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By

Alan Sennett



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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--|
| BOC | Bloc Obrer i Camperol – Workers’ and Peasants’ Bloc (dissident communists) |
| CEDA | Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas – Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Right [parties] |
| CGTU | Confederación General de Trabajo Unitario – General Confederation of United Labour (official Communist trade union) |
| CNT | Confederación Nacional del Trabajo – National Confederation of Labour (anarcho-syndicalist union) |
| CPSU | Communist Party of the Soviet Union (official) |
| CSR | Comités Sindicalistas Revolucionarios – Revolutionary-Syndicalist Committees (Maurín’s group in the 1920s) |
| FAI | Federación Anarquista Ibérica – Iberian Anarchist Federation |
| FCCB | Federación Comunista Catalano-Balear – Catalan-Balearic Communist Federation (Maurín’s group, expelled from PCE) |
| FJS | Federación de Juventudes Socialistas de España – Socialist Youth Federation (of Spain) |
| FNTT | Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra – National Federation of Landworkers (Socialist-led trade union) |
| FOUS | Federación Obrera de Unidad Sindical – Workers’ Federation of Syndical Unity (POUM-led trade union) |
| GPU | State Political Administration, later NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) – (Soviet secret police organisation) |
| JCI | Juventud Comunista Ibérica – Iberian Communist Youth (POUM youth movement) |
| JONS | Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista – National Syndicalist Offence Committees (fascist movement) |
| JSU | Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas – Unified Socialist Youth (merged Socialist and official Communist youth movements) |
| KPD | German Communist Party |
| PCC | Partit Comunista Català – Catalan Communist Party (dissident communists) |
| PCdec | Partit Comunista de Catalunya – Communist Party of Catalunya (official; fused with three other Catalan organisations to form the PSUC) |
| PCE | Partido Comunista de España – Spanish Communist Party (official Communists) |
| PNV | Partido Nacionalista Vasco – Basque Nationalist Party |
| POUM | Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista – Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification (Nin and Maurín – dissident communists) |

| | |
|------|---|
| PSOE | Partido Socialista Obrero Español – Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (social-democratic party) |
| PSUC | Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya – Unified Socialist Party of Cataluña (official Communists) |
| SFIO | French Socialist Party |
| UGT | Unión General de Trabajadores – General Workers’ Union (Socialist) |

Introduction

This study examines the influence of Trotsky's political thought upon those Spanish Marxists who broke with the official Communist movement during the 1930s. The book takes as its central theme the idea which is most evocative of Trotsky's name and lies at the very core of his political thought, the theory of permanent revolution. It argues that Trotsky's theory of revolution and the conception of historical development underpinning it can be shown to have had a major impact upon the Spanish dissident communists' political thought and actions in the period from 1930 to 1937. Trotsky's influence can also be found in the Spanish Marxists' critique of Stalinism and their conceptions of fascism and dictatorship. A large portion of the book focuses upon a primary-source analysis of the writings and political activities of the two most prominent and influential dissident communists, Andreu Nin and Joaquín Maurín. They are generally considered to be the most significant Spanish contributors to twentieth-century Marxist thought, although few of their writings have been translated into English. It is argued here that, although their work deserves to be viewed in its own right, it is underpinned by the influence of Trotsky's Marxism, particularly insofar as Nin's writings are concerned.

It is curious that, given the overwhelming volume of published material concerned in one way or another with the Spanish Revolution and Civil War, comparatively little attention has been directed toward the political ideas and activities of the dissident communists. The same might be said of Trotsky's writings and political interventions in the deliberations of those communists who had become disenchanted with the official line emanating from Moscow. Recent biographies of Trotsky have devoted surprisingly little space to discussing Trotsky's understanding of and connection with Spanish events. Robert Service's biography deals with the Spanish Civil War in under two pages.¹ Geoffrey Swain devotes a couple of paragraphs to the subject.² The most extensive and informative coverage is to be found in Ian Thatcher's short political biography.³ Even there it merits only four pages. Of the monographs that do exist, many are coloured by the fact that they have either been written by ex-members of the organisations concerned or by commentators who have a

¹ Service 2009.

² Swain 2006.

³ Thatcher 2003.

particular political axe to grind. Among the notable exceptions to this rule is the work of the Catalan historian Pelai Pagès. He is the author of the most authoritative study of Nin's political ideas, *Andreu Nin: su evolución política*; the principal work on Spanish Trotskyism during the 1930s, *El movimiento trotskista en España (1930–1935)*; and a full-length biography of Nin, *Andreu Nin: Una vida al servicio de la clase obrera*.⁴ He has also contributed numerous articles on the dissident communists and introductions to collections of Nin's writings and speeches. Nin's relationship with the Spanish communist movement has been studied in depth by Francesc Bonamusa in his book *Andreu Nin y el movimiento comunista en España*. Antoni Monreal dealt with Maurín's political thought of the 1920s and 1930s in his book *El pensamiento político de Joaquín Maurín*. Other academic studies of particular note are Bonamusa's *El Bloc Obrer i Camperol 1930–325* and Andrew Durgan's *B.O.C. 1930–1936: El Bloque Obrero y Campesino*, which is essentially the published version of his Ph.D. thesis.⁶

Although these studies often deal extremely well with Nin's and Maurín's political ideas – especially those by Pagès, Monreal and Durgan – they do not examine the influence of Trotsky's Marxism in depth. Trotsky's involvement in the dissident communists' affairs is usually addressed either in terms of organisational connections, such as those of the International Left Opposition, or in relation to Trotsky's personal advice to Nin. The literature cited above, together with the items mentioned later in chapter footnotes, is concerned rather more with the history of the dissident communist organisations than with the nature of the Marxist theory upon which their dissent from the post-Lenin orthodoxy was based.

The more specific literature devoted to Trotsky's involvement with Spain is dominated by the various articles and pamphlets of the French Trotskyist historian Pierre Broué. He has defended Trotsky against the criticisms of veteran dissident communists such as Víctor Alba and Ignacio Iglesias. Although these debates provide useful discussions of key political issues, they do not adequately address the theoretical issues from a critical perspective. To his detractors, Trotsky simply transposed his model of Russian historical development and the strategy of the Bolsheviks onto an analysis of Spain, a country with different conditions and different traditions of mass struggle. But, in responding to such detractors, Broué does not advance a counterargument to explain how and why Trotsky generalised the conception of historical development

4 Pagès 2011.

5 Bonamusa 1974.

6 Durgan 1989.

and theory of revolution he had originally formulated for Russian conditions. Consequently, there is no discussion of whether or not Trotsky's general theory was able to take account of different conditions or whether he successfully adapted it to suit Spain. Indeed, there is little attempt in any of the literature on the subject to place Trotsky's involvement with the Spanish Revolution in the context of his Marxism as a whole.

It is important to stress a few points regarding the scope and content of this book. The present study lays no claim to advance a novel interpretation of Spanish history, nor is it intended as a contribution toward a greater understanding of the genesis of the organisations concerned, other than in the realm of their political thought. However, it does offer some evaluative and critical comments concerning the perspectives and actions of the political groups mentioned. It also sets them in their historical context and considers some issues of a historiographical nature. The main aims of the book are twofold. In the first place, it seeks to outline and assess Trotsky's involvement with the Spanish Revolution and to set this within the overall context of his political theory and historical approach. Secondly, it attempts to measure the influence of Trotsky's political thought upon the Spanish dissident communists through a close examination of the political ideas of Andreu Nin and Joaquín Maurín. It is hoped that the present study will fill a gap in the existing literature on Trotsky's political thought and also contribute toward a greater understanding of a somewhat neglected current of Marxist thought.

Turning to the organisation of the book, Chapter One focuses upon Trotsky's formulation and refinement of his theory of revolution. It begins with a description of the law of uneven and combined development and argues that this law forms the foundation upon which the theory of permanent revolution rests. One of the central concerns, here, is to emphasise the extent to which Trotsky departed from the prevailing Marxist orthodoxy over the question of exactly how proletarian revolutions might develop. Although he was not unique among his contemporaries in using the concept of 'permanent revolution', it will be argued that he formed the most coherent and complete theory of revolution that challenged the prevailing notions of stagism. His dissenting voice, arguably one of the most healthy and creative facets of Trotsky's Marxism, can be heard even in the formative phases of his political evolution. This chapter also considers the controversy over Stalin's doctrine of 'socialism in one country'. In forcefully rejecting this doctrine, Trotsky restated the theory of permanent revolution and expanded it into a theory of world socialist revolution. A lengthy concluding section discusses some of the main theoretical and historical problems with Trotsky's formulation of permanent revolution and attempts to assess its strengths and weaknesses.

The second chapter is devoted to an exposition and analysis of Trotsky's writings on Spain and to his political involvement with the dissident communists. It examines Trotsky's application of the law of uneven and combined development to Spanish historical development in the early modern and modern periods. Chapter Two also considers whether Trotsky was at all justified in applying the prognosis of permanent revolution to Spain. Attention is also given to the relationship between revolutionary theory and political strategy as manifested in Trotsky's advice to the Spanish dissident communists. Since it is impossible to comprehend Trotsky's advice to his followers without appreciating his analysis of the international situation and his warnings of the dangers of fascism and Stalinism, these aspects of his thought are also dealt with in relation to the Spanish context.

The bulk of the book is devoted to the political ideas and actions of the Spanish dissident communists up until 1937. Chapter Three examines the evolution of Nin and Maurín's political thought through to the early 1930s. It outlines their characterisations of Spanish history and their perceptions of the course that Spain's revolutionary process was likely to take. It attempts to clarify the points of convergence and divergence between Trotsky's analysis and their own respective conceptions.

Chapter Four focuses upon Nin's and Maurín's analyses of and participation in the Spanish labour movement during the early 1930s. It compares and contrasts their theoretical understandings of fascism and dictatorship and considers the warnings each gave about the dangers of a new authoritarianism arising in Spain. This chapter also examines the practical efforts of the dissident communists to build a Workers' Alliance against the threat from the far Right. Finally, it discusses the differences in perspective between Nin's organisation and Trotsky's International Left Opposition.

The next chapter looks at the convergence of the two wings of dissident communism in Spain, which culminated in the creation of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, known as the POUM) in September 1935. Chapter Five thus examines the political basis upon which the POUM was constructed, examining its political programme and orientation toward other political forces on the Left. This chapter also considers its view of and participation in events leading up to the elections of February 1936.

Chapter Six offers a discussion of the POUM's involvement in the Spanish Popular Front. It asks why this new party, an amalgamation of the Spanish Trotskyist organisation led by Nin and Maurín's largely Catalan Bloque Obrero y Campesino (Workers' and Peasants' Bloc, or BOC), involved itself in an

electoral alliance that included bourgeois-republican parties. This move led to a massive rift between Trotsky and Nin that was never repaired. It is argued that this crucial phase in the development of the POUM needs to be set within broader historical debates around the nature and significance of the Frente Popular (Popular Front). Hence this chapter situates discussion of the POUM's possible reasons for signing the electoral pact within the wider historiography of this key period in the run-up to the outbreak of civil war in July 1936. Controversy surrounds the question of whether the Spanish Popular Front should be viewed as an official Communist initiative, driven by the Comintern, or whether it is better understood as the product of the domestic political dynamic. Chapter Six goes on to look at the POUM's responses to the war and social revolution sparked off by the military rising of July 1936. Finally, it considers the reasons behind the POUM's participation in the Catalan government in late 1936, in which Nin served a brief spell as minister of justice.

The final chapter looks at the campaign waged against the POUM in the context of the reversal of the social revolution in the first half of 1937. Frequently viewed as a counterrevolution, the motive force behind this development is often associated with the growing influence over the Republican government of Soviet advisors, Comintern agents and the Spanish Communist Party. The situation reached a crisis point in May 1937 as armed conflict exploded in Barcelona. Government suppression of what was seen as an insurrection was followed by the outlawing, persecution and eradication of the POUM as a political force and the murder of Nin. Again, this has generally been explained as the work of Soviet secret service agents and is often tied to Stalin's foreign policy requirements. Yet, in order to fully understand these events, we need to examine the perspectives of the POUM during the early months of 1937 and consider some of the historiographical debates around the causes of the May events. As will be seen, historians disagree considerably over the role played by the official Communists, Soviet advisors and agents, and other political forces in the Republican camp. The chapter ends with an assessment of the role and significance of the POUM's theory and practice during the Spanish Revolution.

An appendix has been provided in order to clarify some of the historical references that cannot usefully be covered through the device of footnotes. It consists of a survey of modern Spanish history up until the end of the Spanish Civil War. The function is to furnish the reader with an overview of the main historical and political problems to which Trotsky and the Spanish dissident communists addressed themselves. The essay is divided into three sections.

The first section deals with the character of Spanish historical development particularly the issues surrounding Spain's transition to capitalism. The second section looks at the emergence of organised labour and the condition of the various workers' organisations in 1930. The final section offers a brief history of the Second Republic, the Revolution and the Civil War.

Trotsky's Theory of Revolution

It has long been clear to many scholars that Marx by no means ruled out the notion of a socialist revolution occurring in a relatively backward country like Russia.¹ However, such an idea was far removed from the orthodox understanding of Marx that prevailed among many Second International theorists of the early twentieth century. For them, revolutions in less advanced capitalist countries would not pass beyond what they often referred to as the 'stage of bourgeois democracy'. A truly 'socialist' revolution was only possible in countries that had already experienced a considerable degree of capitalist industrial development. Trotsky's major, if not entirely original, contribution to Marxist political theory thus flew in the face of orthodoxy, insisting that the next round of revolutionary struggle in Russia would not witness a completion of Russia's 'bourgeois revolution', but would combine with and grow into a socialist one. Even a passing acquaintance with Russia's subsequent history is sufficient to confirm the prescience of this analysis. The Bolshevik Revolution, when it arrived in October 1917, was, indeed, not detained at the 'bourgeois-democratic stage' but witnessed the emergence of a new political, social and economic entity that sought to transform Russia into a workers' state. Moreover, Trotsky himself was a key participant in this attempt to reshape society and continued to place this analysis of the dynamics of Russian social development at the core of his subsequent theory and practice. He elaborated and extended this theoretical perspective to other 'backward' countries in which he detected the presence of a revolutionary dynamic, not least Spain. The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss Trotsky's theory of revolution as it developed within his writings over the space of twenty-five years.

It is important to recognise that Trotsky's Marxism drew far less stimulus from close readings of classic texts than it did from personal involvement in revolutionary events. As he noted, political thought needs to be situated within

1 Perhaps the most significant example is Marx's 1881 letter to the Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich (in McLellan 1977, pp. 577–580). However, there is considerable evidence in the writings of Marx and to some extent Engels that the possibility of socialist revolutions in backward capitalist countries was present in their thought, albeit alongside other ideas that tend to contradict this. See the detailed discussion of Marx's revolutionary thought in Löwy 1981.

the context of the concrete conditions that give rise to it.² Hence we would do well to study the evolution and elaboration of what became known as the ‘theory of permanent revolution’ in relation to the cataclysmic events of the first forty years of the twentieth century. In this respect, Trotsky’s development of the theory of permanent revolution cannot be separated from either its historical context or the personal trajectory of its main author. While the term ‘permanent revolution’ is found in some of Marx’s writings,³ and was discussed as a concept in the context of Russia in the period from 1903 to 1907 by leading Marxists such as Kautsky,⁴ it was Trotsky who formulated the complete theory. Moreover, as will be argued below, his formulation rests upon a powerful methodological tool which is missing from other contributions, namely the law of uneven and combined development. That said, the intention here, is less to chart the genesis of the theory and more to present it in its totality as a complete theoretical device which aspires to the status of a universal theory. Many claims have been made as to its theoretical power in revealing the dynamics of revolution in the period of high imperialism and late capitalism. Its validity has been seen not merely to hinge upon its internal coherence as a theory, but also to rest upon the extent to which it may be usefully and profitably applied to the concrete revolutionary situations its author purported to clarify and advance. Trotsky would surely have been the last person to relegate his theory of revolution to the status of an academic exercise. In his terms, and those of his followers, revolutionary theory has but one purpose: to inform revolutionary strategy and tactics in order to assist the struggle of the working class in the conquest of political power and in laying the basis for socialism on a global scale. In this respect, permanent revolution constitutes an integral and indispensable aspect of Trotsky’s Marxism and can be said to embody the classic unity of theory and practice often said to have characterised the lives of his peers Lenin and Luxemburg.

This chapter begins by considering the law of uneven and combined development and the sense in which it serves as a foundation for the theory of permanent revolution. It then discusses Trotsky’s development of what might be termed the ‘permanentist’ aspects of Marx’s theory of revolution; that is to say, those aspects of Trotsky’s theory of revolution that can be traced back to the perspectives adopted by Marx and some Second International Marxists.

² Trotsky 1969, p. 157.

³ For instance: *On the Jewish Question* (Marx 1843); *The Holy Family* (Marx 1845); and *Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League* (Marx 1850).

⁴ See Day and Gaido (eds.) 2009 for texts by Kautsky, Parvus, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Mehring and Ryazanov in which ideas of the ‘revolution in permanence’ are elaborated.

We will first look at the way Trotsky elaborated his ideas in relation to the revolutionary experience of 1905, and then explore his extension of the theory to encompass all backward capitalist countries. These formulations were to prove highly influential among the Spanish 'dissident communists' in the 1930s, as will be shown in later chapters. Later sections of the present chapter deal with Trotsky's understanding of the concept of 'revolutionary crisis' and discuss his theory in the light of twentieth-century revolutions. As we will see, this discussion raises a number of problems and questions that will resurface in relation to Spain's historical and political development.

1.1 Uneven and Combined Development

Notions of uneven historical development are certainly to be found in the work of Marx and other early Marxists, but Trotsky extended the concept by adding a second aspect, the law of combined development.⁵ As he expressed it:

Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness there derives another law which, for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of combined development – by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms. Without this law, to be taken of course in its whole material context, it is impossible to understand the history of Russia, and indeed of any country of the second, third or tenth cultural class.⁶

Trotsky thus sees 'uneven development' describing the variable rates of development of a country's productive forces, the spread of which is determined by differing natural conditions and historical conjunctures. It is these variable elements that apportion differential rates of growth to each country, to every branch of the national economy and to institutions and social classes. Therefore, out of unevenness arise particular combinations of characteristics

⁵ Löwy 1981.

⁶ Trotsky 1980b, pp. 5–6.

from a lower stage of social development with those from a higher stage.⁷ These combinations may well be quite different from country to country.

Such a formulation was immensely useful for Marxists when it came to analysing the particular nature of a country's social, economic and political development and its revolutionary potential. Since the Marxist methodology tends to begin with analysis of the economic 'base', it is not surprising that Trotsky took this as his starting point for gauging revolutionary potential. Yet he was well aware of the need to avoid suggesting a mechanistic equation between a country's level of economic development and its degree of preparedness for proletarian revolution. Indeed, he saw this as the essential conceptual power of the notion of uneven development. It suggested that countries whose economies were relatively 'backward' were capable of achieving levels of development in certain economic sectors superior to those of more 'advanced' countries. If this was the case, then it further suggested that these advanced sectors were combined with the traditional, backward sectors. If so, then this raised interesting contradictions in social, economic and political spheres that might open up the prospect of revolutionary crises.

In order to clarify the issue of uneven capitalist development, it is worth reflecting upon Trotsky's explanation for this phenomenon. Two factors essential to the competitiveness of capitalist enterprises are the continual updating of the production process and the organisation of labour so as to increase productivity. Although those countries first to industrialise continued to hold a massive advantage over the later-industrialising states of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, latecomers like Germany and the United States enjoyed the benefits of the most advanced technology and production methods from the outset. They were able to begin their industrialisation with the most up-to-date techniques and processes, thus jumping over the formative stages through which Britain and France had been obliged to pass. The outcome of this was that, in industries where technology had undergone rapid development, the latecomers were not held back by the need to replace outdated machinery, and, in this sense, enjoyed an immediate advantage. They were also able to compete effectively from the outset and move into new branches of industry with relative ease.

7 Trotsky's earliest significant elaboration of uneven and combined development came in his 1906 pamphlet, *Results and Prospects*; the formulation also crops up in subsequent writings. Its main application to Russia comes in *The Permanent Revolution* (Trotsky 1969) and *The History of the Russian Revolution* (Trotsky 1980b). This summary draws upon all of these sources. Footnotes in this section are largely restricted to direct quotes.

Trotsky argued that once the world capitalist economy entered its imperialist phase in the late nineteenth century, the majority of relatively backward countries had been unable to experience overall economic growth. Their patterns of development tended to display a *combination* of modern industrial capitalism, on the one hand, and, on the other, the continuation of an archaic agrarian sector that dominated the national economy and constituted a massive obstacle to dynamic capitalist development. The capitalist industrial sector was often promoted by the state and dominated by foreign capital, whereas agriculture was the preserve of pre-capitalist ruling classes.

Uneven and Combined Development in Russia

Trotsky applied the law of uneven and combined development in his analysis of the dynamics of the 1905 Revolution in Russia. He notes that, in Russia, the contrasts between modern and archaic productive forces and social relations of production were especially pronounced and seriously hampered the development of capitalism. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia's vast precapitalist agriculture contrasted sharply with a developing capitalist industrial sector. Largely foreign and, in part, fostered by the Tsarist state, these capitalist enterprises were highly concentrated, huge in scale and often devoted to heavy industrial production for military purposes.⁸ With the exception of a few areas, the dominant agrarian sector remained largely undeveloped and acted as a brake upon the development of a dynamic national economy.⁹ Employing the vast majority of the active population at a subsistence level, Russia's backward agriculture prevented the emergence of a strong domestic market. This, in turn, inhibited the growth and diversification of the manufacturing industry. Trotsky notes that any accumulated domestic capital tended to be diverted away from industry and into real estate speculation, usury and hoarding. The bourgeoisie was thus closely related to landed interests and had little stake in the kind of agrarian revolution which would have been necessary to stimulate a dynamic agriculture. Although industrial

8 Trotsky 1980b, pp. 5–6; Trotsky 1973b, Chapters One and Two. For modern historical studies of the state and industrial development in Russia see Kemp 1969, Chapter Five; Anderson 1974, Part 2, Chapter Six; Kahan 1967; Milward and Saul 1977; Gerschenkron 1963; and Falkus 1972.

9 According to Lenin, Russian agriculture was developing in the direction of wage labour with large Junker-type estates, but at the time, 1912, 'purely capitalist relations in our country are still overshadowed to a *tremendous* extent by *feudal* relations' (V.I. Lenin, 'The Essence of the "Agrarian Problem" of Russia,' cited in Anderson 1974, p. 350). As Anderson points out, the suggested 'Prussian path' did not materialise in the final years of Tsarism and the slowly spreading capitalist relations were always mixed up with pre-capitalist modes of surplus extraction (Anderson 1974, pp. 351–2).

development established capitalist relations of production in factories which employed very large numbers of people, the overwhelming majority of the population were still involved in feudal and semi-feudal forms of production in the countryside. But even here one could speak of a *combination* of social relations of production, since many factory workers returned to their villages to take part in the harvest.¹⁰

As mentioned above, the rise of economic imperialism was the major shift in the nature of capitalism that enabled Trotsky to see the development of backward societies as both uneven and combined. Unlike Marx, Trotsky was writing in the age of 'high imperialism', when Second International theorists saw capitalism as incorporating most countries into a global economic system. As he remarked in 1905: 'Binding all countries together with its mode of production and its commerce, capitalism has converted the whole world into a single economic and political organism'.¹¹ Colonialism and economic imperialism were the means by which capitalism was exploiting 'backward' countries and territories, often employing precapitalist methods. But, in Russia, the state welcomed foreign capital and had been able to transplant onto Russian soil the most advanced technology and the most concentrated organisation of labour. Much of Trotsky's 1906 pamphlet *Results and Prospects* is devoted to an explanation of how Russia developed into what he called a 'semi-colonial country'.

Central to Trotsky's analysis is his argument that the penetration of capital took place with the active encouragement of the Tsarist state. Indeed, in Russia, 'capitalism seemed to be an offspring of the state'.¹² Due to factors such as the country's unfavourable geographical situation, its dispersed population, its slow economic development and the failure of towns to develop as manufacturing centres, Russia found itself lagging far behind its European rivals. Its economy lacked dynamism and its class formation remained primitive. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, Trotsky continued, Russia had found itself faced with competition from other European countries. The state thus attempted to accelerate economic development and, by the late nineteenth century, was actively promoting it.

10 Rimlinger (1960) and Von Laue (1961) note this. Even after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, an act which freed many for work in the new factories, the *mir* system continued to bind the peasant/worker to the soil. He could always be summoned to return to his village. But, by 1917, there were 3.6 million workers, concentrated in particular regions. Most came from the countryside, 'snatched from the plough and hurled into the factory furnace', as Trotsky put it (quoted in Smith 2002, p. 10).

11 From Trotsky's forward to Lassalle's 'Address to the Jury', quoted in Trotsky 1969, p. 107.

12 Trotsky 1969, p. 41.

In order to be able to survive in the midst of better-armed hostile countries, Russia was compelled to set up factories, organize navigation schools, publish textbooks on fortification, etc.... [But] if the general course of the internal economy of this enormous country had not been moving in this same direction, if the development of economic conditions had not created the demand for general and applied science, all the efforts of the state would have been fruitless.¹³

Economic modernisation was thus state-induced rather than state-created. Government provided and attracted from overseas much of the necessary investment and directed it largely into production for military use. This often conflicted with business interests. However, the lack of a strong tradition of liberal democracy among the indigenous bourgeoisie, which was itself a reflection of its weakness as a class, meant that there was little prospect of it enjoying real political influence. For Trotsky, this revealed a key contradiction of uneven and combined development in Russia: the feudal state form, which maintained its rule only through an enormous coercive apparatus, had come into conflict with the requirements of the very capitalist industrial development it had done so much to foster. Owing to the particular path of capitalist development in Russia and its specific mode of insertion into the imperialist system, the historical agent of democratic revolution – the national bourgeoisie – was incapable of taking the political action necessary to overcome this contradiction. The Russian bourgeoisie thus appeared as a mere shadow of its revolutionary English and French forebears.

Uneven and combined development of social classes also accounted for the relative weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie. As Trotsky notes, the towns had not evolved as economic centres in the way they had in Western Europe. Until the late nineteenth century, the role of Russian towns remained primarily as administrative centres and bases for the military. Industrial development, when it came, was not centred upon an existing urban artisan class, as had been the case in Britain and France. The establishment of large factories tended to concentrate the workforce from the very outset, thus creating a substantial proletariat. Yet, at the same time, the urban petit-bourgeoisie, the traditional social bedrock of Western bourgeois liberalism, remained relatively insignificant. For Trotsky, this accounted for the weakness of this social layer. Trotsky described the big bourgeoisie, the key capitalist class, as 'half foreign'.

13 Trotsky 1969, p. 42.

Capitalism in Russia did not develop out of the handicraft system. It conquered Russia with the economic culture of the whole of Europe behind it, and before it, as its immediate competitor, the helpless village craftsman or the wretched town craftsman, and it had the half-beggared peasantry as a reservoir of labour power. Absolutism assisted in various ways in fettering the country with the shackles of capitalism.

...

By economically enslaving this backward country, European capital projected its main branches of production and methods of communication across a whole series of intermediate technical and economic stages through which it had had to pass in its countries of origin. But the fewer obstacles it met with in the path of its *economic* domination, the more insignificant proved to be its political role.¹⁴

In other words, as long as the economic interests of foreign capitalists were guaranteed by the Tsarist state, there was no need for them to intervene at a political level.

The Imperialist World System

In *The Permanent Revolution*, written in 1929, Trotsky extended his use of the concept of uneven and combined development to all countries which were experiencing a limited degree of capitalist development and were locked into the imperialist world system. Although he considered that most countries were affected by this global capitalist system and the world division of labour, he realised that each one had a particular location within the overall framework.

The economic peculiarities of different countries are in no way of a subordinate character... [N]ational peculiarity is nothing else but the most general product of the unevenness of historical development, its summary result, so to say.¹⁵

As Marx had stressed, capitalism also created contradictions that had the effect of radically altering the conditions of economic, social and political development. Emerging capitalist societies did not simply repeat the same course of historical development followed by earlier developers. Hence, Trotsky totally rejected Stalin's idea that revolutionary politics should be based

14 Trotsky 1969, pp. 49–50.

15 Trotsky 1969, p. 148 (emphasis in original).

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