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## Why Trotskyism Is Reactionary

The Progressive Labor Party recognizes that Trotskyism is phony communism, also called "revisionism" – capitalist ideas in a left disguise. Many people, including many Trotskyists themselves, don't understand the reactionary essence of Trotskyism.

*In this pamphlet we'll expose the fallacies of Trotskyism in two ways.*

- *We'll discuss some facts about Trotsky himself that expose how reactionary he was.*
- *We'll expose the idealist\* – non-Marxist, anti-materialist – basis of Trotskyism.*

Trotskyist groups trace their beginnings in pro-Trotsky factions within the Bolshevik Party -- called the Communist Party of the Soviet Union/Bolshevik, or CPSU(b) – during the 1920s. When Trotsky was expelled from the Soviet in 1928, his supporters were also expelled from other parties in the Communist International, or 'Comintern', or quit on their own. Some of these groups formed new Trotskyist parties in various countries, continuing after Trotsky's assassination in 1940. They attracted some left-leaning and anti-Soviet intellectuals, though few workers. Their determined struggle against the Soviet Union and Comintern earned them publicity by the capitalists far beyond their numbers.

With Khrushchev's denunciations of Stalin in 1956 and 1961, but especially with the end of the USSR in the early '90s, the pro-Soviet revisionist groups shrank in numbers and influence. The disappearance of pro-China communist groups after Deng Xiao-ping led the Chinese Communist Party swiftly to the right upon Mao Tse-tung's death in 1976 completed the collapse of the old Communist movement. Trotskyist political parties have become more prominent in a much smaller "left" no longer dominated by pro-Soviet groups.

### **Cult of "Great Leaders" Always Reactionary**

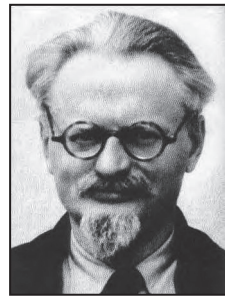
Even if Trotsky had been a great revolutionary and theorist like Marx or Lenin, Trotskyism would still be reactionary, because Trotskyist groups treat him as an unquestionable authority. In reality, Trotsky was a dishonest reactionary, whose arrogance and great ego led him to be one of the main founts of anti-communism for capitalist exploiters.

We in PLP do not intend to simply continue the "Stalin – Trotsky" battles of the past. In the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels wrote that workers "have nothing to lose

but their chains." The working class has no reason to hang on to outmoded ideas, refight old battles, or embrace errors made by our heroic ancestors in the communist movement.

We have studied Trotskyism, ready to learn whatever we might find that was valuable. If Trotskyism, and Trotskyist parties, offered anything positive, we would embrace it. If Trotskyists were forces we ever could unite with, we would do so.

But we can't. Trotskyism has nothing positive to offer the world's working class and the struggle for a communist world. It is a reactionary, idealist philosophy.



**Leon Trotsky**  
**1879-1940**

Trotsky was a Russian radical Marxist, a fluent and prolific writer, a powerful public speaker and, until August 1917, a Menshevik. The Mensheviks believed that only after capitalism had industrialized a country could a socialist revolution be successful.

By the middle of 1917 the Tsar had abdicated and a government of big capitalists had taken over Russia. The working class in the large cities had proven open to revolutionary leadership. Trotsky and some others, the "Mezhraiontsy" or Inter-district committee, joined the Bolshevik Party, where Lenin immediately put Trotsky on the Central Committee. He played an important role as military and political leader during the four-year long Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917.

Trotsky shared with Lenin and the rest of the Bolsheviks the view that the working class in Russia could not long hold power without revolutions in the advanced industrial countries of Western Europe. However, Trotsky was on the "right" of this continuum of views, believing more firmly than most that a failure of such revolutions would inevitably doom the socialist revolution in Russia. Others were less fatalistic.

This belief led Trotsky to advocate devoting all efforts to stimulating international revolutions. That, in turn, earned Trotsky a reputation as a "leftist". But note that this "super-revolutionary" attitude proceeds from a Menshevik -- an economic determinist, pessimistic, and ultimately "right" -- analysis: that capitalism still had a "progressive" role to play in industrializing Russia, unless this could be done with the aid of more advanced socialist countries.

## Trotsky's Arrogance

Many former Mensheviks became good Bolsheviks. All Bolsheviks had doubts and questions about how to develop "socialism in one country" if – as proved the case – there were no helpful revolutions in advanced capitalist societies. What determined Trotsky's reactionary political path were his class position as an elitist Russian intellectual, and his personality.

Intellectuals as a stratum of the petty bourgeoisie, were drawn to Menshevik analysis since it left capitalism and its relations of production, in place, and so justified a continuation of the relatively privileged position of intellectuals, and those with education generally, above workers and peasants. The Bolsheviks regarded this as a "necessary evil", a form of bribery to win technically-skilled intellectuals to help educate and industrialize the workers' state.

The Mensheviks went much further, rejecting the Bolshevik revolution as illegitimate in the absence of revolutions in more industrialized countries. Trotsky had abandoned the Mensheviks because he hoped the Russian Revolution would spark revolutions in advanced industrial countries like Germany, which could then help backward Russia advance.

Not all Bolshevik intellectuals took this line, however. Central to Trotsky's political career was his extreme individualism. Trotsky was convinced that he himself was a world-class genius and the only one who deserved to succeed Lenin as leader of the Bolshevik Party. Arrogant in his personal relations, he angered even his greatest admirers like Max Eastman. Arrogance is an extreme form of idealism.

Politically, this meant that Trotsky was constantly trying to gain power, forming alliances with other prominent Bolsheviks rather than supporting the party's line.

## Factionalism

During the 1920s the Bolsheviks had annual Conferences and Congresses in which they open debated the future course of the revolution. Trotsky's positions were consistently defeated. Trotsky's Menshevik ideas implied that, without further socialist revolutions in industrial countries, Russia's own revolution was doomed. Capitalism, Trotsky thought, was essential to industrializing Russia, which was too economically backward to do it alone.

Most working-class Bolsheviks recognized this as defeatist. Stalin and other Bolshevik leaders said the working class could industrialize the country by itself. This position won out in the great debates at the annual Party Conferences during the 1920s. Trotsky's line was overwhelmingly defeated. Since his great ego could not accept this, Trotsky continued to form secret alliances with other dissident communists, even after such "factions"

had been outlawed by a party vote in 1921.

## Democratic Centralism

According to Democratic Centralism, all communists must fight to put the party's line into practice once it has been decided upon by debate and vote. There is no other way to judge whether the Party's line is correct or not. For, if all members do not try to put it into effect with all their effort, who can say, in the case of failure, whether the line was incorrect, or whether it was correct but just never carried out?

Factionalism creates a situation where party members spend their time organizing around their own line, rather than vigorously trying to put the party's line into effect. It is similar to "democratic" capitalist politics, where different parties, and even different factions within a party, spend all their time trying to advance themselves by "beating the other guy." In a communist party, this is a recipe for disaster.

Trotsky was called to account time and again for his factional activity in the party debates of the 1920s. Each time he recanted, but went right back to doing the same thing. Eventually the exasperated Bolsheviks expelled him for incorrigible factionalizing.

Stalin was among the last to agree to this expulsion; Trotsky's later allies in the secret Opposition, including Bukharin, wanted to expel Trotsky much sooner! When he and some followers organized a counter-demonstration at the Bolshevik Revolution's 10th anniversary in 1927, Trotsky was expelled from the Party, exiled to a remote city, and finally deported from the USSR in January 1929.

## Trotsky's 'Cult of Personality'

Utterly lacking in modesty and self-criticism, Trotsky rationalized his factional activity by attributing his political defeats to dishonest maneuvers by his opponents – "stacking the votes", admitting "politically immature" workers as members, and counter-factionalizing. He never accepted that his ideas were, or could be, wrong. He had

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"cult of personality."

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no faith in the collective discussions and struggles of the Bolshevik party. He was out of touch with reality. In short, he was an idealist.

To account for his defeats Trotsky always complained

about a "lack of democracy" in the Party. But within the ranks of his own followers he tolerated no disagreement. The Trotskyist movement was a caricature of a "cult of personality." The "cult of Stalin" has long since been criticized – Stalin himself attacked it many times -- and is gone. But the "cult of Trotsky" has survived to the present day. No Trotskyist group publicly criticizes The Master. Trotsky's writings are said to be always right, unchanging – naturally, since Trotsky was killed in 1940 – and yet, somehow, still always valid.

Of course this is idealist nonsense. No ideas can be "forever correct", and Trotsky's were never correct in the first place. Trotsky owed his high position in the Bolshevik Party not to his ideas or writings, but to his organizational abilities, largely in the military. Here too, as in other key areas in which communist theory and practice might move ahead or be retarded, he took right-wing positions.

### Trotskyism A Form of Idealism

Marx once said: Criticize everything! That is the only materialist, scientific way to proceed. Trotskyist groups have no chance whatsoever of understanding reality correctly, much less of leading a working-class movement for communism, because they are devoted to a religious reverence for Trotsky's works.

This attitude stems from Trotsky himself. One source was Trotsky's own egoism. Another was his removal from political struggle. Trotsky had never been a worker; had, in fact, never worked for a living. He had long been divorced from contact with the working class, shown by his proposal in the early '20s to ban unions and put workers under military discipline. His following was overwhelmingly among intellectuals. After his exile in 1929, this divorce from practice deepened.



*Trotsky addresses Red Army soldiers in Moscow in 1918*

Communists know that, even with a thorough grounding in Marxism-Leninism, only devoted political practice in the working-class movement makes any kind of correct understanding of reality, and evaluation of theory, possible. The Chinese Communist Party led by Mao Tse-tung discovered – not by "theory," but through practice forced upon them by bitter necessity – that peasants could be the leading force for a working-class revolution and, therefore, that the dictatorship of the working class could be won in a basically agricultural country. But to faithful Trotskyists the Chinese Revolution, like that in the Soviet Union, was "doomed from the start," because it did not follow Trotsky's economic-determinist path!

A third result of Trotsky's own idealism and arrogance was his theory of "Stalin-as-devil." This is just the "great man" theory turned on its head. Since Stalin, a modest man of working-class background, had defeated him, the "great genius", it must have been through dishonesty. In reality, Stalin was a sound theorist and one of the most learned men of the century, as recent studies of his reading and library have revealed. Trotsky's self-portrayal as world-class genius simply indicates his extreme egoism.

Trotsky originated the false notion of Stalin as a power-hungry, all-powerful, malevolent monster who supposedly ran the USSR to suit his own paranoid fantasies. This version of the "great man" theory is simply a mirror-image of Trotsky's own inflated view of himself, and is equally idealist. Neither Stalin nor anyone else was or could be like this.

But this notion of "Stalinism" originated with Trotsky and his followers, who are its greatest champions. It was enthusiastically embraced by all anti-communists, and is the central version of anti-communism promoted by openly pro-capitalist writers today. Trotsky became the main fount of anti-communism. In all the many books he wrote while in exile in the '30s he – Trotsky -- is the hero, while Stalin is the villain.

Some bourgeois historians say Trotsky falsified his own role in the Revolution. Certainly all his versions of subsequent political struggles are dishonest, reducing the debates over the line of the world-wide communist movement to a duel between himself and the "evil" Stalin. His biography of Stalin opens with a racist account of Stalin's ancestry derived, as Trotsky himself admits, from – a Nazi!

### Trotsky's Corruption

During the mid-1930s three public trials were held in Moscow. Former

Bolshevik leaders, together with many lesser figures, confessed to plotting against the Soviet government in collusion with the exiled Trotsky. They also confessed to contacts with German and Japanese militarists. Twenty years later Khrushchev also said the charges were lies, and “rehabilitated” the “victims” – meaning, declared them innocent, but without any evidence. Trotsky and his followers seemed to be vindicated.

But after Trotsky’s archives (at Harvard) were opened in 1980, even leading Trotskyist researchers agreed that Trotsky had lied when he said he had not been in touch with prominent oppositionists within the USSR. Since 1991 a number of the confessions on which the Moscow Trials were based have been published. The circumstances surrounding them make it clear that they were not forged or obtained under torture. This strongly suggests that the original charges made against him in the famous Moscow Trials were – at the very least – mainly true. A dangerous conspiracy against the Soviet government really did exist. There is even some documentary evidence that Trotsky was indeed in contact with Japanese militarists.

Trotsky denied all these charges – he could hardly do otherwise. Meanwhile, he was

- calling for the overthrow of the Soviet government,
- trying to gain admission to the US so he could testify before the anti-working class House Committee on Un-American Activities,
- informing on Communists in Mexico to the FBI, and
- writing attacks on Stalin and the USSR in the American capitalist press, such as Life magazine.

This behavior cost Trotsky many of his bourgeois sympathizers, who after all believed that collaborating with the capitalist police was beyond the pale. Had he acted like Lenin, and admitted that he would take money and help from any capitalist in order to seize power in the USSR, he would have lost them all.

## Trotskyism Today

The Trotskyist movement reflects all the same idealist errors of its origins. To them, Trotsky’s writings offer “answers” to all the problems of the world’s working class – which are, of course, the same answers as Trotsky “discovered” in the ‘20s and, especially, the ‘30s, when he had little to do but write and plot.

The Trotskyists continue the “cult” of Trotsky. They never criticize him, and so never learn anything. They never doubt that Trotsky’s works were valid in their own time, which they were not and – given Trotsky’s alienation from the working class and any working-class based movement -- could not have been.

Trotskyists treat Trotsky’s voluminous writings as

though they were accurate, trustworthy accounts, instead of heavily biased, self-serving accounts. They would laugh or scorn anyone who took this attitude to, say, Stalin’s works, but they cannot see the same error when they make it themselves.

They are also “locked” into the “cult of Lenin”, which Trotsky shared with Stalin and the communist movement generally. Many of Lenin’s statements are similar to Trotsky’s. Many of Lenin’s statements also provided support for Stalin’s later policies. For Trotskyists, the “cult” of Lenin sustains the “cult” of Trotsky. Real Marxist-Leninists recognize that all such “cults” are reactionary.

They also “believe” Trotsky’s denials that he was involved in plotting the overthrow of the Soviet government, and in general everything Trotsky said. In short, Trotskyists’ whole political perspective is based upon refusal to question Trotsky, his writings, and his actions. Since they never question Trotsky, they are “locked” into Trotsky’s errors.

In practice Trotsky and his followers came to embrace many of the fundamental assumptions of the CPSU(b) and the Comintern. This is not surprising, since in many ways both Trotsky’s ideas and those of Stalin and other Soviet leaders can be found in Lenin’s works, and can be traced into Marx’s and Engels’ writings too.

Today the line of the Trotskyist groups is much like that of the revisionist, formerly pro-Soviet and Maoist, groups:

- support for nationalism, whether “progressive” or not, among “oppressed nations”;
- United Fronts with “liberal” bourgeois groups against fascism, or simply against conservatives;
- the promotion of “socialism,” meaning pretty much what the Soviets meant by it – social-welfare state capitalism, with great inequalities among managers and workers;
- a “multi-stage” theory of how to arrive at communism (in the rare instances when they even mention communism), and therefore
- no fight for communist revolution at all.

All Trotskyist groups adhere to the reactionary policies listed above. But there are many differences – sometimes very subtle ones – among the Trotskyist groups, which we will not attempt to summarize here. Factionalism remains a principle in all Trotskyist parties and groups. Consequently, Trotskyist groups are continually splitting into more groups. Each of these grouplets competes in the game of ‘Who follows The Master the most faithfully?’

The main political errors of Trotskyist groups are the same as they have been for many years. This is logical, since they cannot change their basic ideas in conformity with reality.

The main importance of Trotskyist groups for the capitalist ruling classes are the following:

- misleading mass movements into alliances with the “liberal” ruling class – the main forces of capitalist rule – against “reactionaries” and fascists;
- misleading honest people into supporting nationalism, rather than fighting for proletarian internationalism, even when those nationalists are overtly fascist.
- most important, spreading anti-communist lies, especially concerning the history of the Communist movement, and most especially, about Stalin and the Soviet Union in his day. This last point really characterizes Trotskyism, as opposed to other revisionist (phony communist) groups.

What Real Communists – the PLP – Are Like

We in PLP are very appreciative of the history of the dictatorship of the proletariat under the leadership of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. The great communists movements

associated with these leaders’ names accomplished wonderful things for the working class of the world. We have much positive to learn from them.

At the same time, we are sharply critical of the errors these great leaders made. We have long made public our criticisms of Lenin, Stalin and Mao in Road to Revolution III (1971) and IV (1982), and in many articles in PL Magazine and The Communist. We continue to do this.

Communists in PLP believe that as workers we have no “sacred cows,” Lenin, Stalin, Mao, or anyone else, whom we hold beyond criticism. Despite their many successes, the communist movement represented and led by these great figures failed to build a classless, egalitarian society run by workers. We have to be the “dwarves on the shoulders of giants,” seeing farther than they because we build upon their successes.

*\* Idealism: here, the belief that knowledge of reality can be gotten from applying a fixed set of ideas, rather than through a scientific process of study and struggle. Trotskyism is one form of idealism disguised as Marxism-Leninism.*



## REVIEW OF “Uncovered: The Whole Truth about the Iraq War”

**R**obert Greenwald’s new video, Uncovered: The Whole Truth about the Iraq War, offers two major insights about the US invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The first insight is related to what the video presents. The second insight is more important: what the video neglects to present despite its self-important title of being The Whole Truth about the Iraq War and what it therefore reveals about Moveon.org, the video’s sponsor. As we hope to demonstrate below, this video leaves most of the Iraq War story untold. Its highly selective history is hardly an accident. In fact, it is eerily reminiscent of liberal opposition to the Vietnam War, which, we should remember, only emerged when victory was unobtainable and “quagmire” was undeniable. It is so selective because Greenwald, his sponsors, and the “patriotic” experts he interviewed -- many of whom could one day be sent to trial in the Hague for war crimes -- need a historic

treatment which suits their veiled political objectives. They want to draw millions with anti-war views off the streets and couches, into the voting booth to vote against George Bush based on his administration’s Iraq folly, and in support of the in-house, in the Beltway critics of the Bush-Cheney administration, especially if they come back to power through a Democratic president.

What these “good imperialists” might do with such a political victory is left unasked and unanswered in the video, other than our guess they would pray that their names will not emerge as American accomplices if/when Saddam Hussein is eventually put on trial. Nevertheless, it is clear to us that Moveon.org hopes to draw opponents of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq into the Democratic Party, and then into acceptance of the broader, long-term US imperialist goals and programs they advocate for the Middle East.

A full and honest history of the Iraq War would undercut this electoral means to a cloaked policy end in the Middle