

Leon Trotsky

Ideas for Freedom
28 November 2009

Aims

- A better idea of why Trotsky was a great revolutionary – arguably the greatest of the 20th century.
- Some good reasons why Trotsky remains relevant to socialist today.
- A clear idea of why the AWL are Trotskyists.

Plan

1) **Icebreaker**: Say the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Trotsky
[With large group, go round. Smaller group – could brainstorm.]

2) **Intro on Trotsky's life**

Either – straight talk for 20 minutes [see notes overleaf]
Timeline – using ideas from brainstorm]

3) Discussion of his **relevance** (cards overleaf)

Pairs – each group gets a card with a key term – discuss how it might be relevant to today – 10 minutes

Report back – At least 20 minutes

[Structure in some sort of order – e.g. united front, transitional demands, workers govt]

4) **Sum up**

Suggestions for reading Trotsky

AWL sources on Trotsky (website)

An outline of a revolutionary life

- Early political life
- In power
- In exile

Trotsky was born Lev Davidovich Bronstein on 7 November 1879. In his youth won to Marxism 1897.

He faced exile in Siberia 1898-1902, escaped to take his place in the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party leadership, largely between the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions.

He developed his celebrated theory of permanent revolution – that it would be the Russian working class would overthrow Tsarism and take power, as the first step in an international socialist revolution.

Aged 26, Trotsky put this into practice when elected chair of the St Petersburg Soviet during the 1905 revolution. Arrested, escaped 1907. Exile Vienna. Pravda 1912. Balkan wars

In 1914, a leading socialist internationalist opposed to the carnage of the First World War.

Trotsky returned to Russia in May 1917, joined Lenin and the Bolsheviks and again chaired the Petrograd Soviet. He led the Military Revolutionary Committee, which organised the October insurrection.

As Commissar for Foreign Affairs he ended Russian involvement in the imperialist carnage.

As Commissar of War, he constructed the Red Army and led it to victory in the civil war.

At the same time he played a central role in the **Communist International**, - a global general staff of proletarian militants to fight for international socialism. Development of the revolutionary strategy to win majority working class support: united front, transitional demands, workers government.

With the isolation of the Russian revolution and the growth of the Stalinist bureaucracy, Trotsky was driven into opposition to Stalin. He led the Left Opposition after 1923 until his expulsion from the Bolshevik Party in 1927. Exiled to Alma Ata, expelled from the USSR to Turkey, hounded through France, then Norway and finally Mexico. Assassinated in August 1940.

Trotsky continued to make original and stimulating contributions to Marxism, including:

- his penetrating analysis of Britain at the time of the general strike – union bureaucracy
- the Chinese revolution (1925-27)
- his demand for a united front against Hitler,

- his analysis of the Spanish revolution
- the popular front in France and
- His analysis of Bonapartism in Mexico.

However it was his persistent critique of Stalinism, tracing every twist in the evolution of the bureaucracy until it became, in his words, the sole master of the surplus product.

It was his efforts to build an authentic independent Marxist current within the working class movement in the 1930s, through splits and fusions.

Combined and uneven development	Permanent revolution
United front	Transitional demands
Workers' government	The revolutionary party
Anti-Stalinism	Anti-fascism
Trade union bureaucracy	Popular front
Bonapartism	Centrism
Sectarianism	Entryism
Anti-imperialism	Art and literature
Military - civil war	United States of Europe
War and "revolutionary defeatism"	Degenerated workers' state