

GREAT
CONTEMPORARIES

by

Winston S. Churchill



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LEON TROTSKY, *ALIAS* BRONSTEIN

WHEN THE usurper and tyrant is reduced to literary controversy, when the Communist instead of bombs produces effusions for the capitalist Press, when the refugee War Lord fights his battles over again, and the discharged executioner becomes chatty and garrulous at his fireside, we may rejoice in the signs that better days are come. I have before me an article that Leon Trotsky *alias* Bronstein has recently contributed to *John o' London's Weekly* in which he deals with my descriptions of Lenin, with the Allied Intervention in Russia, with Lord Birkenhead and other suggestive topics. He has written this article from his exile in Turkey while supplicating England, France and Germany to admit him to the civilizations it has been, and still is, the object of his life to destroy. Russia, his own Red Russia, the Russia he had framed and fashioned to his heart's desire regardless of suffering to others or hazard to himself, has cast him out. All his scheming, all his daring, all his writing, all his harangues, all his atrocities, all his achievements, have led only to this – that another 'comrade', his subordinate in revolutionary rank, his inferior in wit, though not perhaps in crime, rules in his stead, while he, the once triumphant Trotsky whose frown meted death to thousands, sits disconsolate – a skin of malice stranded for a time on the shores of the Black Sea and now washed up in the Gulf of Mexico.

But he must have been a difficult man to please. He did not like the Czar, so he murdered him and his family. He did not like the Imperial Government, so he blew it up. He did not like the Liberalism of Guchkov and Miliukov, so he overthrew them. He could not endure the Social Revolutionary moderation of Kerensky and Savinkov, so he seized their places. And when at last the Communist regime for which he had striven with might and main was established throughout the whole of Russia, when the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was supreme, when the New Order of Society had passed from visions into reality, when the hateful culture and traditions of the individualist period had been eradicated, when the Secret Police had become the servants of the Third International, when, in a word, his Utopia had been achieved, he was still discontented. He still fumed, growled,

snarled, bit and plotted. He had raised the poor against the rich. He had raised the penniless against the poor. He had raised the criminal against the penniless. All had fallen out as he had willed. But nevertheless the vices of human society required, it seemed, new scourgings. In the deepest depth he sought with desperate energy for a deeper. But, poor wretch, he had reached rock-bottom. Nothing lower than the Communist criminal class could be found. In vain he turned his gaze upon the wild beasts. The apes could not appreciate his eloquence. He could not mobilize the wolves, whose numbers had so notably increased during his administration. So the criminals he had installed stood together and put him outside.

Hence these chatty newspaper articles. Hence the ululations from the Bosphorus. Hence these entreaties to be allowed to visit the British Museum and study its documents, or to drink the waters of Malvern for his rheumatism, or of Nauheim for his heart, or of Homburg for his gout, or of some other place for some other complaint. Hence these broodings in Turkish shades pierced by the searching eye of Mustafa Kemal. Hence these exits from France, from Scandinavia. Hence this last refuge in Mexico.

It is astonishing that a man of Trotsky's intelligence should not be able to understand the well-marked dislike of civilized governments for the leading exponents of Communism. He writes as if it were due to mere narrow-minded prejudice against new ideas and rival political theories. But Communism is not only a creed. It is a plan of campaign. A Communist is not only the holder of certain opinions; he is the pledged adept of a well-thought-out means of enforcing them. The anatomy of discontent and revolution has been studied in every phase and aspect, and a veritable drill book prepared in a scientific spirit for subverting all existing institutions. The method of enforcement is as much a part of the Communist faith as the doctrine itself. At first the time-honoured principles of Liberalism and Democracy are invoked to shelter the infant organism. Free speech, the right of public meeting, every form of lawful political agitation and constitutional right are paraded and asserted. Alliance is sought with every popular movement towards the left.

The creation of a mild Liberal or Socialist regime in some period of convulsion is the first milestone. But no sooner has this been created than it is to be overthrown. Woes and scarcity resulting from confusion must be exploited. Collisions, if possible attended with bloodshed, are to be arranged between the agents of the New Government and the working people. Martyrs are to be manufactured. An apologetic attitude in the rulers should be turned to profit. Pacific propaganda may be made the mask of hatreds never before manifested

among men. No faith need be, indeed may be, kept with non-Communists. Every act of goodwill, of tolerance, of conciliation, of mercy, or magnanimity on the part of Governments or Statesmen is to be utilized for their ruin. Then, when the time is ripe and the moment opportune, every form of lethal violence from mob revolt to private assassination must be used without stint or compunction. The citadel will be stormed under the banners of Liberty and Democracy; and once the apparatus of power is in the hands of the Brotherhood, all opposition, all contrary opinions must be extinguished by death. Democracy is but a tool to be used and afterwards broken; Liberty but a sentimental folly unworthy of the logician. The absolute rule of a self-chosen priesthood according to the dogmas it has learned by rote is to be imposed upon mankind without mitigation progressively for ever. All this, set out in prosy textbooks, written also in blood in the history of several powerful nations, is the Communist's faith and purpose. To be forewarned should be to be forearmed!

I wrote this passage nearly seven years ago, but is it not an exact account of the Communist plot which has plunged Spain into the present hideous welter against the desires of the overwhelming majority of Spaniards on both sides?

It is probable that Trotsky never comprehended the Marxian creed, but of its drill-book he was the incomparable master. He possessed in his nature all the qualities requisite for the art of civic destruction – the organizing command of a Carnot, the cold detached intelligence of a Machiavelli, the mob oratory of a Cleon, the ferocity of Jack the Ripper, the toughness of Titus Oates. No trace of compassion, no sense of human kinship, no apprehension of the spiritual, weakened his high and tireless capacity for action. Like the cancer bacillus he grew, he fed, he tortured, he slew in fulfilment of his nature. He found a wife who shared the Communist faith. She worked and plotted at his side. She shared his first exile to Siberia in the days of the Czar. She bore him children. She aided his escape. He deserted her. He found another kindred mind in a girl of good family who had been expelled from a school at Kharkov for persuading the pupils to refuse to attend prayers and to read Communist literature instead of the Bible. By her he had another family. As one of his biographers 'Max Eastman' puts it: 'If you have a perfectly legal mind, she is not Trotsky's wife, for Trotsky never divorced Alexandra Ivovna Sokolovski, who still uses the name of Bronstein.' Of his mother he writes in cold and chilling terms. His father, old Bronstein, died of typhus in 1920 at the age of 83. The triumphs of his son brought no comfort to this honest hard-working and believing

Jew. Persecuted by the Reds because he was a bourgeois, by the Whites because he was Trotsky's father, and deserted by his son, he was left to sink or swim in the Russian deluge, and swam on steadfastly to the end. What else was there for him to do?

Yet in Trotsky, in this being so removed from the ordinary affections and sentiments of human nature, so uplifted, shall we say, above the common herd, so superbly fitted to his task, there was an element of weakness especially serious from the Communist point of view. Trotsky was ambitious, and ambitious in quite a common worldly way. All the collectivism in the world could not rid him of an egoism which amounted to a disease, and to a fatal disease. He must not only ruin the State, he must rule the ruins thereafter. Every system of government of which he was not the head or almost the head was odious to him. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat to him meant that he was to be obeyed without question. He was to do the dictating on behalf of the proletariat. The 'toiling masses', the 'Councils of Workmen, Peasants and Soldiers', the gospel and revelation of Karl Marx, the Federal Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, etc., to him were all spelt in one word: Trotsky. This led to trouble. Comrades became jealous. They became suspicious. At the head of the Russian Army which he reconstructed amid indescribable difficulties and perils, Trotsky stood very near the vacant Throne of the Romanovs.

The Communist formulas he had used with devastating effect upon others were now no impediment to him. He discarded them as readily as he had discarded his wife, or his father, or his name. The army must be remade; victory must be won; and Trotsky must do it and Trotsky profit from it. To what other purpose should revolutions be made? He used his exceptional prowess to the full. The officers and soldiers of the new model army were fed, clothed and treated better than anyone else in Russia. Officers of the old Czarist regime were wheeled back in thousands. 'To the devil with politics; let us save Russia.' The salute was reintroduced. The badges of rank and privilege were restored. The authority of commanders was re-established. The higher command found themselves treated by this Communist upstart with a deference they had never experienced from the Ministers of the Czar. The abandonment by the Allies of the Russian Loyalist cause crowned these measures with a victory easy but complete. In 1922 so great was the appreciation among the military for Trotsky's personal attitude and system that he might well have been made Dictator of Russia by the armed forces, but for one fatal obstacle.

He was a Jew. He was still a Jew. Nothing could get over that. Hard fortune when you have deserted your family, repudiated your

race, spat upon the religion of your fathers, and lapped Jew and Gentile in a common malignity, to be baulked of so great a prize for so narrow-minded a reason! Such intolerance, such pettiness, such bigotry were hard indeed to bear. And this disaster carried in its train a greater. In the wake of disappointment loomed catastrophe.

For meanwhile the comrades had not been idle. They too had heard the talk of the officers. They too saw the possibilities of a Russian army reconstituted from its old elements. While Lenin lived the danger seemed remote. Lenin indeed regarded Trotsky as his political heir. He sought to protect him. But in 1924 Lenin died and Trotsky, still busy with his army, still enjoying the day-to-day work of administering his department, still hailed with the acclamations which had last resounded for Nicholas II, turned to find a hard and toughly wrought opposition organized against him.

Stalin the Georgian was a kind of General Secretary to the governing instrument. He managed the caucus and manipulated the innumerable committees. He gathered the wires together with patience and pulled them in accordance with a clearly perceived design. When Trotsky advanced hopefully, confidently indeed, to accept the succession to Lenin, the party machine was found to be working in a different direction. In the purely political arena of Communist activities Trotsky was speedily outmanoeuvred. He was accused, on the strength of some of his voluminous writings, of 'Anti-Leninism'. He does not seem to have understood that Lenin had replaced God in the Communist mind. He remained for some time under the impression that any such desirable substitution had been effected by Trotsky. He admitted his heresy and eagerly explained to the soldiers and workers the very cogent reasons which had led him to it. His declarations were received with blank dismay. The OGPU was set in motion. Officers known to be under an obligation to Trotsky were removed from their appointments. After a period of silent tension he was advised to take a holiday. This holiday after some interruptions still continues.

Stalin used his success to build a greater. The Politburo, without the spell of Lenin, or the force of Trotsky, was in its turn purged of its remaining elements of strength. The politicians who had made the Revolution were dismissed and chastened and reduced to impotence by the party manager. The caucus swallowed the Cabinet and, with Stalin at its head, became the present Government of Russia. Trotsky was marooned by the very mutineers he had led so hardily to seize the ship.

What will be his place in history? For all its horrors, a glittering light plays over the scenes and actors of the French Revolution. The

careers and personalities of Robespierre, of Danton, even of Marat, gleam luridly across a century. But the dull, squalid figures of the Russian Bolsheviks are not redeemed in interest even by the magnitude of their crimes. All form and emphasis is lost in a vast process of Asiatic liquefaction. Even the slaughter of millions and the misery of scores of millions will not attract future generations to their uncouth lineaments and outlandish names. And now most of them have paid the penalty of their crimes. They have emerged from the prison-cells of the Cheka to make their strange unnatural confessions to the world. They have met the death in secret to which they had consigned so many better braver men.

But Trotsky survives. He lingers on the stage. He has forgotten his efforts, which Lenin restrained, to continue the War against Germany rather than submit to the conditions of Brest Litovsk. He has forgotten his own career as a War Lord and the opportunist remaker of the Russian Army. In misfortune he has returned to Bolshevik Orthodoxy. Once again he has become the exponent of the purest sect of Communism. Around his name gather the new extremists and doctrinaires of world revolution. Upon him is turned the full blast of Soviet malignity. The same vile propaganda which he used with so much ruthlessness upon the old regime is now concentrated upon himself by his sole surviving former comrade. All Russia from Poland to China, from the North Pole to the Himalayas, is taught to regard him as the supreme miscreant, seeking in some way or other to add new chains to the workers and bring the Nazi invader into their midst. The name of Lenin, the doctrine of Karl Marx, are invoked against him at the moment when he frantically endeavours to exploit them. Russia is regaining strength as the virulence of Communism abates in her blood. The process may be cruel, but it is not morbid. It is a need of self-preservation which impels the Soviet Government to extrude Trotsky and his fresh-distilled poisons. In vain he screams his protests against a hurricane of lies; in vain he denounces the bureaucratic tyranny of which he would so blithely be the head; in vain he strives to rally the underworld of Europe to the overthrow of the Russian Army he was once proud to animate. Russia has done with him, and done with him for ever.

He will, perhaps, have leisure to contemplate his handiwork. No one could wish him a better punishment than that his life should be prolonged, and that his keen intelligence and restless spirit should corrode each other in impotence and stultification. Indeed we may foresee a day when his theories, exploded by their application, will have ceased even to be irritating to the active, hopeful world outside, and when the wide tolerance which follows from a sense of security

will allow him to creep back, discredited and extinct, to the European and American haunts where so many of his early years were spent. It may be that in these future years he will find as little comfort in the work which he has done as his father found in the son he had begotten.