answered: Not at all. The objective conditions are rotten ripe for socialism; the key to the international situation lies in the hands of the subjective factor: the vanguard of the proletariat. But the vanguard is wrecked by a crisis in its leadership. To overcome that crisis, and help the proletariat bridge the difference between the maturity of the objective circumstances and their own political immaturity, he had elaborated a Transitional Program. That was 1936. Fascism was still triumphant, but Trotsky already acted:

"Those layers of the population which at one time were intoxicated with fascism, i.e. chiefly the middle classes, have had enough time in which to sober up."*

The program of transitional demands in Fascist countries then continues:

"One thing can be stated with conviction even at this point: once it breaks through, the revolutionary wave in fascist countries will immediately be a grandiose sweep and under no circumstances will stop short at the experiment of resuscitating some sort of Weimar corpse."

Had Trotsky written thus because he had forgotten his 1933 thesis which the proponents of the N. C. Majority Resolution are now "defending"? Not at all. Neither was Trotsky in need of lessons from Gates on the role of the vanguard party. This was his 1933 interpretation of his 1933 thesis. It did not ignore, but was based upon, the fact that it was most difficult for the vanguard to function in fascist countries, where the proletariat was deprived of all democracy, that is, of all experience in choosing a revolutionary program:

"It is very likely, that a genuine proletarian success in one of the 'democratic' countries will be necessary to give impetus to the revolutionary movement on fascist territory."

But Trotsky then added:

"A similar effect is possible by means of a financial or military catastrophe."

That similar effect which Trotsky could foresee when fascism was the unchallenged victor in Germany and the challenged victor in Spain, the Majority N.C. cannot see even after:

- (a) the Fascist Army is suffering defeats, the greatest of which was at Stalingrad
- (b) the German General Staff had seen the handwriting on the wall and had sent peace feelers to Russia
- (c) Churchill promises that the European war will see its "climax" in 1944
- (d) the fall of Mussolini had released the pent-up energies of the heroic Italian masses who, in many instances, moved straightway to the formation of soviets
- (e) the German workers went on strike: "If the Italians can do it, so can we."
- (f) French masses refused to be herded into labor battalions for Germany
- (g) and the European masses throughout display both restlessness and militancy

And what is the majority of our N.C. busy doing? They are busy quoting Trotsky's analysis of fascism when fascism was the unchallenged victor. Not only do they, in 1943, reiterate the 1933 analysis, but they elaborate, in a most original manner, upon Trotsky's description of the destruction that fascism has wrought upon the proletarian organizations. They state

that the European proletariat is "impotent" at the very time when it is so militantly awakening! In 1938, when the proletariat had not yet shown these tremendous recuperative powers, Trotsky already saw:

"...factory committees, it may be supposed, will appear before the old routinists rush from their chancelleries to organize trade unions; soviets will cover Germany before a new Constituent Assembly will gather in Weimar..."

Whereas the N. C. Majority, in 1943, wish us to accept a program based on that "impotence". Had they really wished to expound Trotsky, they should not have forgotten so easily what Trotsky said a program in fascist countries should be based upon:

"A revolutionary program should base itself on the dialectics of the class struggle, obligatory also to fascist countries..."

The leader of October must indeed be turning in his grave at the strange phenomenon that his analysis of triumphal fascism is used by revolutionists to screen the revolutionary upsurge of the European proletariat as fascism heads toward its doom.

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*All quotations are from The Founding Conference of the Fourth International, pages 42-5