

REVIEW ESSAY

Trotskyism Emerges from Obscurity: New Chapters in Its Historiography

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BENSAÏD, DANIEL. *Les trotskysmes*. Deuxième éd. [Que sais-je?, 3629.] Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 2002. 128 pp. € 6.50.

CHARPIER, FRÉDÉRIC. *Histoire de l'extrême gauche trotskiste. De 1929 à nos jours*. Editions I, Paris 2002. 402 pp. € 22.00.

MARIE, JEAN-JACQUES. *Le trotskysme et les trotskystes. D'hier à aujourd'hui, l'idéologie et les objectifs des trotskystes à travers le monde*. [Collection L'Histoire au présent.] Armand Colin, Paris 2002. 224 pp. € 21.00.

NICK, CHRISTOPHE. *Les Trotskistes*. Fayard, [Paris] 2003. 618 pp. € 23.00.

The Trotskyist Fourth International went through many quarrels and splits after its foundation in 1938¹ – understandably, given the political and social isolation in which the movement generally functioned. Its enemies to its left and right crowded the Trotskyists into an uncomfortably narrow space. Trotskyists' intense internal discussions functioned as a sort of immune response, which could only be effective if theoretical and

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1. For bibliographies of Leon Trotsky and Trotskyism, see Louis Sinclair, *Trotsky: a Bibliography* (Aldershot, 1989); Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz (eds), *Trotsky Bibliography: An International Classified List of Publications About Leon Trotsky and Trotskyism 1905–1998*, 3rd compl. rev. and enl. (Munich, 1999). Several biographies of Leon Trotsky have been published: Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879–1921* (London, 1954); *idem*, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921–1929* (London, 1959); *idem*, *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929–1940* (London, 1963); Pierre Broué, *Trotsky* (Paris, 1988); Baruch Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford, 1978); Dmitriy A. Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary* (London, 1996). Studies of international Trotskyism include: Robert J. Alexander, *International Trotskyism, 1929–1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement* (Durham, 1991); *idem*, *Trotskyism in Latin America* (Stanford, CA, 1973); Cliff Slaughter, *The International Committee Against Liquidationism* (London, 1974); Pierre Frank, *La Quatrième Internationale: contribution à l'histoire du mouvement trotskyste* (Paris, 1973); Rodolphe Prager,

programmatic issues were clearly formulated. The more practical success eluded them, the more programmatic clarity served as compensation and monopolized their attention. In the name of various “isms” their passions sometimes took acute forms, while, under the surface, “ordinary” human shortcomings threw oil on the fire.

Alongside this social-psychological dialectic, disappointment and scepticism also reflected more universal events. The international labour movement experienced a number of dramatic defeats during the twentieth century. The victories of Stalinism and fascism made it “midnight in the century”, an experience that could hardly leave Trotskyists unmoved. Many of them, individually or in groups, broke with their organizations.²

After World War II, the Soviet Union remained an apple of discord.³ Among early critics of Trotsky’s theory of the “degenerated workers’ state” were the Greek-born economist, Cornelius Castoriadis (born 1922),

Les congrès de la IVe Internationale: (manifestes, thèses, résolutions); 1, Naissance de la IVe Internationale: (1930–1940) (Paris, 1978); idem, Les congrès de la IVe Internationale: (manifestes, thèses, résolutions); 2, L’ Internationale dans la guerre, 1940–1946 (Paris, 1981); idem, Les congrès de la IVe Internationale: (manifestes, thèses, résolutions); 3, Bouleversements et crises de l’après-guerre: (1946–1950) (Montreuil, 1988); idem, Les congrès de la IVe Internationale: (manifestes, thèses, résolutions); 4, Menace de la troisième guerre mondiale et tournant politique (1950–1952) (Montreuil, 1989).

2. The history of Trotskyism is often presented as a succession of breaks and splits. Jean-Paul Sartre poked fun at it rather sarcastically in his comedy *Nekrassov*, in which a dedicated Trotskyist shows his doctrinal purity by naming the party he has founded – and of which he is the only member – the “Bolshevik-Bolshevik Party”. In reality, the Trotskyists were not unique in this respect. Every current of the labour movement has experienced periodic splits. On Trotsky’s views on fascism, see: Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, with an intro. by E. Mandel (New York, 1971). On Trotsky’s thinking about Stalinism, see: Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?*, Max Eastman (tr.) (London, 1937). A number of shifts and contradictions in Trotsky’s vision of Stalinism are examined in R.H. McNeal, “Trotskyist Interpretations of Stalinism”, in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1977). Ernest Mandel (1923–1995), the most important postwar Trotskyist theorist, further developed Trotsky’s theory of the degenerated workers’ state in *idem, Traité d’économie marxiste* (Paris, 1962); *idem*, “Economics in the Transition Period”, in *idem* (ed.), *Fifty Years of World Revolution – An International Symposium* (New York, 1968); *idem*, “Zehn Thesen zur sozialökonomischen Gesetzmäßigkeit der Übergangsgesellschaft zwischen Kapitalismus und Sozialismus”, in Peter Henricke (ed.), *Probleme des Sozialismus und der Übergangsgesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M, 1973); *idem*, “Once Again on the Trotskyist Definition of the Social Nature of the Soviet Union”, *Critique*, 12 (1979–1980). Tony Cliff (Ygael Gluckstein) formulated a “state-capitalist” critique of the theory of the degenerated workers’ state in *idem, State Capitalism in Russia* (London, 1974); *idem*, “On the Class Nature of the People’s Democracies”, in Richard Kuper (ed.), *The Origins of the International Socialists* (London, 1971).

3. For an overview of the debate over the Soviet Union, see Marcel van der Linden, *Von der Oktoberrevolution zur Perestroika: der westliche Marxismus und die Sowjetunion* (Frankfurt/M, 1992); Theodor Bergmann, Mario Kessler (eds), *Ketzer im Kommunismus: Alternativen zum Stalinismus* (Mainz, 1993); Massimo L. Salvadori, *L’utopia caduta: storia del pensiero comunista da Lenin a Gorbaciov* (Rome, 1992).

and philosopher, Claude Lefort, originally part of the circle around Maurice Merleau-Ponty.⁴ They considered that the Soviet Union was no longer a workers' state, and characterized it as a bureaucratic collectivist formation in which a new elite exercised power exclusively in its own interest.⁵ These heterodox conceptions landed them in 1948, along with a handful of allies, outside the Internationalist Communist Party (PCI), the French section of the Fourth International. They acquired a new podium in the political-philosophical journal, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, established shortly after their split and published by the group with the same name from 1949 to 1965.⁶ The collaborators of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* included the Situationist artist, Guy Debord,⁷ and Jean-François Lyotard, who in the 1970s became the most influential postmodernist philosopher.⁸

In their first issue, the dissidents defended their departure in an open letter to members of the Fourth International. Trotskyism, they said, was a movement without a political or theoretical future, because it lacked an independent ideological foundation. It could not truly free itself from

4. We counted half a dozen groups that broke from the authentic Trotskyist understanding of the Soviet Union as a transitional society between capitalism and socialism: James Burnham/Max Shachtman/C.L.R. James/Raya Dunayevskaya (1940); Isaac Deutscher (1940); Manuel F. Grandizo/Benjamin Péret (1946); Tony Cliff (1948); Cornelius Castoriadis/Claude Lefort (1949). In addition, differences in interpretation of Trotsky's legacy led to other breaks, of which that of Michel Raptis (Pablo) (1967) was the most important. No coherent interpretation exists of these splits and their mutual interactions. Partial accounts are to be found for the US in: Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the 'American Century'*, (Highland Park, MI, 1994); Raya Dunayevskaya, *For the Record: The Johnson-Forest Tendency or the Theory of State Capitalism, 1949–1951: Its Vicissitudes and Ramifications* (Detroit, MI, 1972). For the British group, Kuper, *Origins of the International Socialists*; Tony Cliff, *Trotskyism after Trotsky: The Origins of the International Socialists* (London, 1999). For the French group: Jean François Kessler, "Le communisme de gauche en France (1927–1947)", *Revue française de science politique*, 28 (1978); Christophe Bourseiller, *Histoire générale de l'Ultra-Gauche* (Paris, 2003).

5. "Sur le régime et contre la défense de l'URSS", *Bulletin Intérieur du PCI*, 31 (August 1946), repr. in Cornelius Castoriadis, *La société bureaucratique, vol. 1: Les rapports de production en Russie* (Paris, 1973), pp. 63–7; P. Gottraux, *Socialisme ou barbarie: un engagement politique et intellectuel dans La France de l'après-guerre* (Lausanne, 1997).

6. Marcel van der Linden, "Socialisme ou Barbarie: A French Revolutionary Group (1949–1965)", *Left History* [Canada], 5 (1997), pp. 7–37; Gottraux, *Socialisme ou barbarie*; M-F. Raflin, *Itinéraires d'extrême/ultra gauche: Socialisme ou Barbarie ou une tentative de réinvention du communisme* (Paris, 2000). Pierre Frank formulated the official Trotskyist critique of the Castoriadis (Chaulieu)/Lefort (Montal) tendency in his article "'Novateurs' et 'conservateurs' dans la question de l'URSS", *Bulletin Intérieur de l'IS*, (June 1947), repr. in Pierre Frank, *Le stalinisme* (Paris, 1977).

7. Guy Debord (1931–1994) was a prominent member of the Situationist International, which was founded in July 1957. His *La société du spectacle* (Paris, 1967), *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York, 1995) gave the movement its theoretical foundation.

8. Jean-François Lyotard established his reputation in the 1970s with such publications as *Economie libidinale* (Paris, 1974); *Rudiments païens* (Paris, 1977); *La condition post-moderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, 1979).

Stalinism as long as it continued to define itself in opposition to Stalinism and did not radically break with Stalinist ideology.⁹ The dogma of “unconditional defence of the Soviet Union” and the call for formation of a government with communist participation had made French Trotskyism an “appendix” of Stalinism, they said. Trotskyism was, by its nature, prone to continual crisis, which prevented the movement from “attaining the level of a fully constituted organization”. In a later synthesis, Lefort even condemned Trotskyism as a “micro-Stalinism”: “They internalize their adversaries’ values, forgetting that the link between those values and the practical behaviour that they condemn is no accident.”¹⁰ He pointed to

[...] the power of the apparatus, the division between leaders and followers; the manipulation of meetings, the hoarding of information, the cloistering of activities, the stereotyped character of their dominant discourse in all its varieties, the impermeability to events, which risked putting practice and theory on the wrong track – a thousand indications persuaded me that here, a hundred leagues removed from the Communist party, was to be found its miniature mirror image.¹¹

Lefort and Castoriadis’s idea that Trotskyism proved unable to escape from the orbit of Stalinism still sounds, fifty years later, as controversial as it is provocative. The idea is provocative, because *Socialisme ou Barbarie*’s criticism of hierarchy and bureaucracy laid bare the difficult relationship (including in Trotskyist practice) between the level of organization of the vanguard – the separate revolutionary organization – and of the masses – the organs of workers’ power that develop in revolutionary periods.¹² More than other revolutionary Marxist currents in the 1950s and 1960s, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* gave a central role to workers’ control: the workers’ autonomous exercise of power “from below”. It analysed the modern world from the perspective of the worker (admittedly, the male factory worker) and his daily life. Historians like Edward Thompson, Raniero

9. “Lettre ouverte aux militants du PCI et de la IVe Internationale”, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 1 (March–April 1949), pp. 90–101.

10. Claude Lefort, *Éléments d’une critique de la bureaucratie* (Geneva, 1971), pp. 349–350.

11. *Ibid.*, cited in Philippe Campinchi, *Les Lambertistes, un courant trotskiste français* (Paris, 2000), p. 115.

12. The work of the Belgian Marxist, Ernest Mandel, who was part of the Fourth International’s leadership from 1946 to 1995, makes clear that thinking about this set of problems did not remain static in Trotskyist circles either. While he did not elaborate a theory of the revolutionary party, he tried to update the conception of a Leninist party in numerous monographs. At the same time he argued for the maximum degree of direct democracy in the form of councils in combination with a multi-party system. Ernest Mandel, *Trotsky: A Study in the Dynamics of His Thought* (London, 1979); *idem*, *Trotsky als Alternative* (Berlin, 1992); *idem*, “La théorie de Trotsky sur le rapport entre l’autogestion de la classe et le parti d’avant-garde”, *Quatrième Internationale*, (April, 1990).

Panzieri, and Erhard Lucas would later adopt a similar approach in their effort to investigate capitalism “from below”.¹³

Yet the proposition of the “social barbarians” (as they ironically called themselves) seems untenable. The origins of the Trotskyist movement can hardly be seen as solely an opposition to Stalinism. The Fourth International was formed in a broader context: in the decades (before as well as after 1938) of the deep, worldwide economic crisis, in the midst of the degeneration of the Soviet Union; but also when the struggle against fascism, whose rise the social democrats and communists were failing to stop with their popular-front strategy, was reaching its climax; and finally in a five-year-long, globally devastating world war. The emergence of Trotskyism depended, in the last analysis, on an analysis of capitalism, of which the critique of Stalinism was only a corollary.

Furthermore, understanding Trotskyism requires paying attention not only to the currents that are considered “orthodox Trotskyist” (whichever those may be). Over the years, the movement went in many, very different directions, and the issues that divided Trotsky’s heirs from one another often became more important than what bound them together.¹⁴ Political differences played a major role in this differentiation process, as did national and cultural traditions. British and North American Trotskyism developed differently from French, Latin American, or Asian Trotskyism.¹⁵ In this field, the wider the range of vision, the deeper the

13. Van der Linden, “Socialisme ou Barbarie”. The canon of this type of approach certainly includes: E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968); *idem*, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London, 1977); Rainero Panzieri, *Spontaneità e organizzazione: gli anni dei “Quaderni rossi” 1959–1964* (Pisa, 1994); *idem*, *The Labour Process and Class Strategies* (London, 1978); Erhard Lucas, James Wickham, and Karl Heinz Roth, *Arbeiterradikalismus und Die “andere” Arbeiterbewegung: zur Diskussion der Massenarbeiterthese* (Bochum, 1977).

14. Jacques Roussel has remarked of the three Trotskyist currents in France – the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), Workers’ Struggle (LO) and the Workers’ Party (PT) – “These three groups have radically divergent positions on most of the major revolutionary problems of our time”; Jacques Roussel, *Les enfants du prophète: histoire du mouvement trotskyste en France* (Paris, 1972), p. 56.

15. See e.g. on Asian Trotskyism, Gregor Benton, *China’s Urban Revolutionaries: Explorations in the History of Chinese Trotskyism, 1921–1952* (New York, 1996); Kumari Jayawardene, “Le contexte de la formation du Lanka Sama Samaya Party”, *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, 61 (February 1998); Meryl Fernando, “Le LSSP du 1939 à 1960”, *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, 61 (February 1998). On Trotskyism in Germany: Wolfgang Alles, *Zur Politik und Geschichte der deutschen Trotzkisten ab 1930* (Frankfurt/M, 1987). On British Trotskyism: John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism, Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1984); *idem*, *The Far Left in British Politics* (Oxford, 1987). On the Trotskyist movement in Bolivia: J. Robles, “Trotskyism in Bolivia”, *Revolutionary History*, 4:3 (1992); L. Justo, “Bolivia: The Revolution Defeated. Origins, Development and Postmortem of the First Proletarian Revolution of Latin America”, *Revolutionary History*, 4:3 (1992); J. Lieven, “Bolivia, From the Birth of the Revolutionary Workers Party to the Popular Assembly”, *Revolutionary History*, 4:3 (1992). On Cuba: Gary Tennant, “Les trotskystes cubains entre deux révolutions : le parti bolchevik-léniniste et le parti

insights. Daniel Bensaïd made no mistake in giving his recently published essay, *Les trotskysmes*, a title in the plural form.¹⁶

Lefort and Castoriadis's assertion lacks credibility, finally, because of its admittedly implicit but nonetheless unavoidable implication: if Trotskyists had been a mere "appendix" of Stalinism, then they would have been sucked, like disoriented orphans, into the whirlpools of Moscow-line communism as it declined in the 1990s. But that did not, in fact, happen. Trotskyist organizations have consolidated themselves and sometimes play a prominent role, for example, in the European global justice movement, in the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT),¹⁷ and in France, where the Trotskyists put together won 10.4 per cent of the vote in the 2002 presidential elections. According to polls, a bloc of the French Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) and Workers' Struggle (LO) could even be heading towards 22 per cent of the vote in upcoming regional and European elections.¹⁸

Inspired by this resurgence, several remarkable monographs have appeared recently in France about the far left and Trotskyism¹⁹ – a welcome source of information as background to the revelation of former prime minister Lionel Jospin's Trotskyist past.²⁰ They are all the more welcome given the long and complex history of the world of French Trotskyism, which consists of at least three different currents – the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), Workers' Struggle (LO), and the Internationalist Communist Organization/Workers' Party (OCI-PT) – each with its own distinctive political, cultural, and social background.²¹

ouvrier révolutionnaire (1935–1956)", *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, 73 (2001), pp. 5–60.

16. Bensaïd, *Les trotskysmes*.

17. One part of the Brazilian Trotskyists have organized themselves inside the PT in the current Socialist Democracy (DS). In the last elections for the party presidency in 2001 Raul Pont, former mayor of Porto Alegre, won 17.5 per cent of the vote (*International Viewpoint*, November 2001). DS member, Miguel Rossetto, is Minister of Agrarian Reform in the Lula government. Daniel Bensaïd calls Porto Alegre the "symbolic city where the Trotskyist left of the Workers' Party has played a decisive role over the last 20 years"; Bensaïd, *Les trotskysmes*, p. 123.

18. *De Morgen*, 4 November 2003.

19. Bensaïd, *Les trotskysmes*; Marie, *Le trotskysme et les trotskystes*; Charpier, *Histoire de L'extrême gauche trotskiste*; Nick, *Les Trotskistes*.

20. Lionel Jospin admitted on 5 June 2001 that he had been "Michel", the pseudonym he chose in 1965 on joining Pierre Lambert's Internationalist Communist Organization (OCI), now the Workers' Party (PT). He secretly maintained his membership when he joined François Mitterand's new Socialist Party in June 1971. He supposedly broke with the OCI in the mid-1980s; *Le Monde*, 6 June 2001. On Lionel Jospin: Claude Askolovitch, *Lionel* (Paris, 2001); Edwy Plenel, *Secrets de jeunesse* (Paris, 2001); Serge Raffy, *Jospin, secrets de famille* (Paris, 2001); Cecil Amar and Ariane Chemin, *Jospin et Cie: histoire de la gauche plurielle 1993–2002* (Paris, 2002).

21. The history of the different currents has not been chronicled. Information on recent developments can be found in: Olivier Besancenot, *Tout est à nous!: facteur et candidat de la LCR à la présidentielles* (Paris, 2002); Robert Barcia (alias Hardy), *La véritable histoire de Lutte*

The three currents have gone through substantial changes, particularly in recent years, partly influenced by the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Not all these writers have managed to do justice to their topic. A vigorous polemic arose around the work of Christophe Nick, an author whose relationship to scholarly diligence and intellectual honesty is remarkably fancy-free. A historian is familiar with the perils of oral history, but Nick is not; he raises “rumours” to the status of facts without the slightest corroboration. In *Le Monde*, Daniel Gluckstein reproached him with having written an adventure novel full of stimulating but fictitious “storytelling”.²² Nick had saddled Gluckstein, the Lambertist presidential candidate, with a “glorious” biography, thanks to which he found himself labelled a pathological liar just a few months before the elections. Other Trotskyist spokespeople, such as Jean-Michel Krivine and the Italian, Livio Maitan, a member of the Fourth International’s leadership, protested at Nick’s sense of fantasy.²³ Aside from his carelessness with dates, and in spelling names,²⁴ and his meagre sketches of some key figures – the only thing we learn about Ernest Mandel is that he was a Belgian economist – Nick blunders repeatedly in dealing with points of major significance for Trotskyists like the 1921 Kronstadt uprising or the Trotskyists’ activities during the German occupation.

Nick has no doubt that Stalinism was Lenin’s creation, and that Trotsky in power was guilty of repression that preceded and matched Stalin’s.²⁵ Kronstadt, in Nick’s opinion, was far more than an incident; he cites Victor Serge’s indictment in his chapter “Danger from Within” at length, but forgets to mention that this same Serge explains, a few pages later in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* why, after “many hesitations, and with unutterable anguish, my Communist friends and I finally declared ourselves on the side of the Party”.²⁶ The fact that an anarchist like Serge took this position suggests, at the least, that the revolution was in danger. Nick’s assertion that the Fourth International defends Trotsky’s justification of the Bolsheviks’ actions does not correspond to the

Ouvrière: entretiens avec Christophe Bourseiller (Paris, 2003). On the OCI-PT: Philippe Campinchi, *Les lambertistes, Un courant trotskiste français* (Paris, 2000).

22. *Le Monde*, 20 February 2002.

23. *Inprecor*, March/April 2002.

24. Nick refers to Joop Swart when he means Joop Zwart, Jacob Monatte instead of Jacob Moneta, Santen instead of Salomon Santen, Tharlmann instead of Paul Thalmann, Bryan Gisy instead of Gregor Gysi, and Simone Minguet instead of Simonne Minguet. He writes (p. 94) that Rudi Dutschke was killed in April 1968, whereas, in fact, Dutschke died on 24 December 1979.

25. Nick, *Les Trotskistes*, p. 154. The idea “Trotsky, Stalin, they were all guilty!” fits with the accounts in François Furet, *Le passé d’une illusion: essai sur l’idée communiste au xxe siècle* (Paris, 1995) and Stéphane Courtois et al., *Le livre noir du communisme: crimes, terreur et répression* (Paris, 1997).

26. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901–1941* (London, 1967), p. 128.

facts,²⁷ any more than his statement that for Trotsky the end justified the means. Trotsky explicitly rejects that proposition in *Their Morals and Ours*.²⁸

Nick also makes a mess of things in his account of Trotskyists' actions during World War II. With the subtitle "The Jews Under Vichy: A Mere Detail for the Trotskyists",²⁹ Nick attributes to Trotskyists not only a record of collaboration, but a denial of the Holocaust maintained up to the present day, which would be worthy of Le Pen's National Front. He shows the same cynicism when he belittles Trotskyist calls for fraternization with the German proletariat. He misrepresents both the Trotskyists' work among German soldiers,³⁰ and the great number of Trotskyists of Jewish origin who fell victim to anti-Semitism. Nick's portrayal of events is not only dubious but even self-contradictory, as when he says, for example, that the great majority of Trotskyists opposed any idea of armed resistance (not just individual terror),³¹ and yet remarks at another point that Marcel Hic's Internationalist Workers' Party (POI) was the first French political organization to join the resistance.³²

Admittedly, there were Trotskyists who thought that, as long as the Nazi regime showed no sign of disintegrating, it was better to wait and see and not resist actively. Fighting for the restoration of parliamentary, bourgeois democracy was pointless, they thought; better to keep their guns in reserve for other purposes. But there was certainly no consensus in the Fourth International on this point. Abraham Léon called on Trotskyists in 1943 to support every resistance movement and try to push the resistance in the direction of a revolutionary, proletarian movement.³³ Ernest Mandel – like Léon a member of the provisional "European

27. For a critique of Trotsky's opinions in those years, see: Mandel, *Trotsky, A Study in the Dynamic of His Thought*, pp. 53–65; *idem, Trotsky as Alternative* (London, 1995), pp. 81–84.

28. Leon Trotsky, *Their Morals and Ours* (New York, 1942).

29. Nick, *Les Trotskistes*, p. 302.

30. Clara and Paul Thalman, *Revolution für die Freiheit, Stationen eines politischen Kampfes* (Grafenau-Döffingen, 1987); Prager, *Les congrès de la Quatrième Internationale: 2 L'Internationale dans la Guerre (1940–1946)*.

31. Nick, *Les Trotskistes*, pp. 312–313.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 311, 301. On 31 August 1940 the POI published the first underground newspaper in France: *La Vérité, organe bolchévique-léniniste*, no. 1, 31 August 1940; *Facsimilé La Vérité 1940/1944, Journal trotskyste clandestin sous l'occupation nazie* (Paris, 1978).

33. Abraham Léon, "Les Tâches de la 4ème Internationale en Europe", 1942, AMSAB, BAVI Archives, no. 286; "Manifestes et résolutions du IVe Congrès" (Part 1), "Rapport sur la question nationale" (Rapporteur Léon) (1943) AMSAB, BAVI Archives, no. 1. In July 1942 the Belgian Section also supported the "Theses on the National Question" drafted by Marcel Hic, which attributes great importance to national movements, including the right of minorities (Bretons, Basques, Flemings, Welsh, and Albanians) to their own language and administration; Prager, *L'Internationale dans la guerre*, vol. 2, pp. 119–145; Bensaïd, *Les trotskysmes*, p. 52. For a summary of Abraham Léon's life see the foreword by Ernest Mandel (E. Germain) to Abram Léon, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (New York, 1970).

Secretariat” – was no more reluctant than Léon to jump into the fight.³⁴ A person who called the struggle against deportations “Germanophobic” or called a protest march of hungry people to German occupation headquarters “nationalist”, said the twenty-year-old Mandel, understood nothing of proletarian struggle. He stressed that Trotskyist militants should always support every struggle. “Moreover, SUPPORTING THESE MOVEMENTS IS BECOMING THE PRECONDITION TO MAKING THE MASSES ACCEPT FRATERNIZATION WITH THE GERMAN PROLETARIAT AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THEIR OWN BOURGEOISIE” (capitals in the original). Even if some people took part with nationalist aims, Mandel continued, making that the primary consideration would lead to the “absurd” conclusion that “THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE AND THE WHOLE CLASS STRUGGLE MUST BE SUSPENDED FOR THE DURATION OF THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.” Mandel committed himself to beware of chauvinism, but to support every demonstration, every strike and every disturbance. In our opinion, Mandel’s opinion makes no concession to the Trotskyist abstentionism that Nick alleges.

Although its 600-page length gives an impression of thoroughness, Nick’s book is anything but thorough. It is more mythology than scholarly history. Ex-Trotskyist and surrealist, Maurice Nadeau, expressed the same judgment succinctly in the phrase: “This is the work of a journalist-interviewer who turns politics into a polar wasteland.”³⁵ French historian, Jean-Jacques Marie, author of several studies on Trotskyism, as well as a recent biography of Stalin, cites Nadeau approvingly in his monograph *Le trotskysme et les trotskystes*, published shortly after Nick’s book.³⁶

Marie sets out to explain the origin of the various Trotskyist currents – their thought, activities, and perspectives – and to investigate the question of whether their divisions result from a “congenital” sectarianism, or are linked to major political differences, despite their common reference points. After an initial chapter in which he examines the genesis of the term “Trotskyism”, Marie presents the history of the movement in chronological form, relying primarily on secondary sources and in a more descriptive than analytical way. From 1968 on, his exposition seems more rushed and impressionistic, while the last twenty years are referred to only

34. E.R. (E. Mandel), “Les Tâches du parti et la montée révolutionnaire”, *Intern bulletin Cuisinez a l’électricité, propreté! Confort! Economie!*, April 1943, Rodolphe Prager Archive, folder 146; Jan Willem Stutje, “Ernest Mandels kleine oorlog, Revolutionaire socialisten in bezettingstijd, 1940–1945”, *Cahiers d’Histoire du Temps présent/Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, 12 (2003), pp. 7–51.

35. *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 15–28 February 2002, p. 27.

36. Marie, *Le trotskysme; idem, Trotsky, le trotskysme et la IVe Internationale*, (Paris, 1980); *idem, Staline* (Paris, 2001).

in connection with a few key themes: Europe and Maastricht, the former Soviet Union, Palestine and Israel, drugs, and sexuality.

Marie, himself a member of the Lambertist OCI since the 1950s, tries to do justice to the different currents. He succumbs nonetheless to prejudices here and there, particularly in his choice of citations (of which there are many in his work), which seem to illustrate the thesis that the Lambertists are the only current that has remained true to Trotsky's legacy. Marie's rejection of the LCR's libertarian ideas on the subjects of gay rights and drugs, and his silence about the Lambertists' dubious role in Algerian solidarity movements,³⁷ reveal a similar bias.³⁸ These shortcomings – more than the few examples in his work of carelessness and ambiguous formulations – will prevent Marie's study from becoming a standard work on the subject.³⁹

Frédéric Charprier's *Histoire de l'extrême gauche trotskiste* shows no trace of the prejudices that mar Christophe Nick's work, and to a lesser extent Jean-Jacques Marie's. This is not because Charprier is neutral. He handles his subject with commitment and respect, but without doing violence to the facts; his work reads well and is well documented. The Trotskyist movement remained a small one in twentieth-century France, made up of several hundred or at times a few thousand people. The French Communist Party (PCF), with its overwhelming influence in the trade unions and in broader left-wing circles, left them no space: Trotskyists were slandered, denounced, threatened with violence, and occasionally murdered. It is fascinating to read that the movement was nonetheless less marginal in French politics than one might expect from its small size.

Trotskyists played a key role in countless movements. They defended the defendants in the Moscow trials and demanded unity in the struggle against fascism when the communists were still dismissing social democrats as social fascists. In wartime, they preserved the honour of the labour movement by rejecting chauvinism, and calling for workers' unity against fascism as an alternative to the terrorizing bombing of Dresden and Hamburg. After the war as well, Trotskyists provided inspiration to a milieu that extended further than their own ranks. Their solidarity with the struggle for Algerian independence⁴⁰ is as noteworthy

37. See Sylvain Pattieu, *Les camarades des frères. Trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris, 2002), pp. 53–67.

38. Marie, *Le trotskysme*, pp. 185–188.

39. *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, 79 (December 2002), Notes de lecture, p. 116.

40. See an interesting recent study of solidarity in France with the Algerian resistance: Sylvain Pattieu, *Les camarades des frères, Trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris, 2002). Older studies include: Herve Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Les porteurs de valises, La résistance française à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris, 1979); Ali Haroun, *La 7^e Wilaya, La guerre du FLN en France 1954–1962* (Paris, 1986); Mohammed Harbi, *Une vie debout, Mémoires politiques, vol. 1: 1945–1962* (Paris, 2001). For Trotskyist solidarity in Germany and Belgium with the Algerian freedom fighters see: Claus Leggewie, *Kofferträger, Das Algerien-Projekt der Linken im*

as their critical thinking about late capitalism, which led them to predict a new depressive period even during the “golden years of capitalism”.⁴¹ For the 1968 generation, the Flemish Marxist theoretician and radical political leader, Ernest Mandel, was a source of inspiration and an example.

Charpier does not omit from his account the major, sometimes bitterly divisive, debates in the movement: controversies over “entryism”, the nature of the Soviet Union, the colonial revolution, and guerrilla tactics in South America in the 1970s. After Pinochet’s 1973 coup d’état, the LCR leadership even considered kidnapping the Chilean ambassador.⁴² Charpier reports it all matter-of-factly, but with a good feeling for detail. Without hiding his scepticism about what he calls the “revolutionary myth”, he shows that he is impressed by the influence of contemporary French Trotskyism. Since 1995, roughly two million French voters have been casting their ballots for Trotskyist candidates, a total that is totally out of proportion to Trotskyists’ organizational strength. The LCR, LO, and OCI-PT still count their members in thousands, not tens of thousands. Charpier poses the question, “Will this influence last?”⁴³

Daniel Bensaïd asks the same question in *Les trotskysmes*. This political essay retraces the turbulent history of the Trotskyists’ emergence from the marginality in which their movement found itself after World War II. More than the other authors, Bensaïd sets out to analyse and draw up a balance sheet not of “Trotskyism” but, as he emphatically states, of “Trotskyisms”. Despite their common programmatic baggage, the differences among Trotskyist currents turn out to be greater than their similarities.

The different currents owe their existence to the unforeseen character of immediate postwar events. Trotsky may have left his followers “equipped with a valuable legacy”, Bensaïd says, “but without a users’ manual”.⁴⁴ Contrary to Trotsky’s predictions, neither revolutions in the imperialist countries nor the collapse of the Soviet Union’s Stalinist bureaucracy occurred. In fact, the Kremlin extended its power to Eastern Europe and imperialism began a long period of expansion. These unexpected events required time to understand and led to painful splits. Bensaïd rightly reminds his readers that Trotsky’s prognosis made no claim to infallibility;

Adenauer-Deutschland (Berlin, 1984); Jean L. Doneux and Hugues Le Paige, *Le front du Nord, des Belges dans la guerre d’Algérie (1952–1962)* (Brussels, 1992).

41. Ernest Mandel, “The Economics of Neocapitalism”, *The Socialist Register*, 1964; Ernest Mandel, *Der Spätkapitalismus* (Frankfurt/M, 1972); *idem*, *Late Capitalism* (London, 1975).

42. Charpier, *L’Histoire de l’extrême gauche*, p. 283.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

44. Bensaïd, *Les trotskysmes*, p. 56. According to Bensaïd, the programmatic foundation of Trotskyism consists of four elements: (1) the theory of permanent revolution; (2) the theory of transitional demands and the united front against fascism; (3) a critique of Stalinism and bureaucracy; and (4) the question of the party and the International.

it was only a hypothesis.⁴⁵ But – we must add – however carefully it was formulated, it provided no insurance against mistakes.

Trotskyists clung too long to the doctrine that capitalism was going through the phase of its final collapse.⁴⁶ Ernest Mandel declared for example in March 1946:

Even if the war has not immediately led to a revolutionary wave in Europe on the scale and at the pace we had counted on, it is no less clear that it has destroyed the capitalist equilibrium on a world scale, opening up a long revolutionary period. Our self-criticism of our perspectives [...] is limited essentially to questions of tempo; it does not change our judgment of the nature of the period that has followed the imperialist war.⁴⁷

Mandel thus held on – albeit with some postponements – to a catastrophic perspective, denying the possibility of recovery. Here and there empirical counterarguments were put forward, but without success.⁴⁸ Visions of collapse were not limited to left-wing circles, incidentally. Pessimism predominated in other milieux as well, and fears for the future were widespread. Joseph Schumpeter noted in 1943, “It is a commonplace that capitalist society is, and for some time has been, in a state of decay.”⁴⁹ As late as 1953, John Kenneth Galbraith still foresaw a rapid collapse of the US economy. This led him to investigate the 1929 Crash in hopes of arriving at some useful insights.⁵⁰ Only after 1955 did the “golden years of capitalism” – two decades of uninterrupted economic growth – put an end to the pessimism. Galbraith lost his interest in slumps and announced that the West had entered the era of The Affluent Society.⁵¹ Mandel too in those years, by updating the theory of “long waves”, developed a new and effective framework for unravelling the secrets of postwar capitalist

45. *Ibid.*

46. Geoff Hodgson, *Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism* (Nottingham, 1977).

47. “Résolution: La nouvelle ‘paix’ impérialiste et la construction des partis de la IVe Internationale”, in Prager, *Les congrès de la quatrième internationale, vol. 2, L’Internationale dans la guerre 1940–1946*, p. 405. Cf. E. Germain (Ernest Mandel), “The First Phase of the European Revolution”, *Fourth International*, August 1946.

48. Marcel van der Linden, *Het westers marxisme en de Sovjet Unie* (Amsterdam, 1989), p. 89; Hodgson, *Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism*, p. 39; Callaghan, *British Trotskyism, Theory and Practice*, p. 33. The majority of the British Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), for example, pointed to the beginning of an economic boom, but stressed at the same time: “only to face later, we repeat, a greater catastrophe than capitalism has ever confronted in its history” [retranslated from the French]; see “Les perspectives pour la Grande Bretagne et l’orientation du Parti Communiste Révolutionnaire”, resolution adopted at the 1946 RCP Conference, in Rodolphe Prager Archive, folder 158. In the US in 1946 Max Shachtman’s Workers’ Party also predicted a boom, while insisting it would be limited to the US; see Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left*, pp. 199–200.

49. Cited in David Cannadine, “The Past and the Present in the English Industrial Revolution 1880–1980”, *Past & Present*, 103 (May 1984), p. 142.

50. John K. Galbraith, *The Great Crash 1929* (London, 1955; repr. Boston, MA, 1961).

51. *Idem*, *The Affluent Society* (London, 1962).

dynamism.⁵² His conclusions, of course, rejected conventional economists' findings. The capitalism of the so-called "thirty glorious years" remained in his eyes profoundly capitalist, despite all the fashionable talk about something "totally new and different".⁵³

Mandel's analysis came too late to show everyone the way round the Trotskyist labyrinth. The current around David Rousset (1947), *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (1948), the Lambertists (1952), and the group in England around Tony Cliff (1950) had already left the Fourth International.

Bensaïd shows no fear of heretical ideas. For example, he considers the formula that the crisis of humanity results in the last analysis from the crisis of the revolutionary leadership, ritually repeated in Trotskyist circles, too superficial. The absence of a leadership is not the one missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle called revolution, he says. Since the 1930s, the accumulation of defeats for the workers' movement has changed the objective situation itself. Failing to see this, says philosopher Bensaïd, feeds the wellsprings of political paranoia, which continually explains setbacks as the result of capitulation or betrayal by the vanguard.⁵⁴ To our mind this insight can help explain Trotskyism's periodically recurrent internal crises.

In his rich and complex essay, Bensaïd shows no reluctance to write about the countless shortcomings and errors of "Trotskyisms", including of the LCR, the organization that he has helped lead since 1969. He tellingly explores the risks of "entryism" – the Trotskyist practice from the early 1950s to the late 1960s of infiltrating social democratic or Stalinist parties – and concludes that all too many "entryists", "subject simultaneously to the Newtonian law of gravity and the Darwinian law of adaptation to the surrounding environment, assimilated into the movement that they were supposed to be subverting. Jospin is the outstanding example."⁵⁵ He also subjects the notorious issue of armed struggle in Latin

52. On long waves see: Nikolai D. Kondratieff, "Die langen Wellen der Konjunktur", *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, December 1926; Leon Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (New York, 1945). Trotsky's criticism of Kondratieff in "The Curve of Capitalist Development" in *idem*, *Problems of Everyday Life* (New York, 1973), pp. 273–280. Mandel's synthesis in Mandel, *Spätkapitalismus*; *idem*, *Long Waves of Capitalist Development* (London, 1995); Alfred Kleinknecht, Ernest Mandel, and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds), *New Findings in Long-Wave Research* (New York, 1992). On Mandel's theory of long waves see Francisco Louça, "Ernest Mandel and the Pulsation of History", in G. Achcar (ed.), *The Legacy of Ernest Mandel* (London, 1999), and Richard B. Day, "The Theory of Long Waves: Kondratiev, Trotsky, Mandel", *New Left Review*, 99 (September–October 1976), pp. 67–82.

53. Ernest Mandel was one of the critics of Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital*, which attempted to revise Marx's theory of capitalism against the backdrop of the "long boom" of the 1950s and 1960s; P.A. Baran and P.M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York, 1966).

54. Bensaïd, *Les trotskysmes*, p. 62.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

America, which tormented the Fourth International from 1969 until the mid-1970s, to a critical examination.

The tragedy is that new insights do not wipe out the consequences of earlier mistaken choices. The demoralization of “lost” generations makes the work of subsequent generations that much more difficult. That too is part of the objective situation, whose relevance today Bensaïd points out anew.

The four works that we have reviewed all show to a greater or lesser extent the ephemeral nature of journalism. This is a sign that current events demand new insights about Trotskyism. But most of these authors, in order to supply the public’s needs, have not withstood the temptation to view the secrets of history primarily through the keyhole. They pay too much attention to incidents, which they describe too often on the basis of direct oral and written testimony, without the mediation of a considered historical interpretation. Furthermore most of these works examine Trotskyism in its French manifestations, without doing justice to its international dimension; yet Trotskyism as a national phenomenon is a contradiction in terms. Only Bensaïd escapes this reproach. But due to his essay’s use of sources and manner of composition, it has too few claims to be, besides a stimulating argument, also a scholarly analysis.