

# Hail Red Army Nerve Gas!

## Trotskyism as Psychopathology

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In politics nothing can be taken at face value; many times what passes for an elaborately drawn political point of view is little more than a posture which conceals psychopathology. Trotskyism, a stillborn variety of marxism notable for the bizarre historical ironies embodied in it, is a particularly appropriate example.

Trotsky, a complex personality of a peculiarly brittle, scholastic intellect, was the first stalinist. In fact, far from representing an "opposition" of "stalinist degeneration" of the Russian Revolution, his political character demonstrates the intimate connection between Bolshevism and stalinism. For Trotsky, the crisis of humanity was reduced to a simple formula: the "crisis of leadership." And by leadership, he was quite specific: he meant "the party."

This individualistic political gadfly who had once astutely accused the Bolsheviks of substituting their own party for the masses, once inside the party proved to be the quintessential bureaucrat and party man. In fact, Trotsky so vehemently defended the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, the crushing of opposition to the Soviet state, the militarization of labor and the bureaucratization process, that even Lenin disassociated himself from him, and Stalin was able to taunt -him with being the "patriarch of the bureaucrats." Trotsky turned the political expediencies of the Bolshevik politicians into universal principles, claiming that the compulsory labor armies and the concentration camps which he was responsible for organizing were "the inevitable method of organization and disciplining of labor power during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism," and, "This is the basis of socialism...the militarization of labor." (See *Trotsky, Terrorism and Communism*; also Peter Beilharz, "Trotsky's Marxism—Permanent Involution?" in *Telos* No. 39, Spring 1979.)

Trotsky was also a great defender of bureaucracy as a principle, claiming that Russia suffered not from excess but from lack of it, and that it was necessary for the sake of efficiency to grant privileges to the bureaucracy. For Trotsky, it was a virtue that marxists were never "idol-worshippers of formal democracy." After all, he was to point out in his attacks on the Workers Opposition, that the "revolutionary historical birthright of the Party" was such that it was "obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of the temporary vacillations even in the working class." (See Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, Vol. I, chapter XIV. Deutscher points out that "There was hardly a single plank in Trotsky's programme of 1920 through 21 which Stalin did not use during the industrial revolution of the thirties.")

Trotskyism is "partyism" pure and simple. In the pathological voluntarism of the trotskyists the party stands above everything, including a complex, shifting social reality. For trotskyists, as for Trotsky, as he was to argue openly, "That is permissible...which really leads to the liberation of mankind." But who is to decide what will lead to liberation? Who else but the party: "In the last analysis the party is always right No one can be right against the party...since the party embodies the very highest tasks and aims of mankind."

If Trotsky himself was to fall victim to the axe of his revolutionary logic in Coyoacan, Mexico, his epigones have raised his most repugnant political stupidities to religious principles. If there is something less than admirable about "commissar Trotsky" having anarchists, or "deserters," or "shirkers" summarily executed by the Red Police, even more repulsive is the spectacle of his disciples in New York calling for the crushing—that is, the

extermination—of tribal people or unruly workers who do not care to recognize the infallibility of the party dictatorship and the forward march of the “workers state.”

The Spartacist League is one example of this pathology of “little men” smugly calling for a powerful police state to murder, imprison, bayonet, bomb and “mop up” those who oppose its will. Hence, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan at the end of 1979, to defend its client military government in Kabul, the tiny Spartacist League declared in a spasm of soviet patriotism, headlines screaming “Hail Red Army!” and photos of smiling Soviet troops, that “the liberation of the Afghan masses has begun!” Calling for “unconditional military support to the Soviet army” (what could this possibly mean from midget bureaucrats fulminating from their armchairs in New York?), they felt it necessary to add, “although it is surely uncalled for militarily, a natural desire on the part of the world’s young leftists would be an enthusiastic desire to join an international brigade to Afghanistan to fight the CIA-connected mullahs.” (*Workers Vanguard*, 11 January 1980)

And these small-change stalinists-out-of-power didn’t even flinch when it became common knowledge that the Red Army “liberators” were using nerve gas on the disobedient, uncooperative “masses” in the hinterlands. If the tribesmen didn’t understand what was best for them, then they would have to be gassed and bombed. The liberation of mankind demanded it. When an FE staff member pointed this out to one Spartacist member, she screamed, “You want to see women in the veil, you want them sold for a brideprice!” When it was argued that western civilization’s solution of gassing whole villages was hardly an alternative to even barbaric practices, she answered, “So what! History is a pile of corpses!” Trotskyists love talking in such terms, shamefully bragging about making the pile even bigger. They even gleefully quoted Alexander Cockburn of the *Village Voice* who wrote, “If ever a country deserved rape, it’s Afghanistan.” Making sure that the leaders in the Kremlin heard them, they wrote in more than one of their publications, “The Trotskyists stand at their posts.”

Now it is the workers themselves who have raised the ire of the trotskyists, challenging the authority of the Polish state and the Soviet Union. Hysterical over the uprising in Poland, the spartacists write-in a recent issue of their “organ,” “The threat of a counterrevolutionary thrust for power is now posed in Poland. That threat must be crushed at all costs and by any means necessary.” (WV, 9/25/81). By counterrevolution the trotskyists mean “capitalist restoration.” But “capitalist restoration” in a country which already runs along bureaucratic state capitalist lines is as absurd a formulation as a “workers state,” deformed, or degenerated, in which the workers are totally crushed under the power of a bureaucratic police apparatus. But they are trotskyists, which is to say that they are the disciples of the bureaucratic plan. Their vision of socialism is administrative and technological, and linked to juridical forms of property relations rather than the real relations of production. The means of production are owned by the state and the state is operated by the managers—that is, by the Stalinist bureaucrats. And so perhaps they also want to form an “international brigade” of commissars and bureaucrats to machine gun, round up, mop up, and crush the recalcitrant Polish workers. Of course, they will want to take their gas masks along, since their soviet liberators will probably use the same nerve gas that is being used on the “feudal” peasants in Afghanistan.

Screaming about “anti-soviet” moves in Poland, these lovers of police power, summary execution and the labor camp, proclaim, “If the Kremlin Stalinists, in their necessarily brutal, stupid way, intervene militarily to stop it [the “counterrevolution” threatening the “gains of October”] we will support this.” (Will they send guns and volunteers, we wonder?) The fact is that even with a “capitalist restoration,” that is, a purely formal change in whose name is on the deeds to the shipyards (what will the “counterrevolutionaries” do—have a lottery to see Who gets to be the new capitalists?), the Polish workers couldn’t be any worse off than they already are—hungry and standing in long lines to fight over dwindling amounts of goods, thanks to years of “socialist planning” and looting by the Soviet Union and the western banks.

But if the Red Army intervenes, the Trots will cheer the tanks which impose labor discipline, round up not only the reactionary clerics but the radical and socialist workers (whose activities we can only surmise by reading between the lines of the international press), and guarantee that the banks get the money owed to them. Their charges of “anti-sovietism” sound like “Jewish science” or “trotskyite fifth column” and other catchphrases of police states everywhere. “Counterrevolution is no joke,” they say, and publish banner headlines calling the murderers of the Kremlin to destroy the Polish working class in order to save it. They even uncritically report state-patronized “mass meetings” in the Soviet Union which denounce the Polish workers and note that the Soviet Union lost 600,000 troops fighting the Nazis in Poland, without bothering to mention that the Soviet Union split up Poland with the

Nazis in the first place. What does it matter to the Poles if western corporations help plan the already “planned economy” and extract surpluses for the western banks? This is essentially identical to the situation that led to this crisis in the state-capitalist eastern bloc in the first place.

Because trotskysts are hypnotized by the spectacle of political power, they see the wheeling and dealing of Lech Walesa and the politicians in Solidarity as the essential character of the Polish events, rather than the impulse on the part of the Polish workers fed up with the glorious “gains of the October Revolution” to have some semblance of control over their lives. Like the decaying old men in the Kremlin whom they emulate, they see plots everywhere. They see the desire for “self-management” (which seems to be the common desire among Poles, and not a return to western-style private capitalism) as counterrevolution because they love arbitrary administrative power, the hallmark of their prophet.

But more than bureaucratic control, the trotskyst pathology is fascinated by police rule and bloodshed. The “little men” love to imitate their rulers. “Shoot them! Crush them!” howl the degenerated workers statists, drooling over the idea of firing squads. Even if the Poles, indifferent to the tortuous dialectic of the trotskysts, did want to try the “western road,” under the mistaken notion that things would be significantly any different than they have been under state-capitalism, the spartacists would not tolerate the Poles making their own mistakes, finding their own way out of the morass. They would need work discipline, labor armies, martial law, the Gulag, cops and troops on every street corner, even nerve gas, even nukes—“revolutionary,” collectivized nukes of course—to keep the illusion intact, the edifice in place, the bureaucrats in command.

The trots see themselves as the “only” solution to the crisis facing humanity. The preponderance of this adverb in their literature reveals their delusions of grandeur and their shrill demand that the world conform to their formulas or be crushed under the weight of the totalitarian state they worship. But ultimately, it is only the Polish people and they alone who can decide the outcome and the terms of revolution and counterrevolution in Poland.

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