

uneven and combined development theorising 'the international'

U&CD: a Trotsky Digest

With the exception of the opening chapter of *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky nowhere provides a concentrated exposition of the idea of uneven and combined development.

Instead, materials relevant to the idea are found scattered widely across his works – a paragraph here, a sentence there, sometimes just a suggestive phrase almost hidden by a surrounding mass of irrelevant polemics.

This document assembles a variety of such materials which I have found useful for thinking about the idea. The materials are arranged by source (rather than thematically). And the sources themselves are arranged chronologically, with dates in parentheses to indicate when the texts were written. Words in square brackets are not Trotsky's.

This document is not a substitute for reading the originals, but it may help direct you to passages of special relevance.

Note that the critical remarks by James Burnham on pages 20-21, though republished in a volume of Trotsky's writings, are of course by Burnham himself.

If you have any suggestions for additional passages to include, please email them to me, with the full references, at j.p.rosenberg@sussex.ac.uk

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1. *Results and Prospects* (1906)

168 It would be a stupid mistake simply to identify our revolution with the events of 1789-93 [i.e. the French Revolution]. Historical analogies, by which liberalism lives and is nurtured, cannot take the place of social analysis.

170 It is difficult to say what shape Russian social development would have taken if it had remained isolated and under the influence of inner tendencies only. It is enough to say that this did not happen. Russian social life, built up on a certain internal economic foundation, has all the time been under the influence, even under the pressure, of its external social-historical milieu.

Thus the main thing was not that Russia was surrounded by enemies on all sides. This alone does not explain the position...

171 It was not the Tatars who compelled Old Russia to introduce firearms...

173 ...under the influence and the pressure of its more differentiated Western milieu, a pressure that was transmitted through the military-state organization, the State in its turn strove to force the development of social differentiation on a primitive economic foundation.

174 Russian thought, like the Russian economy, developed under the direct pressure of the higher thought and more developed economies of the West.

...the influence of these countries found expression in fierce struggle for the existence of the State before expressing itself in direct economic competition.

175 At the moment when developing bourgeois society [in Russia] began to feel a need for the political institutions of the West, the autocracy proved to be armed with all the material might of the European States.

Supported by its army and its budget, the autocratic government made the European Stock Exchange its exchequer, and the Russian taxpayer thus became a hopeless tributary of this European Stock Exchange.

176 The only way out of these contradictions which its situation indicated to society was through the accumulation of sufficient steam within the boiler of absolutism to burst it.

181 ...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.

In the first place it converted the Russian peasant into a tributary of the Stock Exchanges of the world.

- 182 The European Stock Exchange was even directly interested in the maintenance of absolutism, for no other government could guarantee such usurious interest.

Thus it was capital which, as before, remained largely European and which realized its political power in the parliaments of France and Belgium, that mobilized the working class in Russia.

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.

- 183 Russian absolutism developed under the direct pressure of the Western states. It copied their methods of government and administration much earlier than economic conditions here permitted the rise of a capitalist bourgeoisie.

- 184 History does not repeat itself. However much one may compare the Russian Revolution with the Great French Revolution, the former can never be transformed into a repetition of the latter. The 19th century has not passed in vain.

- 185 Revolution can be achieved either by a nation gathering itself together like a lion preparing to spring, or by a nation in the process of struggle becoming conclusively divided in order to free the best part of itself for the execution of those tasks which the nation as a whole is unable to carry out.

- 186 *Jacobinism* is now a term of reproach on the lips of all liberal wiseacres.. We, the world army of Communism, have long ago made our historical reckoning with Jacobinism. The whole of the present international proletarian movement was formed and grew strong in the struggle against the traditions of Jacobinism. We subjected its theories to criticism, we exposed its historical limitations, its contradictoriness, its utopianism...

But we defend Jacobinism against..... the attacks... of... liberalism... The proletariat has taken the honour of the revolutionary past of the bourgeoisie under its protection.

- 195 It is possible for the workers to come to power in an economically backward country sooner than in an advanced country. In 1871 the workers deliberately took power in their hands in petty-bourgeois Paris – true for only two months, but in the big-capitalist centers of Britain or the United States the workers have never held power for so much as an hour.

[Trotsky quotes Marx:] ‘The working class in Germany is, in its social and political development, as far behind that of England and France as the German bourgeoisie is behind the bourgeoisie of those countries. Like master, like man.’ [Trotsky notes that ‘textual Marxists’ have used this quote to argue that revolution in Russia could not precede revolution in Britain, France, Germany etc.]

- 196 Marxism is above all a method of analysis - not analysis of texts, but analysis of social relations... [Trotsky rejects any] attempt to convert an historically-relative remark of Marx’s into a supra-historical axiom.

- 197 Between the productive forces of a country and the political strength of its classes there cut across at any given moment various social and political factors of a national and international character, and these displace and even sometimes completely alter the political expression of economic relations.
- 203 [On the French Revolution:] The emancipated peasantry lost all interest in the political stunts of the 'townspeople', that is, in the further progress of the revolution, and placing itself like a heavy foundation-stone at the foot of 'order', betrayed the revolution to the Caesarist or *ancien-regime*-absolutist reaction.
- 209 [Trotsky forecasts that the peasant majority would assist in the overthrow of Czarism, but would then resist the policies of a proletarian regime.] Thus, the more definite and determined the policy of the proletariat in power becomes, the narrower and more shaky does the ground beneath its feet become. All this is extremely probable and even inevitable...
- 212 ...uninterrupted revolution... - an idea which connected the liquidation of absolutism and feudalism with a socialist revolution...
- 217 ...Marx... regarded the revolution of 1848 as the immediate prologue to the socialist revolution... etc.
- 228 Politics is the plane upon which the objective pre-requisites of socialism are intersected by the subjective ones.
- 240 We thus see that the world bourgeoisie has made the stability of its State system profoundly dependent on the unstable pre-bourgeois bulwarks of reaction.
This immediately gives the events now unfolding an international character and opens up a wide horizon.
- 241 [Trotsky's prognosis of how the Russian revolution might trigger those revolutions in more advanced societies which would be needed to rescue it: Russian revolution sparks Polish revolution, provokes Austro-Prussian intervention in Poland, leading to war with Russian, igniting the German revolution!]
- 242 Having placed huge masses of men under arms, the bourgeois governments are unable, however, to cut with the sword through the tangle of international politics.
- 245 ...the logic of international relations is stronger than the logic of diplomacy.

...there is every ground for assuming that the financial crisis arising from the bankruptcy of Russia will directly repeat itself in France... etc.
- 247 Left to its own resources, the working class of Russia will inevitably be crushed by the counter-revolution the moment the peasantry turns its back on it. It will have no alternative but to link the fate of its political rule, and, hence, the fate of the whole Russian revolution, with the fate of the socialist revolution in Europe. That colossal state-political power given it by a temporary conjuncture of circumstances in the Russian bourgeois revolution it will cast into the scales of the class struggle of the entire capitalist world ...a call for the last attack...(!)

2. 1905 (1908-9/1922)

- 21 Our revolution [1905] destroyed the myth of the ‘uniqueness’ of Russia. It demonstrated that history does not have special laws for Russia. Yet at the same time the Russian revolution bore a character wholly peculiar to itself...

It is hard to tell how the life of the Russian state would have developed if it had taken place in isolation, influenced by internal tendencies alone. Suffice to say that this was not the case. Russia’s social existence was always under constant pressure from the more developed social

- 22 and state relations of Western Europe, and as time went on this pressure became more and more powerful. Given the relatively weak development of international trade, a decisive role was played by military relations between states. First and foremost, the social influence of Europe found expression in the form of military technology.

The Russian state... was brought face to face with state organizations which had developed on a higher economic basis. Two possibilities presented themselves: the Russian state had either to fall in the struggle with those state organizations... or it had to outpace the development of its own economic relations...

Up to a certain point all the above also applies, of course, to any other European state. The difference is that in their mutual struggle for existence [they were] not subject to such powerful and economically intolerable outside pressures.

- 23 In the play of social forces, the pendulum swung much further in the direction of state power [in Russia] than was the case in the history of Western Europe.

- 26 ...Tsarism represents an intermediate form between European Absolutism and Asian despotism, being, possibly, closer to the latter of these two.

But at a time when semi-Asiatic social conditions were transforming Tsarism into an autocratic organization, European technology and European capital were equipping that organization with all the means of a great European power. This enabled Tsarism to intervene in all the political relations of Europe...

- 27 During the pre-capitalist epoch, the influence of Europe on the Russian economy was, of necessity, limited. The natural – that is to say, self-contained – character of the Russian national economy protected it from the influence of higher forms of production... But when capitalist relations finally became predominant in Europe,... then the situation changed utterly.

By the time that our developing bourgeois society began to feel the need for the political institutions of the West, the autocracy, aided by European technology and European capital, had already transformed itself into the largest capitalist entrepreneur, the largest banker, the monopoly owner of railways, and of liquor retail shops.

- 30 It was not the village craftsman, nor even the rich merchant, but the state itself which finally came face to face with the necessity of creating a large-scale industry.

- 31 The Russian textile industries developed entirely on the basis of ready-made English models. During the 1840s and 1850s the German, Knopp, transferred 122 spinning factories, down to the last nail, from England to Russia.
- 34 Deprived of the possibility of dumping its products on Russia, European capital crossed the Eastern frontier in its most invulnerable and attractive hypostasy: in the form of money.
- 35 While economic contacts with Europe were still limited to the importation of craftsmen and machines or even to loans borrowed for productive purposes, this was in the last analysis a question of making the Russian national economy assimilate certain elements of European production. But when free foreign capital, in its race for a high level of profits, flung itself upon Russia's territory... it became a matter of making the capitalist industrial organism of Europe assimilate the national economy of Russia.
- 53 Within this vast space [i.e. Czarist Russia] every epoch of human culture is to be found: from the primeval barbarism of the northern forests, where people eat raw fish and worship blocks of wood, to the modern social relations of the capitalist city, where socialist workers consciously recognize themselves as participants in world politics and keep a watchful eye on events in the Balkans and on debates in the German Reichstag. The most concentrated industry in Europe based on the most backward agriculture in Europe. The most colossal state apparatus in the world making use of every achievement of modern technological progress in order to retard the historical progress of its own country.
- 67 'Pedants... believe that the history of one capitalist nation must repeat itself in the history of any other capitalist nation, with larger or smaller divergences. What these pedants fail to see is that the world is now undergoing a unified process of capitalist development which absorbs all the countries it meets on its way and creates in them a social amalgum combining the local and general conditions of capitalism. The actual nature of this amalgum cannot be determined by mouthing historical cliches, but only by applying a materialistic analysis.' [NB The wording of this passage has been taken from Knei-Paz, p.88, rather than from the Penguin edition of *1905*. Knei-Paz's translation seems better.]
- There can be no analogy of historical development [between Britain's experience and that of early 20th late developers]... but there does exist a profound inner connection between the two.
- 342 ...what a complicated business it is trying to apply the methods of historical materialism to living human history...
- 343 That the historical life of every society is founded on production; that production gives rise to classes and to groupings of classes; that the state is formed on the foundations of class struggle, and that the state is an organ of class oppression – these notions were not a mystery either for me or for my opponents in 1905. Within these limits the history of Russia obeys the same laws as the history of France, England, or any other country.
- 344 Where there are no 'special features', there is no history, but only a sort of pseudo-materialistic geometry. Instead of studying the living and changing matter of economic

development it is enough to notice a few outward symptoms and adapt them to a few ready-made clichés.

Hence the appearance in Russia of modern capitalist industry in a completely primitive economic environment: for instance, a huge Belgian or American industrial plant surrounded by dirt roads and villages built of straw and wood, which burn down every year, etc. The most primitive beginnings and the most modern European endings.

- 356 I have pointed out how much our entire development has been influenced by the fact that on our Western frontiers we constantly came back into contact with states that were more developed, better organized, and technically better armed than ourselves... When economic interests are defended by the state they always assume the nature of political aims and tasks; and when they have to be defended not by diplomatic means but by the force of arms, they become military tasks.
- 358 The property-owning classes of Russia came up against the hostile or partially hostile property-owning classes of Europe. These contacts took place through the mediation of the state organisation. The autocracy was that state organisation. The whole structure and the whole history of the Russian autocracy would have been different if there had been no European towns, European gunpowder (or if we had invented it) and the European stock exchange.
- 359 ...Tsarism, in defending the interests of Russia's property-owning classes in the international struggle, was operating from a more primitive base than its enemies or allies

3. *Leon Trotsky on Britain (1925-28)*

- 24 The Communist International, viewed in the light of this knowledge, may be considered an almost conservative institution as compared with Wall Street.
- 25 England is leading the United States to hegemony, as it were.
- ...capital today nowhere feels itself so strong as in America
- 26 ...the political development of England presents remarkable peculiarities.
- 27 England emerged from the epoch of the civil war and Cromwell's dictatorship a little nation, with hardly 1,500,000 families; it entered the imperialist war in 1914 an empire, embracing within its boundaries one-fifth of all mankind.

After the middle of the eighteenth century, the universal might of England is indisputable. England rules on the seas and on the world market which is its creation.

The industrial century was simultaneously the century of Great Britain's world hegemony.

From 1850 to 1880, England was the industrial school for Europe and America. But this very fact undermined its special monopolistic position. With the 1880s, England begins perceptibly to weaken.

36 The impact of European revolutions has always been clearly expressed in the social development of England. They have always led to reforms, so long as the English bourgeoisie, owing to its world leadership, still had in its hands great resources for its maneuvers.

51 ...the entire English industry 'gradually' accumulating its resources, is without system or plan.

... an explanation of the internal logic of the historical process...

52 ...by 'Europe' we mean culture...

61 The historical dialectic process in this connection has played a sorry trick on England, in transferring the advantages of her early development into the causes for her present backwardness. We have already seen this in the field of industry, in science, in the government system, in the political ideology. England grew up without any precedents. She could not seek and find any pattern for her future among more advanced countries. She advanced by groping, empirically, looking ahead and generalizing as to her path only when absolutely necessary. The traditional cast of mind of the Englishman, particularly of the English bourgeois, is impressed with the seal of empiricism, and this same tradition was passed on to the upper layers of the working class. Empiricism became a tradition and a banner; it was combined with a contemptuous attitude for the 'abstract' thought of the Continent.

...But it appeared in the course of time that the German bourgeoisie, backward in practical respects and therefore inclined to theoretical speculation, was turning its backwardness into an advantage and creating an industry far more scientifically organized and adapted for the struggle on the world market.

4. *The Third International After Lenin (1929)*

3. It is... a question of drawing up the balance of the world economic and political experiences of the last period.

In our epoch, which is the epoch of imperialism, i.e. of *world* economy and *world* politics under the hegemony of finance capital, not a single communist party can establish

4. its program by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of developments in its own country. ... An international communist program is in no case the sum total of national programs or an amalgam of their common features. The international program must proceed directly from an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of world economy and of the world political system taken as a whole in all its connections and contradictions, that is, with the mutually antagonistic interdependence of its separate parts.

5 Linking up countries and continents that stand on different levels of development into a system of mutual dependence and antagonism, leveling out the various stages of their development and at the same time immediately enhancing the differences between them,

and ruthlessly counterposing one country to another, world economy has become a mighty reality which holds sway over the economic life of individual countries and continents.

8 ...it is precisely the international strength of the United States and her irresistible expansion arising from it, that compels her to include the powder magazines of the whole world into the foundations of her structure, i.e., all the antagonisms between the East and the West, the class struggle in Old Europe, the uprisings of the colonial masses, and all wars and revolutions. ... this transforms North American capitalism into the basic counter-revolutionary force of the modern epoch, constantly more interested in the maintenance of 'order' in every corner of the terrestrial globe...

15 ...the *unevenness* of historical development of different countries and continents *is in itself uneven*.

19 ...the entire history of mankind is governed by the law of uneven development. Capitalism finds various sections of mankind at different stages of development, each with its profound internal contradictions. The extreme diversity in the levels attained, and the extraordinary unevenness in the rate of development of the different sections of mankind during the various epochs, serve as the *starting point* of capitalism. Capitalism gains mastery only gradually over the inherited unevenness, breaking and altering it, employing therein its own means and methods. In contrast to the economic systems which preceded it, capitalism inherently and constantly aims at economic expansion, at the penetration of new territories, the surmounting of economic differences, the conversion of self-sufficient provincial and national economies into a system of financial interrelationships. Thereby it brings about their *rapprochement* and equalizes the economic and cultural levels of the most progressive and the most backward countries. Without this main process, it would be impossible to conceive of the relative leveling out, first of Europe with Great Britain, and then, of America with Europe; the industrialization of the colonies, the diminishing gap between India and Great Britain...

By drawing the countries economically closer to one another and leveling out their stages of development, capitalism, however, operates by methods of its *own*, that is to say, by anarchistic methods which constantly undermine its own work, set one country against another, and one

20 branch of industry against another, developing some parts of world economy while hampering and throwing back the development of others. Only the correlations of these two fundamental tendencies - both of which arise from the nature of capitalism - explains to us the living texture of the historical process.

Imperialism, thanks to the universality, penetrability, and mobility and the break-neck speed of the formation of finance capital as the driving force of imperialism, lends vigor to *both these tendencies*. Imperialism links up incomparably more rapidly and more deeply the individual national and continental units into a single entity, bringing them into the closest and most vital dependence upon each other and rendering their economic methods, social forms, and levels of development more identical. At the same time, it attains this 'goal' by such antagonistic methods, such tiger-leaps, and such raids upon backward countries and areas that the unification and leveling of world economy which it has effected, is upset by it even more violently and convulsively than in the preceding epochs..

- 21 Uneven or sporadic development of various countries acts constantly to *upset* but in no case to *eliminate* the growing economic bonds and interdependence between those countries which the very next day, after four years of hellish slaughter, were compelled to exchange coal, bread, oil, powder, and suspenders with each other.
- 22 On the one hand, unevenness, i.e., sporadic historical development, stretches the proletarian revolution through an entire epoch in the course of which nations will enter the revolutionary flood one after another; while, on the other hand, the organic interdependence of the several countries, developing toward an international division of labor, excludes the possibility of building socialism in one country.
- 42 ...in the epoch of imperialism it is impossible to approach the fate of one country in any other way but by taking as a starting point the tendencies of world development as a whole in which the individual country, with all its national peculiarities, is included and to which it is subordinated.
- 56 Uneven, sporadic development thus compelled the proletariat of the most backward imperialist country to be the first to seize power. Formerly we were taught that it is precisely for this reason that the working class of the 'weakest link' will encounter the greatest difficulties in its progress towards socialism as compared with the proletariat of the advanced countries, who will find it more difficult to seize power but who, having seized power long before we have overcome our backwardness, will not only surpass us but will carry us along so as to bring us towards the point of real socialist construction on the basis of the highest world technology and international division of labour. This was our idea when we ventured upon the October Revolution.

5. *My Life: An attempt at an Autobiography* (1929)

- xxxvii ...the packages of explosives that civilized neighbours send each other through the air
- 13 The secret power of the world market makes itself felt even in Yanovka.
- 94-5 Along with the suppressed hostility to the political order in Russia, I began to create, in my imagination, an idealized picture of the foreign world - of Western Europe and America. From scattered remarks and descriptions, I began to visualize a culture which was high in itself...
- 95 Life has beaten rationalism out of me and has taught me the workings of dialectics.
- 123 ...the multiplicity of historical factors, which, as we know, even today is the most widely accepted theory in social science. People denote as 'factors' the various aspects of their social activity, endow this concept with a supra-social character, and then superstitiously interpret their own activity as the result of the interaction of these independent forces. Where did the factors come from, that is, under what conditions did they evolve from primitive human society? With these questions, the official eclectic theory does not concern itself.

- 127 The dialectic method revealed itself to me for the first time not as abstract definitions but as a living spring which I had found in the historical process as I tried to understand it.
- 219 For us Russians the German Social Democracy was mother, teacher and living example. We idealized it from a distance.
- 243 ‘The European socialist parties’, I wrote as early as 1905... ‘have developed their own conservatism, which grows stronger the more the masses are captured by socialism.’
- 300 One had to approach the Russian revolution from the world point of view rather than from that of Russia, to avoid getting lost in complexities.
- 348 Marxism considers itself the conscious expression of the unconscious historical process.
- 366 One could probably meditate on the contradictions in the development of a backward country for a minute or two when dashing off at a tangent to the Kremlin past, [*sic*] on the way from one meeting to another - but no longer than that.
- 398 [Trotsky quotes Lenin:] ‘If it were necessary for us to go under to assure the success of the German revolution, we should have to do it. The German revolution is vastly more important than ours. But when will it come? No one knows...’
- 427 So long as those malicious tailless apes that are so proud of their technical achievements - the animals we call men - will build armies and wage wars, the command will always be obliged to place the soldiers between the possible death in the front and the inevitable one in the rear.

6. *The Permanent Revolution* (1930)

- 22 Marxism takes its point of departure from world economy, not as a sum of national parts but as a mighty and independent reality which has been created by the international division of labour... the productive forces of capitalist society have long ago outgrown the national boundaries...
- 23 It is false that world economy is simply a sum of national parts of one and the same type. It is false that the specific features are ‘merely supplementary to the general features’, like warts on a face. In reality, the national peculiarities represent an original combination of the basic features of the world process.
- 24 The peculiarity of a national social type is the crystallization of the unevenness of its formation.
- 25 ...the law of uneven development... does not replace nor does it abolish the laws of world economy: on the contrary, it is subordinated to them.
- 28 ...the tendency of capitalist development is toward a colossal growth of world ties, which is expressed in the growing volume of foreign trade, including, of course, capital export. Britain’s dependence upon India naturally bears a qualitatively different character from

India's dependence upon Britain. But this difference is determined, at bottom, by the difference in the respective levels of development of their productive forces, and not at all by the degree of their economic self-sufficiency. India is a colony; Britain, a metropolis. But if Britain were subjected today to an economic blockade, it would perish sooner than would India under

29 a similar blockade. This, by the way, is one of the convincing illustrations of the reality of world economy.

115 ...history combined the main content of the bourgeois revolution with the first stage of the proletarian revolution – did not mix them up but combined them organically.

116 It is nonsense to say that stages cannot in general be skipped. The living historical process always makes leaps over isolated 'stages' which derive from theoretical breakdown into its component parts of the process of development in its entirety, that is, taken in its fullest scope. The same is demanded of revolutionary policy at crucial moments. It may be said that the first distinction between a revolutionist and a vulgar evolutionist lies in the capacity to recognize and exploit such moments.

The modern history of Russia cannot be comprehended unless the Marxist schema of the three stages is known: handicraft, manufacture, factory. But if one knows *only* this, one still comprehends nothing. For the fact is that the history of Russia... skipped a few stages. The theoretical distinction of the stages, however, is necessary for Russia, too, otherwise one can comprehend neither what this leap amounted to nor what its consequences were.

...The quantitative contraction of the two stages was so great that it engendered an entirely new quality in the whole social structure of the nation. The most striking expression of this new 'quality' in politics is the October Revolution.

117 ...the *skipping of stages* (or remaining too long at one stage) *is just what uneven development consists of.*

...the dialectic of the historical 'stages' is relatively easy to understand in periods of revolutionary ascent. Reactionary periods, on the contrary, naturally become epochs of cheap evolutionism.

One stage or another of the historical process can prove to be inevitable under certain conditions, although theoretically not inevitable. And conversely, theoretically 'inevitable' stages can be compressed to zero by the dynamics of development, especially during revolutions, which have not for nothing been called the locomotives of history.

117-8 Every attempt to skip over real, that is, objectively conditioned stages in the development of the masses, is political adventurism.

131 One must not proceed from a preconceived harmony of social development. The law of uneven development still lives, despite the tender theoretical embraces of Stalin. The force of this law operates not only in the relations of countries to each other, but also in the mutual relationships of the various processes within one and the same country. A reconciliation of the uneven processes of economics and politics can be attained only on a world scale.

...no country in the world can build socialism within its own national limits: the highly-developed productive forces which have grown beyond national boundaries resist this...

...the backwardness of China makes the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship extremely difficult. But we repeat: History is not made to order, and the Chinese proletariat has no choice.

143 Let there be no illusions; we have received an undated moratorium.

7. The History of the Russian Revolution (1932)

4 A backward country assimilates the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries. But this does not mean that it follows them slavishly, reproduces all the stages of their past. The theory of the repetition of historic cycles - Vico and his more recent followers - rests upon an observation of the orbits of old precapitalistic, and in part upon the first experiments of capitalist development.... Capitalism means, however, an overcoming of those conditions. It prepares and in a certain sense realises the universality and permanence of man's development. By this a repetition of the forms of development by different nations is ruled out. Although compelled to follow after the advanced countries, a back-

5 ward country does not take things in the same order. The privilege of historic backwardness - and such a privilege exists - permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages. Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without traveling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past. The European colonists in America did not begin history all over again from the beginning. The fact that Germany and the United States have now economically outstripped England was made possible by the very backwardness of their capitalist development.... The development of historically backward nations leads necessarily to a peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process. Their development as a whole acquires a planless, complex, combined character.

The possibility of skipping over intermediate steps is of course by no means absolute. Its degree is determined in the long run by the economic and cultural capacities of the country. The backward nation, moreover, not infrequently debases the achievements borrowed from outside in the process of adapting them to its own more primitive culture. In this the very process of assimilation acquires a self-contradictory character. Thus the introduction of certain elements of Western technique and training, above all military and industrial, under Peter I, led to a strengthening of serfdom... European armament and European loans - both indubitable products of a higher culture - led to a strengthening of Czarism, which delayed in its turn the development of the country.

The laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism. Unevenness, the most general law of the historical process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives an-

6 other 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 separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms. Without this law, to be taken of course in its whole material content, it is impossible to understand the history of Russia, and indeed of any country of the second, third or tenth cultural class.

Under pressure from richer Europe the Russian State swallowed up a far greater relative part of the people's wealth...

...Slavophilism, the messianism of backwardness...

Appendix I, Volume I

464 ...the indubitable and irrefutable belatedness of Russia's development under influence and pressure of the higher culture from the West, results not in a simple repetition of the West European historic process, but in the creation of profound *peculiarities* demanding independent study.

466 Not to see this immense peculiarity of our historic development means not to see our whole history.

468 Primitiveness and backwardness here cry to the heavens... The most primitive beginnings and the latest European endings....

And our proletariat?... It was thrown into the factory cauldron snatched directly from the plow. Hence the absence of conservative tradition, absence of caste in the proletariat itself, revolutionary fresh-

469 ness; hence - along with other causes - October, the first workers' government in the world. But hence also illiteracy, backwardness, absence of organizational habits, absence of system in labor, of cultural and technical education. All these minuses in our cultural economic structure we are feeling at every step.

Appendix II, Volume III

378 'The industrially more developed country shows the less developed only the image of its own future.' This statement of Marx, which takes its departure methodologically not from world economy as a whole but from the single capitalist country as a type has become less applicable in proportion as capitalist evolution has embraced all countries regardless of their previous fate and industrial level. England in her day revealed the future of France, considerably less of Germany, but not in the least of Russia and not of India.

379 The collapse of Russian capitalism was a local avalanche in a universal social formation.

We have attributed the October revolution in the last analysis not to the fact of Russia's backwardness, but to the law of combined development. The historical dialectic knows neither naked backwardness nor chemically pure progressiveness. It is all a question of concrete correlations. The present-day history of mankind is full of 'paradoxes', not so colossal as the arising of a proletarian dictatorship in a backward country, but of similar historic type... Scholastic, pedantically single-track, or too short national criteria are no

good in our epoch. World development forced Russia out of her backwardness and her Asiaticness. Outside the web of this development, her further destiny cannot be understood.

8. *Trotsky's Notebooks* (1933-1935)

From Philip Pomper's Introduction

- 25 ...Trotsky had not abandoned his basic position as a historian – that of Marxian historical sociology...
- 38 ...one should make allowance for Trotsky's brilliance at grasping the essentials of an argument, position, or text after minimal acquaintance with it and his extraordinary ability to summarize and present a complex position epigrammatically.
- 57 ...dialecticians seek to give structure to both continuity and change by using terms like 'thesis', 'antithesis', 'positive', and 'negative' in ways that permit translations into the ordinary language of form, relationship, continuity, and change, or into mathematical languages. ...when dialecticians try to describe relationship, continuity and change in systemic wholes, the unfailingly use a small number of architectonics.
- 60 A little reflection reveals that the catastrophic architectonic in dialectics [i.e. Trotsky's] must nest, so to speak, within an epigenetic one, and the latter within the systemic architectonic, for breaks can only occur when a process of development has been identified, and what is developing is a systemic whole.

From Trotsky's Notebooks

- 77 Some objects (phenomena) are confined easily within boundaries according to logical classification, others present [us with] difficulties: they can be put here or there, but within a stricter relationship – nowhere. While provoking the indignation of systematizers, such transitional forms are exceptionally interesting to dialecticians, for they smash the limited boundaries of classification, revealing the real connections and consecutiveness of a living process.
- 78 *The concept* – is not a closed circle, but a loop, one end of which moves into the past, the other – into the future. If you pull at its end you can undo the loop, but you can also knot it.

Thus the triad [i.e. thesis-antithesis-synthesis] does not at all correspond to an undifferentiated past, present, and future, but to the formative stages of the process, [NB this notebook, on Hegel, ends with an unfinished sentence which breaks off after the word 'process' – rather like Vol III of Capital breaking off having just posed the difficulty of defining 'class'!]

80 Zubatovshchina

Monarchy + social reforms
Borrowed from Bismarck and Napoleon III,
a presentiment of fascism,
but all of this in truly muscovite style

85 Slavophilism – messianism – revenge for backwardness.

86 $a=a$ is only a particular case of the law $a\neq a$.

87 Formal logic involves stationary and unchanging quantities: $a=a$. Dialectics retorts: $a\neq a$. Both are correct. $A=a$ at every given moment. $A\neq a$ at two different moments. Everything flows, everything is changing.

What does logic express? The law of the external world or the law of consciousness? The question is posed dualistically, [and] therefore not correctly [for] the laws of logic express the laws (rules, methods) of consciousness in its active relationship to the external world.

88 Cognition begins with the differentiation of things, with their opposition to each other, with a classification of their qualitative differences.

89 To view phenomena according to their resemblance or opposition means to see them according to their *quality*.

96 Dialectics is the logic of development. It examines the world – completely without exception – not as a result of creation, of a sudden beginning, the realization of a plan, but as a result of motion, of transformation.

97 Cognizing thought begins with differentiation, with the instantaneous photograph, with the establishment of terms-conceptions,

98 in which the separate moments of a process are placed but from which the process as a whole escapes. These terms-conceptions created by cognizing thought, are then transformed into its fetters. Dialectics removes these fetters, revealing the relativity of motionless concepts, their transition into each other.

99 [reflecting on ‘the triad’, Trotsky notes:] Historically humanity forms its ‘conceptions’ – the basic elements of its thinking – on the foundation of experience, which is always incomplete, partial, one-sided. It includes in ‘the concept’

101 those features of a living, forever changing process, which are important and significant for it at a given moment. Its future experience at first is enriched (quantitatively) and then *outgrows* the closed concept, that is, in practice negates it, by virtue of this necessitating a theoretical negation. But the negation does not signify a turning back to a tabula rasa. Reason already possesses: a) the concept and b) the recognition of its unsoundness. This recognition is tantamount to the necessity to construct *a new concept*, and then it is inevitably revealed that the negation was not absolute, that it affected only certain features of the first concept. The new concept therefore has by necessity a *synthetic* character: into it enter those elements of the initial concept, which were able to withstand the trial by experience + those elements of experience, which led to the negation of the

initial concept.

Consciousness splits nature into fixed categories and in this way enters into contradiction with reality. Dialectics overcomes this contradiction – gradually and piecemeal – bringing consciousness nearer to the world’s reality. The dialectic of consciousness (cognition) is not thereby a *reflection* of the dialectic of nature, but is a *result* of the lively interaction between consciousness and nature

102 and – in addition – a method of cognition, issuing from this interaction.

Since cognition is not *identical* with the world... dialectical cognition is not *identical* with the dialectic of nature. Consciousness is a quite original *part* of nature, possessing peculiarities and regularities that are completely absent in the remaining part of nature. Subjective dialectics must by virtue of this be a distinctive part of objective dialectics – with its own special forms and regularities. (The danger lies in the transference – under the guise of ‘objectivism’ – of the birth pangs, the spasm of consciousness, to objective nature.)

111 The fundamental ‘cell’ of dialectical thinking is the syllogism. But it [too] undergoes transmutation, changes, like the basic cells in various tissues of an organism change.

Dialectics is the logic of development. Logic (formal) is the dialectic of motionlessness. Logic is a particular case of the dialectic, when motion and change enter into the formula as ‘0’.

9. *In Defense of Marxism* (1939-40)

‘A Petty Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party’

49 The dialectic and formal logic bear a relationship similar to that between higher and lower mathematics.

...a more delicate scale always discloses a difference... all bodies change uninterruptedly in size, weight, color, etc. They are never equal to themselves.

To make use of the axiom “A” is equal to “A” with impunity is possible only within certain *limits*. When quantitative changes in “A” are negligible for the task at hand then we

50 can presume that “A” is equal to “A”. ... but quantitative changes beyond certain limits become converted into qualitative. ...To determine at the right moment the critical point where quantity changes into quality is one of the most important and difficult tasks in all the spheres of knowledge including sociology.

Vulgar thought operates with such concepts as capitalism, morals, freedom, workers’ state etc. as fixed abstractions, presuming that capitalism is equal to capitalism, morals are equal to morals etc. Dialectical thinking analyzes all things and phenomena in their continuous change, while determining in the material conditions of those changes that

critical limit beyond which “A” ceases to be “A”, a workers’ state ceases to be a workers’ state.

The fundamental flaw of vulgar thought lies in the fact that it wishes to content itself with motionless imprints of a reality which consists of eternal motion. Dialectical thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximation, corrections, concretizations, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena. Not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development. Not a workers’ state in general, but a given workers’ state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement etc.

51 Dialectical thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion. Dialectics does not deny the syllogism, but teaches us to combine syllogisms in such a way as to bring our understanding closer to the eternally changing reality.

52 The dialectic is not a master key for all questions. It does not replace concrete scientific analysis.

53 ...As if the war were an independent super-social substance...

74 desertions... began not infrequently with rejection of the dialectic.

82 Buffon once said: The style is the man.

84 Every individual is a dialectician *to some extent or other*, in most cases, unconsciously. A housewife knows that a certain amount of salt flavors soup agreeably, but that added salt makes the soup unpalatable. Consequently, an illiterate peasant woman guides herself in cooking soup by the Hegelian law of the transformation of quantity into quality. Similar examples from daily life could be cited without end. Even animals arrive at their practical conclusions not only on the basis of the Aristotelian syllogism but also on the basis of the Hegelian dialectic. [there follows the example of the fox identifying which animals to chase and which to flee] Clearly, the legs of a fox are equipped with Hegelian tendencies, even if not fully conscious ones. All this demonstrates, in passing, that our methods of thought, both formal logic and the dialectic, are not arbitrary constructions of our reason but rather expressions of the actual inter-relationships in nature itself. In this sense, the universe throughout is permeated with 'unconscious' dialectics....

91 The opposition leaders split sociology from dialectical materialism. They split politics from sociology. In the sphere of politics they split our tasks in Poland from our experience in Spain... History becomes transformed into a series of exceptional incidents...

**'Science and Style, A Reply to Comrade Trotsky',
by James Burnham**

187 ...I... find I must stop awhile in wonder: at the technical perfection of the verbal structure you have created, the dynamic sweep of your rhetoric... the sudden, witty, flashing metaphors that sparkle through your pages.

188 ...your *style*, your wonderful style...

...an important truth: that you have a too *literary* conception of proof, of evidence; that you deceive yourself into treating persuasive rhetoric as logical demonstration, a brilliant *metaphor* as argument. Here, I believe, is the heart of the mystery of the dialectic, as it appears in your books and articles: the dialectic, for you, is a *device of style* – the contrasting epithets, the flowing rhythms, the verbal paradoxes which characterise your way of writing.

189 But as soon as these propositions are made *explicit*, as soon as they are brought to the surface from beneath the shrouds of metaphor and rhetoric... [then they *all* need to be proven, and they cannot be].

190 Among those lofty generalities, no humble and inconvenient *fact* intrudes; no earthy test or observation or experiment mar their Olympian calm; those serene words remain forever free from the gross touch of everyday events.

...the popularizers of Darwin who thought that by a metaphorical extension of the hypothesis of biological evolution they had discovered the ultimate key to the mysteries of the universe.

194 And now, Comrade Trotsky, please, please, explain to me and all of us: how, just how, does there *follow from* any and all of this the answer to the political dispute we are arguing...? Your inability to answer this question – and you will not be able to answer it – proves that your introduction of dialectics is an evasion, a perfumed trap for the unwary.

...the vast 'fundamental questions' are not genuine questions at all, but requests for emotional satisfaction...

196 ...there is no sense *at all* in which dialectics (even if dialectics were not, as it is, scientifically meaningless) is fundamental in politics, none at all. An opinion on dialectics is no more fundamental for *politics* than an opinion on non-Euclidean geometry or relativity physics...

You are wrong, Comrade Trotsky... Comrade Trotsky, you have absorbed too much of Hegel, of his monolithic, his totalitarian, vision of a block universe in which every part is related to every other part, in which everything is relevant to everything else, where the destruction of a single grain of dust means

197 the annihilation of the Whole.

203 Your unscrupulous dragging in of dialectics as a polemical maneuver.

206 As to agreement on principles: There is only one way in which such agreement is possible for me – when I am convinced that my principles are wrong, and others are right. And I am afraid that the metaphors, even of a Shakespeare, would not be enough to convince me.

10. The Age of Permanent Revolution: a Trotsky Anthology

Deutscher on Trotsky

19 Trotsky's theory is in truth a profound and comprehensive conception in which all the overturns that the world has been undergoing (in this late capitalist era) are represented as interconnected and interdependent parts of a single revolutionary process. To put it in the broadest terms, the social upheaval of our century is seen by Trotsky as global in scope and character, even though it proceeds on various levels of civilization and in the most diverse social structures, and even though its various phases are separated from each one another in time and space.

23 Permanent Revolution has come back into its own, and whatever its further intervals and disarray, it forms, the socio-political content of our century.

31 'Trotskyism represented the conscience of the revolution...

33 In the years of Trotsky's last exile... his mind and heart never ceased embracing the world.

34 He is in many ways the most orthodox of Marxists, but his personality dispels the odor of orthodoxy.

It is all the more important for the student of contemporary history to try to penetrate through the crust of these accretions to the original, half-forgotten inspiration of the October Revolution. The mental effort required for this may be compared to the effort of cleansing and restoration that is nowadays being spent on old works of art... The images of Marxism, of Leninism, and of the Revolution purveyed by Western Sovietologists and Soviet ideologists alike have this in common with the theories of those unfortunate art experts: they too assume that all the muck and soot and blood on the surface somehow belong to the originals...

62 Permanent Revolution: the most radical restatement of the prognosis of Socialist revolution since the Communist Manifesto...

Quotations from Trotsky

63 Marx 'erred'. Yet his error has a factual and not a methodological character.

71 Our entire planet, its land and water areas, the earth's surface and its subsoil provide today the arena for a *worldwide* economy, the dependence of whose various parts upon each other has become indissoluble.

76 We owe a great deal to the German Social-Democracy. We have all gone through its school; we have learned from its successes as well as its mistakes. For us it was not one of the parties of the International, but the 'party' - *tout court*.

- 153 In the successive supremacy of Mirabeau, Brissot, Robespierre, Barras and Bonaparte, there is an obedience to objective law incomparably more effective than the special traits of the historic protagonists themselves.
- 154 The proletarian character of the October revolution was determined by the world situation and by a special correlation of internal forces. But the classes themselves were formed in the barbarous circumstances of Tsarism and backward capitalism, and were anything but made to order for the demands of a socialist revolution. The exact opposite is true. It is for the very reason that a proletariat still backward in many respects achieved in the space of a few months the unprecedented leap from a semi-feudal monarchy to a socialist dictatorship, that the reaction in its ranks was inevitable.
- 160 [On Stalinism:] The social meaning of the Soviet Thermidor now begins to take form before us. The poverty and cultural backwardness of the masses has again become incarnate in the malignant figure of the ruler with a great club in his hand. The deposed and abused bureaucracy, from being a servant of society, has again become its lord.
- 161 To define the Soviet regime as transitional, or intermediate, means to abandon such finished social categories as *capitalism* (and therewith 'state capitalism') and also *socialism*.... The Soviet Union is a contradictory society half-way between capitalism and socialism...
- 162 Doctrinaires will doubtless not be satisfied with this hypothetical definition. They would like categorical formulae... Sociological problems would certainly be simpler if social phenomena had always a finished character. There is nothing more dangerous, however, than to throw out of reality, for the sake of logical completeness, elements which today violate your scheme and tomorrow may wholly overturn it. In our analysis, we have above all avoided doing violence to dynamic social formations which have no precedent and have no analogies. The scientific task, as well as the political, is not to give a finished definition to an unfinished process, but to follow all its stages, separate its progressive from its reactionary tendencies, expose their mutual relations, foresee possible variants of development, and find in this foresight a basis for action.
- 170 It is absolute balderdash to identify social democracy with fascism.
- 174 ...the office of kingship is an interrelation between people. The king is king only because the interests and prejudices of millions of people are refracted through his person.
-The leader is always a relation between people, the individualistic supply to meet the collective demand.
- 180 [On Nazism:] All the refuse of international political thought has gone to fill up the spiritual treasury of the neo-Germanic Messianism.
- 356 ...everything exists in time; and existence itself is an uninterrupted process of transformation; time is consequently a fundamental element of existence....