



BEYOND THE BORDER :

The Jewish Odyssey of Leon Trotsky

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To Dr. Ellis Rivkin for the gift of  
understanding. May he go from strength  
to strength.

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## DIGEST

It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the relationship between Leon Trotsky and Judaism. In doing so I have made no attempt to chronicle his life in detailed biographical fashion. Instead, I have tried to focus in on the aspects of Trotsky's life which relate in some way to his unique Jewish identity.

The thrust of the thesis is to try and show that Trotsky had little choice other than to choose the way of life for which he opted and that given that choice he represented a unique development within Judaism rather than a rejection of it. To this end it was necessary to point out the particular nature of Trotsky's early background and the failure of the Judaisms available to him at the time of his development to offer anything but restrictive parochial outlooks on life and belief. Thus his international socialism is in reality one aspect of an international Jewish identity that was unrecognized by the vast majority of the world's Jews.

The problem in isolating Trotsky's views on Judaism was that he rarely dwelt on it as a separate and distinct subject. More often than not his ideas are contained within larger contexts such as in responding to the requests of the BUND in 1903, or of Stalin in the 1920's and 30's. This latter confrontation repeatedly forced Trotsky to confront his Jewishness for it was

the use of anit-Semitism by his enemies which brought home the need for Trotsky to take up a consideration of the Jewish problem. Despite adversity, persecution and repeated failure, Trotsky never lost hope in his international vision and he died with this thought still paramount to his entire system.

The Judaism of Trotsky was an international Judaism, a Jewish identity that was based on a view of man that saw in national loyalties only roadblocks to progress. Jews and Judaism are to prosper in an era of an organic international community based on a process of a permanently evolving civilization. It is a view that is still unfulfilled, but in the words of Trotsky, "while there is life, there is hope".

The life and times of Leon Trotsky reflect in many ways the tragic comedy that is human existence, for here was a man born with keenness of mind, tongue and vision, mirrored against times of catastrophic excitement and penetrating frustration. His victories, as his defeats, were monumental in size, affecting his civilization as well as self. He was, in almost every sense of the word, a giant player in an epic drama of hopes, ambitions, despair and defeat, played on a stage as huge as the world itself. This is fitting, for Trotsky transcended barriers of nation and time. He viewed humanity on a world scale and lived with an ever present global dream. It is to the world's misfortune that he died with his dream still unfulfilled.

Much has been written on the political aspect of Trotsky's life. In the context of those discussions, his relationship to Judaism and to Jews has been treated only in passing. The accepted belief that Trotsky was a Jew by birth only, rejecting all vestiges of his faith, was held to be sufficient to deal with his Jewishness. While it is true that Trotsky's Judaism was, for the most part, subsumed under the banners of developing socialism, it is not valid to assume that Trotsky and Judaism parted company never again to meet or effect each other. Indeed, this is one of the interesting and ironic elements in Trotsky's life, the fact that despite repeated protestations denying an overt Jewish identity, his being Jewish influenced him quite often during his life, and played

on him to an ever increasing degree as his life drew closer to its tragic end.

The foolish attempt on the part of many to read Trotsky out of Judaism must then be reconsidered. Dare we make the mistake of accepting Trotsky's so-called non-Jewishness just because it was not a Judaism that harmonized with accepted definitions? It would be a mistake to do so, for it would behoove us to consider him a pioneer rather than heretic, a man who dared to stand on the frontier rather than in the swamps.

The shaping of that identity began with the foundations of the society into which Trotsky was born. The years preceding his birth produced in Russia the dynamic societal stresses that gave rise to varieties of identity structures, each vying with the other as well as with the established order for influence. For the Jew, in particular, the years of Alexander II, Alexander III and Nicholas II, were years of hope and frustration, of quiet victories and tumultuous persecutions. Most of all, they were years of rapid change where the arena of ideas was never without combatants. The years that immediately followed the Crimean War were, for Russia, years of spring. Under the liberating influence of Czar Alexander II, major steps were taken on the road to social reform, steps designed to hasten Russia's surge into enlightened culture. Alexander freed the serfs yielding an

expanded economic base and allowed for a greater tolerance toward Russia's minorities. "Great as was the cause for rejoicing among the Russian people...even greater was that of the Russian Jews. They saw in the new rule a promise of redemption, not alone from the oppression which they shared in common with the Russian masses, but also from the additional disabilities and terrors they suffered as Jews."<sup>1</sup> Among the new reforms granted to the Jews we can cite the opening, without discrimination, of the high schools and universities, and the opening up of areas outside of the Pale to Jewish scholars, professional men, artisans and merchants.<sup>2</sup>

The effect of such liberalism on the Jewish population was immediate. Russian Jewry progressed as never before as the desire to be "Russified" became a major force especially within the larger Jewish communities like Odessa, St. Petersburg and Moscow. Heretofore cooped up, choking each other in the Pale as in a Black Hole, they were now wild with an excessive desire for Russification."<sup>3</sup> The attempts at liberalization on the part of the Czar did rejuvenate great masses of Russian Jewry. Yet one must keep in mind that the granting of these freedoms were neither all-encompassing nor free of ulterior motives. Alexander was responding to a definite need within his country, and he granted freedom because he knew that not to do so would endanger his power, given the flux in Russian and European society. It is safe

to say that the liberal treatment of the Jews was more a function of political and economic necessity than morality. "In 1858, the Minister of Finance, Brock, suggested to the Jewish Committee that a number of discriminatory laws, which limited Jewish commercial activities in certain branches of Russian industry, be abolished. He urged the lifting of such restrictions because he believed that they had an adverse effect upon manufacture and commerce, and retarded the progress of social development of the country. <sup>4</sup>

The year 1863 marked an important turning point in Russia's liberal thrust. The Polish uprising was viewed as a barometer of runaway liberalism and therefore reaction to that liberalism began to cut short the modest gains of the Czar's regime. We can note that the liberal dreams of Russia began to fade with increasing rapidity in the years following 1863. Alexander, like many a politician in times of flux, found himself between two diverse extremes. On the one hand were the radicals who slowly but surely realized that they were never going to see the liberty and freedom which the edicts of the Czar had promised. They thus began to entertain thoughts of taking that freedom for themselves. On the other hand were the extreme reactionaries consisting mostly of nobles who had become impoverished by the emancipation of the serfs, and who grasped at the opportunity to point out to Alexander the evils of his liberal policy. <sup>5</sup>

As the 1870's dawned, the reaction of nativist Russian sentiment grew. Outbreaks of anti-Semitism (pogroms and the revival of ritual murder charges) began to rise. Yet, the Jews still maintained a loyalty to the Czar and to his rapidly vanishing dream. The dream continued to vanish as reaction to Western liberal ideas grew. Slowly the banner of Slavophilism became transformed from a glorification of the honest and positive qualities of the Russian peasant and land to a national policy of political, social and economic oppression. The major event in the tightening noose of reactionary nationalism was the tragic assassination in 1881 of Alexander II. With the rise of Alexander III to power, the fate of Russia's Jewry became cemented in defeat.

By the time Alexander III assumed the throne in 1881, Slavophilism was transformed altogether from a uniquely Russian form of nationalism into a deliberate rationale for reaction. Personally, the Czar hardly needed to be persuaded that Russia's long-range interests and his own were best served by a policy of uncompromising autocracy, and of equally uncompromising nationalism...he was a man endowed with a grimly insular view of the world. 'We can have no other policy', he announced in April 1881, 'except one that is purely Russian and National'.<sup>6</sup>

The architect of Alexander III's Slavophilism was his former teacher, and the Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobyedonostsev.<sup>7</sup> In his desire to promote his reactionary nationalism, Pobyedonostsev took special aim against the Jews about whom he pledged to force one-third to emigrate; one-third to embrace

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Christianity, and one-third to die of starvation.<sup>8</sup> Such a policy of oppression seemed assured as Alexander's regime progressed. Disabilities were heaped upon the Jews. In 1881, Minister of the Interior, Ignatiev, went to work with the formation of the Central Committee for the Revision of the Jewish Question. In 1882, the infamous May Laws were adopted limiting Jewish migration from the cities and placing restrictions on education and Jewish life in general.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the vices of politically sponsored anti-Semitism tightened around the necks of Russia's Jews forcing undue hardship, and helping to fuel the fires of various movements which saw their salvation either in the absolute destruction of the Czarist regime or autonomous regions outside of the regime's control. Any hopes for reversal of the reactionary tide with the death of Alexander III was quickly put to rest. In 1894, Nicholas II came to power and made no attempt to alleviate the restrictive trend. If anything, the trend was heightened as outrages against defenceless Jews increased. "The closing years of the 19th century wiped out the promise of its opening years. Blood accusations followed by riots became of frequent occurrence."<sup>10</sup>

Economically, life for the Russian Jew was no less bleak. Flux is perhaps the word that best describes the economic conditions of life during the reign of the Alexanders. The attempt to create a larger economic base by the abolition of

serfdom was more often than not sabotaged by poor management and aristocratic resistance. The agrarian problem was compounded by the rise in industrialization and population. Various reforms allowed Jewish businessmen to advance, however, as soon as their successes allowed them to be successful competitors with Russians, "they were met with shouts of protest demanding that this Jewish 'exploitation' be effectively curbed."<sup>11</sup> As was noted earlier, these advances on the part of certain Jews did not stem so much from Alexander's reforms as from the general economic conditions of expansion that were evident during the early reform period. "A new Jewish plutocracy came into being, and its growth excited jealousy and fear among the Russian mercantile class. The government, filled with enthusiasm for the cultivation of large industries, was not yet prepared to discriminate against the Jews whenever big capital was concerned. But it lent an attentive ear to the 'original' Russian merchants whenever they complained about Jewish competition in petty trade, on which lower Jewish classes depended for their livelihood."<sup>12</sup>

Economically, as well as politically, the Jews found themselves caught in the middle of a society in transition. Political liberalism on the one hand (abolition of serfdom in 1861 and the granting of minority rights) was not met with economic liberalism on the other (failure to abolish the Pale and to integrate the Jews into the full industrial

economy). Indeed those reforms that were granted can be seen to have worsened the overall economic position of Russian Jewry.

Thus a considerable number of Jews who had hitherto eked out a living serving the land owners and the peasants were now left without means or subsistence...It should be noted that though these social and industrial reforms had an unsettling effect upon the already rickety economic structure of Russian Jewry, the changes could have been beneficial had the Pale been removed and opportunity given to Jews to adapt themselves to the new conditions...A comparative study of the potential opportunities for livelihood outside the Pale, in contrast to the intolerable competition within the ghetto, leads one to the inescapable conclusion that the lifting of all residence restrictions was the reform most imperatively and immediately needed for the improvement of the sorry economic state of Russian Jewry.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, despite the beginnings of expansion, the Jews were not permitted to participate fully. There was an absence of the one ingredient needed to maximize the potentials for development. That ingredient was the freedom to fully take part in the development of the expanding economy. As long as restrictions, like the Pale, existed, the Jews were prohibited from becoming full participating members in the society. As long as those restrictions remained, the possibilities for renewed oppression continued in the event that the dreams of development were not realized. The increase of restrictions in 1881 and 1882 resulted in greater economic hardship among Jews, especially within the Pale. "The Jews of Russia were driven steadily toward pauperism. By the end of the 19th century, 40% of Russian Jewry were completely

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dependent on charity; while in the province of Minsk, fully one-half the Jewish population lived on the dole provided by their more fortunate brethren."<sup>14</sup> For the Jew growing up in this period of political and economic flux, there were presented a multiple of options around which to develop varying identity structures. Multiple options, other than the ever-present traditional ethnic-religious, continued to present themselves to Jews throughout the Alexandrian period. The first of the major structures that have a bearing on our subject is the movement that gained great strength in those first years of Alexander II.

It was in these years of liberalism that the dream of Russification became, to many, the foundation for their existence. They saw in the first liberal steps on the part of the Czar the beginning of an era when the Jew would be able to fully participate in the general Russian society. With every small victory, hope for a new era of acceptance grew, and that hope recognized no limits and discounted the negative factors. To the leaders of the assimilationist movement, Russification was the only solution to the Jewish problem. "The more ruthlessly life was stifled in the Pale, and the higher mounted the wall of legal restrictions, the more powerful grew the desire to pull the ghetto down."<sup>15</sup>

The attempt to Russify was marked by intense desires to foster on to the community all things Russian. The language and

culture of the Fatherland was to become ingrained within the Jewish community and culture. As the Haskalah publication Razvet (Dawn) declared: "Our Fatherland is Russia. And just as her air is ours, so, too, must her language be ours."<sup>16</sup>

The Haskalah movement made significant headway among the upper classes of Russian Jewry. There, the first breezes of enlightenment carried enthusiastic Jews out into the secular culture in a rapid and determined desire to enjoy the fruits of the long-forbidden Russian culture. Such childlike exuberance is noted by one historian in the following analyses of the Russian Jewish Haskalah:

In their pathetic eagerness to bridge the gulf which separated them from their Christian neighbors, Jews interpreted a friendly gesture on the part of non-Jews as evidence of a complete change of heart. Every minor concession granted by the government was hailed as an assurance of coming civic emancipation. The mere phraseology of a government order pertaining to them, notes a Jewish journalist, in which the invariable 'It is forbidden' of the pre-Alexandrian period was replaced by 'It is permitted', was a source of great encouragement to the Jewish people, regardless of the insignificance of the new concession.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, even though these victories were small, the Haskalah seized upon them as indicative of a greater break-through in the future. To these Jews, there could be no return to the non-Russian past because the government would not allow it. "It was this encouragement from the government, combined with the exhortations of the Jewish press, that produced a new generation of Jews who regarded themselves no longer merely as

subjects of the Russian government, but as part and parcel of Russian culture and the Russian people."<sup>18</sup>

We can therefore identify the first major option for the Jews of Alexandrian Russia as Russification. As a movement, it drew the liberal element of Russian Jewry into a natural partnership with like-minded Christian Russians. The effect of Alexander's liberal thrust, slight as it actually may have been, let loose a bridled desire to enter into the mainstream of general Russian culture regardless of consequences. The irony of this aspect of history is the fact that despite the overt desire for Russification, and despite some gains, the dream of total acceptance was never realized. As the era progressed, and as the political and economic freedoms faded from reality, old prejudices and systems were reinstated which curbed the reach for equality. As one author has commented:

It was natural that the Jews that had become completely Russified should enlist in the ranks of the extreme liberals. They found themselves in every way as progressive and patriotic as the Christian Russians. The language of Russia became their language; its manners and aspirations became their manners and aspirations. They contributed more than any other nationality to Russifying Odessa, which, owing to its great foreign population, was known as the un-Russian city in Russia. Proportionally to their numbers, they promoted the trade and industry, the science and literature of their country more than Russians themselves. Yet, the coveted equality was denied them, and the emancipation granted the muzhiks was withheld from them because of a religion they hardly professed.

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The second major option that developed within Russian Jewry at this time, developed in direct reaction to the Haskalah and the society that spawned such thoughts of assimilation. Jewish Nationalism was regarded by the Russifiers as the barrier to their longed-for fusion of Jew and Russian. It was exactly this fusion which provoked the most fear in the hearts of the Nationalists. They saw no golden dream in the fusion of cultures; rather they saw a growing rejection of a Jewish identity, and an inexorable drift toward total assimilation.

There were a variety of causes that one could point to that aided in the development of Jewish Nationalism within Russia. There was the growing disappointment among Jews at the failure on the part of the government to grant full equality; there was the reaction to the growth, in Europe as well as in Russia, of anti-Semitism growing out of various political and economic collapses (a series of bad harvests in Russia, the Polish uprising, etc.); and there was the reaction within the Jewish community to the gradual surge of nationalism that was sweeping Europe in the latter half of the 19th Century.<sup>20</sup>

Against this background, and under the leadership of men like Ben Yehuda and Peretz Smolenskin, Jewish Nationalism began to emerge as a viable option for great segments of Russian Jewry.

It dawned upon many that the only salvation for the Jews lay in becoming a nation once more. A yearning for a new Fatherland, and a new country seized young and old. The times were suspicious. Cosmopolitanism was everywhere, giving place to nationalism. The little Balkan States had broken the yoke of Ottoman rule...In Poland, Hungary and Ireland, home rule was advocated with a fervor that threatened a revolution. Italy and Germany became united under their own king or emperor. And the Russian Jews, tired of the constant conflicts with the surrounding peoples, experienced the desire which had prompted their ancestors to be like all the other nations.<sup>21</sup>

Growing out of the same soil as the Haskalah and Nationalism, a third option emerged. Jewish Socialism and revolutionary activism that developed out of the economic, political and cultural ferment of those days, became viable potential identities for Jews. The revolutionary movements in Russia arose as a result of frustration and failure. Frustration at the refusal on the part of Alexander II to grant a constitutional regime, and the failure to solve the peasant problem despite the abolition of serfdom. Add to this the previously-mentioned frustrations over Poland and the continuing flux within the economic and political spheres, and one can see the power of those forces making for growing discontent.

The emphasis within the early revolutionary movements was on the plight of the peasants. This cause drew the attention of many of the newly-emerging Jewish student class as they began to come in contact with elements of the Russian Intelligentsia. The Jewish revolutionary of the period openly spurned his

Jewishness. The emancipation of the Jew was tied to the emancipation of the Russian masses. Upon his own people, the young revolutionary looked with contempt "stigmatizing them as bourgeois and orthodox", casting aside Jewish Nationalism as having no raison d'etre, and religion as being a "retrogression."<sup>22</sup>

Characteristic of the early revolutionary movement were the views of one such as Aaron Lieberman who was active in the formation of Socialist organizations. He pointed to men like Marx and LaSalle as products of the Jewish spirit. He advocated the formation of Jewish Socialist groups, and urged their alliance with the peasants. Judaism, as he knew it, was to advocate assimilation; yet not through Russification, but through the solving of the overriding economic concerns of the country. It was the failure to solve this problem that accounted, according to Lieberman and his ilk, for the resurgence of anti-Semitism. He urged Jews to take up the battle and not be detracted from the fight by nonsense such as nationalistic propaganda. To this end he voiced what was to become a recurring theme and point of view:

At a time like this when the cry on every tongue is bread and work, when the problem of the knife and fork is of greater importance than all other problems put together, at such a time our literature finds nothing more important to discuss than the question of religion and nationality, and other such worthless things which every sensible person has ceased to be interested in.<sup>23</sup>

Jewish involvement in revolutionary groups did little to effect a betterment of conditions for the Jews, much less the peasants. Jewish participants were easy targets for anti-revolutionary propaganda. A report to the governor of Minsk in 1878 pointed to such activity and called for renewed restrictions on educational opportunities. "Thus did the Jewish revolutionist, whose ultimate aim, however indirectly, was the solution of the Jewish problem, complicate the Jewish situation, and add another vexing problem to those already in existence. 24

The revolutionary movement in Russia was not long in growing and changing emphasis. With the founding, by George Plekhanov of the Group for the Emancipation of Labor in 1883, Marxian philosophy gained a tenacious foothold on Russian revolutionary ideology. This new thrust broke dramatically with the old movements which had looked to the peasant class to be the spearhead of the new order. According to these Narodniki, Russia was to pass from its semi-feudal economy directly into a socialist society without the intermediate stage of industrial capitalism. The new Marxian movements, however, looked to the rising industrial proletariat as the class destined to lead the great revolutionary struggle. "The founders of the Emancipation of Labor disavowed both the program and methods of the Narodniki. Former Narodniki themselves, they now subjected that revolutionary philosophy to a critical analysis and found it completely out of date, not only with scientific

socialism, but also with the industrial and economic development of Russia."<sup>25</sup>

As might be expected, the rise of such Marxist groups within the general socialist movement, soon sparked a rise of similar groups within the Jewish community. Marxian socialism found a receptive ear within that community, for, by the 1890's, the Jews of the Pale had become more urbanized, impoverished and proletarianized than any other ethnic group within Russia. "Marxian was now the panacea for the nightmare of Czarist oppression...and far more applicable than agrarian populism to the needs of the harassed Jewish working class."<sup>26</sup>

Within these Marxist circles, there was little that was distinguished between what was Jewish and what was not. In the early years of these groups, Jewish problems received no special attention. The leaders of such circles, often under police supervision, often came from assimilated families and sought to spread the revolutionary word through regular meetings of such circles. Since their aim was socialist activism, they had not the slightest interest in training workers for special activity among Jews.<sup>27</sup> As far as these men were concerned, the Jewish problem would cease to exist once the coming class revolution destroyed the apparatus of Czarist oppression. Such a philosophy is expressed vigorously by a typical Jewish revolutionary of the day:

We Jews repudiate all our national holidays and fantasies which are useless for human society. We link ourselves up with armies of Socialism and adopt their holidays. Our holidays, which we have inherited from our ancestors, will vanish together with the old system...Although the majority of us are convinced that Socialism must inevitably come, it will not come by supernatural miracles. The Torah of Socialism will not descend from the heaven of Sinai in thunder and lightning, and the Messiah will not come riding on a white horse.<sup>28</sup>

With such sentiments, we can see the crystalization of this option of socialism and revolutionary activity. From this option would grow such diverse variations as the BUND, the Poale-Zion and Social Zionism.<sup>29</sup> From this option would also come the Jewish leaders of the 1917 Revolution, and primary among such leaders would be the Jew, Trotsky. The choices open to the young Trotsky are thus clear. There was the parochial security of traditional religion; the path of assimilation into an increasingly hostile Russian culture; the headlong flight into Jewish Nationalism, or the rush into the radical new socialist-revolutionary movement. However, given the special environment in which Trotsky found himself, especially in his early years, it seems that for him, no other choice than Marxism, was really noble. It is well to keep in mind the various strata of Russian society, and their influence during his adolescence, and to note his reactions to them. Trotsky did not emerge in a vacuum; he was a product of a definite time and environment, both of which fused to produce a remarkable genius. The beginnings of that fusion, Trotsky's youth, will be our next consideration.

NOTES: CHAPTER 1

1. Greenberg, Louis., The Jews in Russia. I. p. 74
2. Raisin, Jacob, The Haskalah Movement In Russia. p. 225
3. Ibid., p. 239-240
4. Greenberg. op. cit. p. 87
5. Raisin., op cit. p. 249-250
6. Sachar, Howard Morley., The Course of Modern Jewish History. p. 241
7. In the first volume of his biographical trilogy on Trotsky, Isaac Deutscher discusses the nature of Pobyednostsev as being one who wished to restore the previous idea of landlord over land. He sponsored Legislation which restricted education and the freedom of literature. Trotsky himself, in his autobiography, notes pobyednostsev as being a classic upholder of autocratic power and unbending reaction.
8. Raisin., op cit., p. 270
9. Sachar., op cit. p. 242-244
10. Raisin., op cit. p. 275
11. Dubnow, S.M., History of the Jews in Russia and Poland. . p. 185.
12. Ibid., p. 186
13. Greenberg. op cit. p. 165-171
14. Sachar, op cit. p. 246
15. Schwartz, Solomon M., The Jews In The Soviet Union. p. 9
16. Greenberg., op cit. P. 81
17. Ibid. p. 84
18. Ibid. p. 118
19. Raisin. op cit. p. 255-256
20. Greenberg. op cit. p. 143

21. Raisin. op cit. p. 281
22. Greenberg. op cit. p. 147-148
23. Ibid. p. 157
24. Ibid. p. 159
25. Greenberg, Louis. The Jews In Russia. II. ed. Mark Wischnitzer. p. 139
26. Sachar. op cit. p. 288
27. Greenberg, Wischnitzer. op cit. p. 143
28. Sachar. op cit. p. 289
29. BUND. A Jewish workers' socialist party founded in 1897 dedicated to defending the rights of Jewish workers and Jewish interests within the general socialist-revolutionary movement.

POALE ZION. Founded in 1900. Saw the salvation of the Jewish worker in the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

SOCIAL ZIONISTS. Reacted against the imposed pauperism of the Jews and favored the acquisition of territory (not necessarily Palestine) where they could live a normal life.

## II

It is popularly held that Trotsky rejected his Judaism for revolutionary socialism, thereby spurning his religious heritage and negating his past. What this fails to consider is the type of environment from which Trotsky emerged, and the types of Judaism open to him during his formative years. From such a consideration, it becomes clear that there was no form of Judaism that could have accommodated itself to the views that Trotsky gradually developed.

During the 1850's, in the reign of Czar Nicholas I, Leon Bronstein, Trotsky's grandfather, left a small Jewish town near Poltava and settled in the Kherson province. When his sons and daughters grew, they remained on the land, yet only one, David, became prosperous enough to detach himself from the main colony and establish an independent farm at Yanovka.

At his home not Yiddish...but a mixture of Russian and Ukranian. Unlike most mushiks, however, the Bronstein's had no memories of serfdom...David Bronstein was a free and ambitious, tough, hard working farmer of the frontiersman type. He was determined to develop his farm into a flourishing estate, and drove himself and his laborers hard. His opportunities still lay ahead; when he moved to Yanovka, he was only about 30.<sup>30</sup>

Trotsky notes in his autobiography that in the provinces of Kherson and Ekaterinoslav, there were some forty Jewish agricultural colonies. The Jewish farmers were, until 1881, on an even par with the non-Jewish farmers so far as legal and property rights were concerned. It was into such a setting that, on October 26, 1879, David Bronstein's son, Leon, was

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born, and it was in such an idyllic setting that the young Bronstein spent his early childhood. On the boundless steppes of Kherson, and all of south Russia was a kingdom of wheat and sheep, living by laws all its own. It was firmly guarded against the invasion of politics by its great open spaces, and the absence of roads."<sup>31</sup>

One can now begin to understand the unique environment from which Trotsky came. His grandparents had taken advantage of favorable circumstances to liberate themselves from the crush of the Pale. His father had carried on this trend by becoming a successful farmer, and he even proved successful in the face of legal restrictions on the part of the government on property rights of Jews in the early 1880's. The elder Bronstein and his wife were totally committed to their agricultural holdings around which their lives totally revolved. Liberated from the intense contact with fellow Jews, it is not surprising to find the intense religiosity of the Pale missing as well. Judaism was not rejected, yet neither was it resolutely embraced. As Trotsky himself recalled:

In my father's house, there was no strict observance of religion. At first, appearances were kept up through sheer inertia: on holy days, my parents journeyed to the Synagogue in the colony. Mother abstained from sewing on Saturdays, at least within the sight of others. But all this ceremonial observance of religion lessened as years went on--as the children grew up and the prosperity of the family increased. Father did not believe in God from his youth, and in later years, spoke openly about it in front of Mother and the children. Mother preferred to avoid the subject, but when the occasion required, would raise her eyes in prayer.<sup>32</sup>

Trotsky's parents did, however, wish that their child be exposed to environments other than the one at Yanovka. Their decision was to send him to nearby Gromokley to live with an aunt and uncle, and to attend school. There he was taught Russian, arithmetic, and the Old Testament in Hebrew.<sup>33</sup> The experience must have been harrowing for the seven-year-old fresh from the open bliss of the steppe. The strange environment and depressing living conditions could not have helped color his thoughts.

The school was almost certainly a dirty and fetid hole where the boy, accustomed to roaming the fields, must have been choked. The ways of the adults also bewildered him. Once he saw the Jews of Gromokley driving a woman of loose morals through the street of the village, pitilessly humiliating her and shouting vehement abuse...He also noted a strange contrast; on one side of the village stood the wretched hovels of Jewish colonists - on the other shone the neat and tidy cottages of German settlers. He was naturally attracted to the gentile quarters.<sup>34</sup>

Thus the young Trotsky's first contact with the general Jewish world was negative. It represented such an unwelcome change from what he had been used to that the experiment was short-lived and, in retrospect, doomed from the very beginning.

The next great adventure for Trotsky began two years after the Gromokley experience. In 1888, Mrs. Bronstein's nephew, Filippovich Schpentzer, visited Yanovka. The effect on the young Bronstein was immediate. He enraptured me, but at the same time, disquieted me. One sensed in him the element of a more exciting discipline in life--the element of city civilization.<sup>35</sup> The cool, confident cosmopolitan atmosphere of

Schpentzer slowly weaved its magic onto the waiting mind of Trotsky. Trotsky credits Schpentzer with prying loose the first feelings of concern for the misfortunes of others. He notes that on one occasion the two observed an overseer striking a shepherd for keeping horses out late. "How shameful" shrieked the uncle. "And I felt that it was shameful. I do not know if I would have felt the same way if he had not made his remark--I am inclined to think I would. But in any event, he helped me to feel that way, and this alone was enough to instill in me a lifelong sense of gratitude."<sup>36</sup>

The Bronsteins saw in Schpentzer a perfect vehicle for the growth of their child. Thus, following his uncle's marriage, Trotsky was sent to live with the newlyweds in cosmopolitan Odessa. With this move, Trotsky left forever the isolation of the land and discovered, in slow but steady doses, the magic of the city. "Every day there was revealed to me some aspect of a cultural environment greater than that in which I had passed the first nine years of my life. Even the shop at home began to dim, and to lose its magic as compared with the spell of classical literature and the charm of the theatre. I was becoming a little urbanite."<sup>37</sup>

The home into which Trotsky moved is pictured by him, as well as his biographers, as typical of the cosmopolitan, assimilated Jewish family of the time. It was a home where the Pale was far removed and long forgotten, where Russian culture and

western ideas mixed freely. Still, there was a request that Trotsky maintain some contact with his religious heritage. The result of the attempt was catastrophic as well as quietly prophetic.

In the Schpentzer family, religion was not observed at all, not counting the old aunt who did not matter. My father, however, wanted me to know the Bible in the original, this being one of the marks of his parental vanity, and therefore I took private lessons in the Bible from a very learned old man in Odessa. My studies lasted only a few months, and did little to confirm me in the ancestral faith. A suggestion of a double meaning in the words of my teacher concerning some text in the Bible which we were studying, prompted me to ask a question which I worded very cautiously and diplomatically: 'If we accept, as some do, that God does not exist, how did the world come to be?' 'Hm', muttered the teacher, 'but you can turn this question against him as well.' In this ingenious way did the old man express himself. I realized that the instructor in religion did not believe in God, and this set my mind completely at rest.<sup>38</sup>

Once again, Judaism had failed to spark his mind or speak to his emerging life style. Again it remained out of touch with the reality of life in Odessa, and as such, out of touch with a precocious boy such as Trotsky.

Despite the failure of Jewish education to reach him, Trotsky was still affected by his being Jewish. Due to an existing ten percent quota for Jewish students, he was prohibited from immediately entering the St. Paul realshule, and was sent to a preparatory school attached to St. Paul's from which he would be subsequently transferred. Trotsky had little academic trouble in school. He learned to further his appreciation of

art, theatre, literature and discussion. He did not shirk involvement in school issues despite his academic superiority as evidenced by his disciplinary record which included expulsion. From his autobiography, it seems clear that his total experience in the Odessa environment was the major factor in this period of his life, far overshadowing his routine at school.

The color of my memory of the school, taken as a whole, has remained if not quite black, at least decidedly grey...It certainly did teach me a few things: elementary knowledge, the habit of methodical work, and outward discipline. All these came in advantageously in my later life. The same school, however, sowed in me, contrary to its direct purpose, the seeds of enmity for the existing order. These seeds, at any rate, did not fall on barren ground.<sup>39</sup>

It was, then, the flux, the excitement of the society and the times that played most on the emerging mind of Trotsky. The affect of a cosmopolitan environment on his fertile mind in that time of transition, crumbled old truths, and destroyed traditions, Trotsky's soul stood open, caressed by the excitement of life itself. With this in mind, we can appreciate the energy of the following:

I had an intense hatred of the existing order, of injustice, of tyranny. Whence did it come? It came from the conditions existing during the reign of Alexander III; the highhandedness of the police; the exploitation practiced by landlords; the grafting by officials; the nationalistic restrictions; the cases of injustice at school and in the street; the close contact with children, servants and laborers in the country; the conversations in the workshop; the human spirit in the Schpentzer family; the reading of Nekrassov's poems, and of all kinds of other books, and, in general, the entire social atmosphere of the time.<sup>40</sup>

As he left St. Paul's, Trotsky stood ready to enter the first phase of his activist life. He found it in 1896 as he left Odessa to begin the next phase of his schooling in the city of Nikolayev. Trotsky entered into his activism as an anti-Marxist. He favored, instead, the traditional Narodnik outlook that viewed the peasant masses of Russia as the keystone to progress. He denied the determinism of Marx calling it "dry as dust--an offence to the dignity of man, whom it portrayed as the prisoner of economic and social circumstances, the plaything of anonymous productive sources."<sup>41</sup>

In Nikolayev, Trotsky became friendly with a group of leftists who sparked his interest and curiosity, and provided him with an outlet for his developing social concern. Gradually, as a spider weaves his web, the group at Shvigovsky's garden began to define Trotsky's life. When his father found out what his son was doing, he hurried to Nikolayev. He had in mind for his son a degree in civil engineering, and then a return to the farm. Trotsky, however, was far removed from such thinking. He was much too involved at Shvigovsky's organizing people to discuss the current social problems of Russia. When Trotsky's father arrived in Nikolayev, he presented his son with the following ultimatum. "You will either quit this business and get to work, or you will quit spending my money." Needless to say, Trotsky had no intention of returning to a path that would lead to Yanovka. "His revolt

against the social system now became united. To assert himself as a grown man was to assert the revolution. He made no remonstrance against the terms of the ultimatum. He gave up the lodging that had been rented for him, advertised himself as a private tutor, and moved over to Shvigovsky's garden.<sup>42</sup> From that moment he increased his reading of revolutionary facts and became an activist, leading a successful protest against restrictive policies of the Nikolayev library. He organized a free school, read, studied, and gradually turned to social activism.<sup>43</sup>

It is most interesting to note the parallel in this stage of Trotsky's life with the social activist student of the United States of today. They both emerge against a background of transition, from an environment of abundance and not scarcity. They both bring good schooling, a rejection of superstitious pasts that do not speak to a changing present. Both are imbued with a high degree of social concern stemming from injustices they see around them. Both make breaks with their home through groups that provide intellectual stimulation and a meaningful identity. One cannot help but wonder if there is something more than mere coincidence operating here.

Trotsky did return briefly to Odessa in an attempt to study mathematics. This was short-lived, however, and he found himself using the trips to the city to obtain revolutionary documents which he promptly brought back to Nikolayev.<sup>44</sup> Finally, in 1897, Trotsky took the first giant step towards becoming a

professional revolutionary. He formed the Southern Russian Workers Union as a result of government reprisals over protests stemming from a young political prisoner who committed suicide in her St. Petersburg cell. The Union organized hundreds of Nikolayev workers into cells which met to discuss current events and read clandestine papers. It was during this period that Trotsky first began to realize his power to move people through the written words of his pamphlets.<sup>45</sup>

The work of the group gradually began to interest the police. Under mounting police pressure, the group split. Early in 1898, Trotsky returned to the area and to an estate where his friend Shvigoovsky had taken a new job. It was there that the police finally cornered him and had him arrested. He was jailed in Kherson and later moved to Odessa, Moscow, and eventually to Siberia. This became one of the most important periods of his life for he read, discussed and studied. He even had time to marry. By the time he left his exile in Siberia, he had groomed himself for his life's work, and emerged as a confirmed Marxist. "These efforts occupied his mind and kept his spirit buoyant as his second year in prison was drawing to a close. Mentally, the adolescent was passing into manhood, and the transition was hastened by the fact that nothing was left to the captive in his cell but thought and reflection."<sup>46</sup>

Much of that thought and reflection took the form of theological investigations conducted with his jailor in the Odessa prison. In all such inquiries, he found the Orthodoxies available to him to be representative of the life and times he wished to abandon. To this end, Deutscher notes: "Both the Jewish and Greek orthodoxies were so obscurantist and stubborn in their refusal to take notice of any new idea...that they violently repelled the educated or even half-educated man. He could not compromise with a religion which itself refused to compromise with any modern trend in the human mind."<sup>47</sup>

Trotsky and his wife were eventually transferred to a remote outpost in Siberia. His four-year exile proved to be the foundation for his ideological structure, for he emerged in 1902 a confirmed Marxist, and a committed revolutionary. He yearned for systems that encompassed the broad scope of humanity and humanity's problems. He saw in men like Darwin and Marx the harbingers of new times, new cultures, new civilizations. He viewed the society of his time as in need of drastic transformation, and he sought systems that would go beyond parochial concerns and embrace an international concern for humanity. For these aims, no form of Judaism was at hand. His experiences with Judaism of his day only confirmed in him negative responses for it had failed to respond in a creative and way to a society in flux. He left Russia in 1902 an internationalist, firm in his notion that the Jewish

people were part of a larger whole. Judaism, even the Jewish Socialists of the BUND, had yet to move that far.

NOTES...CHAPTER II

30. Deutscher, Isaac. The Prophet Armed. p. 6-7
31. Trotsky, Leon. My Life. p. 5
32. Ibid., p. 84
33. Ibid., p. 37
34. Deutscher. op cit. p. 11
35. Trotsky. op cit. p. 42
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 43
38. Ibid., p. 85-86
39. Ibid., p. 77
40. Ibid., p. 90
41. Deutscher. op cit. p. 26-27
42. Eastman, Max. Leon Trotsky 'The Portrait Of A Youth'. p. 37-38.
43. Trotsky. op cit. p. 100-101
44. Deutscher. op cit. p. 30
45. Ibid., p. 30-31
46. Ibid., p. 39
47. Ibid., p. 38

### III

From 1902, when he appeared in London at Lenin's door, until his death by assassination in 1940, Trotsky remained a dedicated fighter for international socialism. His career during those 38 years was a compound of victories followed by defeats, and defeats followed by victories in rapid succession. Throughout it all he remained constant to the ideal of international socialism as the answer for the world's problems. The Jewish problem, as part of the total international problem, would inevitably be solved by the victory of socialism.

Upon his arrival in London, Trotsky was introduced by Lenin to his fellow workers Martov and Axelrod. Trotsky cooperated with these men in the editing of the Social Democratic Journal Iskra. He also embarked on lecture tours of Europe promoting Social Democratic ideals and making interesting and important contacts with other Social democrats. The year 1903 saw him as a vital cog in the Social Democratic wheel so that he was sent to the 2nd congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party as a trusted and intense member of the Party elite. It was at this congress that the Social Democratic party split into the rival Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. For our purposes, however, the Congress is significant for the conflict that broke out between the Iskra establishment and the renegade Bundist faction. It was during this debate that Trotsky's position on Judaism was enunciated for the first time in public.

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The BUND came to the congress demanding the right to set up an autonomous organization within the Party directly aimed at the Jewish participants. It asked for the right to elect its own central committee, frame policy in matters directly related to Jews, and sought to establish cultural autonomy (the right of Jews to manage their own affairs through a network of schools and institutions with a Yiddish base). The debate on this subject has been reported as having been one of the stormiest ones in the early history of the Party. Championing the cause of unity under the banner of internationalism, Trotsky stressed the view that there was no future for the Jews as a separate community. The scene is dramatically recreated by Deutscher:

This was one of the stormiest scenes at the Congress, and one of the very rare occasions on which Trotsky referred to himself as a Jew, and spoke on a specifically Jewish issue. That he was doing so only to refute Jewish demands must have seemed almost cad-dish to the highly-strung delegates of the BUND. He pleaded, however, that more than a Jewish issue was at stake. Claiming for itself autonomy within the Party, with the right to elect its own Central Committee, the Bund was, in fact, setting a precedent for others...It would then have to abandon the idea of an integrated organization, and to transform itself into a loose federation of parties and groups... The other demand that the Bund be recognized as the party's sole agency among Jewish workers amounted to a claim that only Jews were entitled to carry the Socialist message to Jewish workers, and to organize them. This, Trotsky pointed out, was an expression of distrust in the non-Jewish members of the party, a challenge to their internationalist conviction and sentiment.<sup>48</sup>

The internationalist conviction was, then, the underpinning of Trotsky's view of Judaism, and the future of the Jewish

people. Tied to the victories of international Socialism, the Jewish people could not help but advance from their low state. No kind of nationalism could solve the problems of the Jews. "He saw the solution of the Jewish problem not in the formation of a Jewish state, still less in the formation of Jewish states within the non-Jewish ones, but in a consistently internationalist reshaping of society."<sup>49</sup> Some 69 years later, Trotsky's words still ring prophetic, still yearn to be realized.

Trotsky maintained a more or less independent status with respect to the rival Socialist faction working through pen and tongue for some form of reconciliation. In 1905, he returned to Russia to join the Revolution and became a leading figure in the Petersburg Soviet. Arrested, he was again sent to Siberia. Following a familiar path, he escaped, and once again found his way to London. For the next decade he spent his time writing, speaking and thinking in various centers of the world. The outbreak of World War I found him in Switzerland. From there he went to Paris only to be expelled in 1916. His next stop was New York City. With the outbreak of the Revolution in 1917, Trotsky returned to Russia and a hero's welcome. He joined forces with Lenin, and together they set out to build a new Russia. His initial activity brought him into disfavor with the provisional government of Kerensky which arrested him, albeit for a short duration. After his release, Trotsky lost little time in rejoining his

revolutionary friends. Elected to high office within the Bolshevik Party, he helped direct the armed uprising in November of 1917. Following the successful seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, Trotsky became, next to Lenin, the foremost leader of the Bolshevik Party.

The years from 1917 to 1924 were years of great challenge and excitement for Trotsky. These were the years of the height of his power and influence. These were the years during which he reorganized the Red Army and led it to victory in the Civil War. These were also the years when he restructured not only the entire transportation system of Russia, but much of its ideological foundations as well. At the heights of his power and influence, Trotsky was only marginally concerned with his Jewish identity. He suffered no attacks because of it and, with the exception of some peripheral encounters, had little to do with it. Typical of those encounters is the following case which took place immediately following the Bolshevik victory:

Lenin came to Trotsky to offer him the Ministry of the Interior to head off various counter-revolutionary trends. In what obviously was a surprise, Trotsky refused. In his autobiography he gives the following account. "I objected, and brought up among other arguments, the question of nationality. Was it worth while to put into our enemies' hands such an additional weapon as my Jewish origin? Lenin almost lost his

temper. 'We are having a great international revolution. Of what importance are such trifles?' " <sup>50</sup> Lenin, however, evidently saw some logic in Trotsky's protests and named him instead to head the Foreign Service Ministry. The incident is curious in that it reflects a point in time when revolutionary ideals were being tempered to fit prerevolutionary reality. Trotsky and his fellows were of the same cut; urbane, educated and idealistic. Russia, the mass Russia, still had to catch up. As Gentscher points out: "But, so far, the revolution had been an urban affair, and Russia's most advanced city its main scene. Now the Bolsheviks had to feel themselves into new roles, those of rulers of rural Russia, which was still wrapped up in Greek Orthodoxy, distrust of the cities and racial prejudice." <sup>51</sup>

As People's Commissar for Military Affairs, Trotsky was in total charge of the movements of the Red Army. Within the army were numbers of regiments made up of the minorities within the Soviet Union. Trotsky, true to his internationalist ideals, desired that all should share equally in responsibilities at the front. Jewish units were, of course, to be included. To assure such participation, Trotsky did his best to insure equal placement for minority divisions. Various instances concerning Jewish regiments illustrate the point. One such is a telegram from Trotsky to Military Headquarters in Kiev, May 10, 1919:

Since the Jewish S.R. (Socialist Revolutionary Party, 'Poale Zion', and other Jewish workers' organizations announced their readiness to organize sections of the Jewish workers to defend the revolution, I propose to organize such formations under the authority of the (military) Headquarters. Along with this proposal, I suggest that the Jewish battalions enter those regiments where there are also battalions of other nationalities. In this way we can avoid the chauvinism which results from the estrangement of the different nationalities, and which, unfortunately, arises when entirely independent national military units are formed.<sup>52</sup>

Again, Trotsky's desire for equality of responsibility is evident. There were to be no favorites, especially since there had obviously been rumblings of preferential treatment within the ranks. In another letter on the subject of troop movements, Trotsky noted that "strong chauvinist agitation on this subject was being carried on among the Red Army men and finding a certain response there."<sup>53</sup>

The 1917-1924 period marked the height of Trotsky's power. With the death of Lenin, Trotsky found himself locked in a life-and-death struggle with Stalin for control of the Party and the State. Given that struggle, and given the beginning of conservative reaction to the Revolution within Russia, it should not come as a surprise that the issue of Trotsky's Jewishness would come into question. Trotsky himself gives the best outline of the flow of events during this period.

In the years of the revolutionary ascendancy, this question never had the slightest importance...The question of my Jewish origin acquired importance only after I had become a subject for political baiting. Anti-Semitism raised its head with that of anti-Trotskyism. They both derived from the same source--the petty bourgeois reaction against October.<sup>54</sup>

The ideas of the revolution were gradually losing hold over the stratum of the party that held direct power over the country. As reaction set in, that power stratum developed its own independent aims, and tried to subordinate the revolution to them. The division grew slowly, as the memory of 1917 was still powerful. "But under cover of traditional forms, a different psychology was developing. The international prospects were growing dim. The every-day routine was completely absorbing the people. New methods, instead of serving old aims, were creating new ones and, most of all, a new psychology. In the eyes of many, the temporary situation began to seem the ultimate goal. A new type was being evolved."<sup>55</sup>

With the death of Lenin, the future of the Soviet state rested on the outcome of the Trotsky-Stalin battle. It was a battle that pitted the internationalism of the Trotskyites against the restrictive, nationalistic views of Stalin and his plan of Socialism in one country. The nationalism of the new right appealed to the deep-rooted nationalism of the Russian masses. "The distrust of the alien was, after all, only a reflex of that Russian self-centeredness, of which socialism in one country was the ideological abstract,"<sup>56</sup> Such a faction would not let the fact of Trotsky, and later Zinoviev and Kamenev's Jewish origin to go unexploited. Though assimilated and directly opposed to forms such as Zionism "they were still marked by that 'Jewishness' which is the quintessence of the urban

way of life in all its modernity, progressiveness, restlessness and onesidedness...They were, in a sense, the 'rootless cosmopolitans' on whom Stalin was to turn his wrath openly in his old age. Not for them was the ideal of socialism in one country."<sup>57</sup>

The scene was now set for the battle that would occupy Trotsky for the next several years, a battle that, in many ways, was never resolved. It was Trotsky, with Zinoviev and Kamenev, as the Opposition against the socialism in one country faction headed by Stalin. Operating as an ever-present shadow would be the political anti-Semitism of the Stalinist faction nurtured in the fertile soil of the Russian psyche. It is from that soil against the background of societal stress that the pattern of Russian anti-Semitism is formed. As author Paul Lendvai analyzed:

If it is true that the fate of Jewry has always been embedded in the structure of Soviet society, then the rekindling of latent anti-Semitism is a concomitant of the rise of social tensions in a conservative society which, for a variety of reasons (loss of inner dynamism, evasion of major unsolved problems, a political vacuum at the top, the threat of China and the growing strains in Eastern Europe) in periods of insecurity, whips up party discipline and heroic traditions, nationalism and xenophobia, racialism, and the hatred of the alien.<sup>58</sup>

The stage now set, we turn to Trotsky's fall and final exile, all the while noting that his Jewishness continues to cast its ominous shadow on Trotsky's tragic destiny.

NOTES...CHAPTER III

48. Deutscher. op cit., p. 74
49. Ibid., p. 75
50. Trotsky. op cit. p. 340
51. Deutscher. op cit. p. 326
52. Trotsky, Leon: On The Jewish Question. p. 8
53. Meijer, Jan M. ed. The Trotsky Papers: I 1917-1919. p.361
54. Trotsky. My life. p. 360-361
55. Ibid., p. 502-503
56. Deutscher, Isaac. The Prophet Unarmed. p. 258
57. Ibid., p. 259
58. Lendvai, Paul. Anti-Semitism Without Jews. p. 11

IV

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In January of 1928, Trotsky was convicted of counter-revolutionary activities and exiled to Alma-Ata in Turkestan. The years from 1924 had been years of steady decline as Trotsky, leader of the Opposition, was gradually read out of the Bolshevik party. Despite all his attempts to obstruct the gradual Stalinization of Russia, Trotsky suffered defeat after defeat. The various biographies of Trotsky, as well as the numerous histories of the period, all deal with the various political, social and economic machinations of the Trotsky-Stalin battle. What we must focus in on here is the particular role Trotsky's Jewish origin played in this battle, and the particular way Stalin used that Jewish origin to his advantage.

Robert Conquest's work on the purge trials of Russia open the door to understanding the way Stalin worked. His anti-Semitism was a matter of policy rather than belief. According to Conquest, Stalin was an expert in camouflage. He knew how to use anti-Semitism, while creating a facade of non-discrimination. "The anti-Semitism, thus disguised, was in accord with Stalin's general exploitation of prejudices, and of the gullibility and pliability of man in general."<sup>59</sup>

Stalin's utilization of the facade was perfectly suited for the times. As we noted above, key ingredients were present within Russian society allowing for a rebirth of nationalistic

fever. There was political struggle at the top, reaction to the revolution, and economic uncertainty within the country. "Stalin, never fastidious in the choice of means, did not shrink from exploiting anti-Jewish tendencies in his struggle with the Opposition. At first surreptitiously, by dark hints and illusions, Stalinist agitators stirred up anti-Semitic prejudices, brought it nearer to the surface, until, in the period of the Great Purges, it reached its first climax.<sup>60</sup>

The realization that anti-Semitism was being used against him must have shocked Trotsky greatly. As a youth, he had repudiated Jewish demands for cultural autonomy, and had striven for the merging of the Jews within the socialist camp. Judaism and Jewish identity was to be subsumed under the victorious banner of international socialism. Now, however, as he makes his way from worker's cell to worker's cell, he is followed by the haunting shadow of anti-Semitism. In a letter written by Trotsky to fellow Politbureau member Bukharin in 1926, there is the suggestion that they try and investigate, first hand, the reason for Trotsky's inability to speak freely in groups that were previously open to him and to his views.

I think that you and I--two members of the Politbureau--have, after all, a few things in common; enough to calmly and conscientiously verify: whether it is true, whether it is possible that in our party, in Moscow, in a workers' nucleus, propaganda is being conducted which is vile and slanderous on the one hand, and anti-semitic on the other; and that honest workers are afraid to question or to verify or to try to refute any stupidity lest they be driven into the street with their families. Of course you can refer me to the 'proper bodies'. But this would signify only closing the vicious circle.<sup>61</sup>

Trotsky rarely confronted open cases of anti-Semitism. This, after all, did not fit in with the facade that Stalin was trying to create. If Stalin wished to refer to the Jewish origins of the Opposition leaders, he would not openly bring attention to it, but would bring light on it through the use of cleverly worded slogans and statements. For example, he published a statement that he fought Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev not because they were Jews, but because they were Oppositionists. "It was absolutely clear to everyone who thought politically, that his deliberate equivocal declaration was aimed merely at the 'excesses' of anti-Semitism, while at the same time broadcasting throughout the entire Soviet Press the very pregnant reminder, 'Don't forget that the leaders of the Opposition are Jews'. Such a statement gave carte blanche to the anti-Semite."<sup>62</sup>

Stalin remained adept at being publically against the spread of anti-Semitism while evoking its use to fit his purposes. Like the equivocal statement above, Stalin used the arts and media to produce similar thinly-veiled anti-Semitic pieces.

The Bolshevik-Jewish Tribuna found itself compelled to recognize some 'strange' features in plays which, purportedly, had been produced to combat anti-Semitism. One of the plays, "The Crime of Citizen Surkev"...contained a peculiar portrayal of Eviripadov, the leading anti-Semite...Another play...gave a tender-hearted representation of anti-Semitism. The same newspaper went on to comment that anti-Semitism was portrayed as nothing more than a minor misunderstanding."<sup>63</sup>

Against such a background, Trotsky struggled in vain. His tragic destiny seemed assured when a mass Opposition protest, scheduled for the 10th anniversary of the Revolution, went awry. On November 7, 1927, Trotsky was surveying the Moscow situation as the hoped-for protest developed. "At Revolution Square, he stopped and attempted to harangue a column of workers marching towards the Lenin Mausoleum. At once policemen and activists assailed him. Shots were fired. There were shouts: 'Down with Trotsky, the Jew, the Traitor!' The windscreen of his car was smashed. The marching column watched the scene uneasily, but moved on."<sup>64</sup>

Throughout the Trotsky-Stalin struggle, Stalin maintained his official policy of denouncing anti-Semitism. The official version was readily accepted as the true picture of what Jewish life was like in the Soviet Union. Stalin, of course, was happy to reconfirm the rosy picture. When asked to comment on the state of the Jews in Russia, Stalin gave the following reply:

National and racial chauvinism is a survival of the barbarous and cannibalistic period. Anti-Semitism serves its exploiters as a lightning rod to protect capitalism from the attack of the working people, a wrong path to divert the latter from the right one, and lead them into a jungle. As consistent internationalists, Communists, therefore, cannot be but irreconcilable and sworn enemies of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism, a phenomenon profoundly hostile to the Soviet regime, is sternly repressed in the USSR. Under the laws of the USSR, active anti-Semites are subject to capital punishment.<sup>65</sup>

It is interesting to contrast Stalin's view of the period with that of his daughter Svetlana regarding anti-Semitism in the

USSR. She says:

In the Soviet Union only during the first decade after the Revolution was anti-Semitism dormant. But with the expulsion of Trotsky, and the extermination during the years of the purges of old Party members, many of whom were Jews, anti-Semitism was reborn in new grounds, and first of all in the Party itself. To this my father not only gave his support; he even propagated a good deal of it himself. In Soviet Russia, where anti-Semitism had old roots among the middle classes and the beurocracy, it now spread throughout the width and breadth of the land with the speed of a plague.<sup>66</sup>

The Purge Trials of the 1930's plagued Trotsky for a number of reasons. There was, of course, the obvious falsification of charges against him as leader of the conspiracy against Stalin and thus the State. Trotsky spent much of his time during this period of his life writing piece after piece defending himself against the charges, and trying vainly to warn the world of the anti-Semitism that was growing as a cancer within Stalin's Russia. The effect of Stalin's purges in Russia was to virtually terminate much of the organized life of Jewish communities. Trotsky set out to sound the alarm, especially in socialist circles, that the true causes of the movement were being replaced by Stalin's own designs. Despite warning after warning, Trotsky's charges fell on deaf and disbelieving ears.

One such reaction saw no anti-Semitism in the purge trials. The purges, according to this view, reflected a conflict in personalities with religion or ethnic origin having no place at all in the fight. Such an opinion would state: 'It is not

anti-Semitism that is behind this move to drive the opposition away from the center of government...it is a clash of personalities in quest of power."<sup>67</sup>

Similar thoughts were voiced in an article in the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent in February, 1937. This piece, entitled "The Russian Enigma", expressed the view that there were no grounds to foster the belief that anti-Semitism had flared up again within Russia. The author saw no difficulty in believing Stalin's charges of collaboration between the accused Bolsheviki and the Nazi's for the purpose of destroying the Stalinist system. The defendant's Jewishness was not to be considered, for, he notes, they had long ago shunned their Judaism and were "never anything but mere Jews by birth, nothing more."<sup>68</sup>

Even the Socialist press rejected Trotsky's warnings. Deutscher notes the following which appeared in the New York Yiddish Daily Der Tag. "This is the first time that we of the Jewish Press have heard such an accusation. We have been accustomed to look to the Soviet Union as to our only consolation, as far as anti-Semitism is concerned...It is unforgivable that Trotsky should raise such groundless charges against Stalin."<sup>69</sup> Similar amazement was voiced by such famous literary luminaries as Theodore Dreiser, Granville Hicks and Max Lerner.<sup>70</sup>

Despite official banishment, conspiracy charges and little

support, Trotsky continued to alert the world to the evils of Stalin and to Stalinist-sponsored anti-Semitism.

In an interview with correspondents of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, and the Mexican Der Neg in January, 1937, Trotsky flatly asserted that anti-Semitism was being used by the Stalinist regime.

You ask me if the Jewish question still exists in the USSR. Yes, it exists...The omnipotent bureaucracy stifles the development of national culture just as it does the whole of culture. Worse still, the country of the great proletarian revolution is now passing through a period of profound reaction... To reinforce its domination, the bureaucracy does not even hesitate to resort in a scarcely camouflaged manner to chauvinistic tendencies, above all to anti-Semitic ones. The latest Moscow trial, for example, was staged with the hardly concealed design of presenting internationalists as faithless and lawless Jews who are capable of selling themselves to the German Gestapo.

Since 1925, and above all since 1926, anti-Semitic demagoguery, well camouflaged, unattackable, goes hand in hand with symbolic trials against avowed pogromists...An important part of the Jewish petty bourgeoisie has been absorbed by the formidable apparatuses of the state, industry, commerce, the cooperatives, etc., above all in their lower and middle layers. This fact engenders an anti-Semitic state of feeling, and leaders manipulate it with a cunning skill in order to canalize and to direct especially against the Jews the existing discontent against the bureaucracy.

Perhaps the most stunning attack by Trotsky on the anti-Semitic trend in Russia was written in February, 1937 entitled Thermidor and Anti-Semitism. The article systematically outlined Trotsky's position. He used the term Thermidor to designate the seizure of power by the conservative Stalinist bureaucracy. The term Thermidor was the month of the French

Revolution when a reactionary force overthrew the radical Jacobins. Trotsky saw this being paralleled within the Soviet Union.

In the beginning of this article, Trotsky notes the reaction by many to his charges of anti-Semitism in Russia. He reminds us as well that we should not be shocked at his charges of anti-Semitism for it has a long and devilish history within Russia which he briefly outlines. To this end, he notes that it is folly to think that the inbred anti-Semitism of Russia would disappear within twenty years simply because legislation was passed. This fact established, Trotsky goes on to outline the social situation in Russia that paved the way for a rebirth of prejudice.

The Soviet regime, in actuality, initiated a series of new phenomena which, because of the poverty and low cultural level of the population were capable of generating anew, and did in fact generate anti-Semitic moods. The Jews are a typical city population. They comprise a considerable percentage of the city population in the Ukraine, in White Russia and even in Great Russia. The Soviet, more than any other regime in the world, needs a very great number of civil servants.

Civil servants are recruited from the more cultured city population. Naturally the Jews occupied a disproportionately large place among the bureaucracy and particularly so in its lower and middle levels. Of course, we can close our eyes to that fact and limit ourselves to vague generalities about the equality and brotherhood of all races. But an ostrich policy will not advance us a single step. The hatred of the peasants and the workers for the bureaucracy is a fundamental fact in Soviet life. The despotism of the regime, the persecution of every critic, the stifling of every living thought, finally the judicial frame-ups are merely the reflection of this basic fact. Even by a priori reasoning, it is impossible not to conclude that the hatred for the bureaucracy would assume an anti-Semitic

color, at least in those places where the Jewish functionaries compose a significant percentage of the population and are thrown into relief against the broad background of the peasant masses...

He who attentively observes Soviet life, even if only through official publications, will, from time to time see bared in various parts of the country, hideous bureaucratic abscesses: bribery, corruption, embezzlement, murder of persons whose existence is embarrassing to the bureaucracy, violation of women and the like. Were we to slash vertically through, we would see that every such abscess resulted from the bureaucratic stratum. Sometimes Moscow is constrained to resort to demonstration trials. In all such trials, the Jews inevitably comprise a significant percentage, in part because, as was already stated, they make up a large part of the bureaucracy and are branded with its odium, partly because, impelled by the instinct of self preservation, the leading cadre of the bureaucracy at the center and in the provinces, strives to divert the indignation of the working masses from itself to the Jews. This fact was known to every critical observer in the USSR as far back as ten years ago when the Stalin regime had hardly as yet revealed its basic features.

The struggle against the Opposition was, for the ruling clique, a question of life and death. The program, principles, ties with the masses, everything was rooted out and cast aside because of the anxiety of the new ruling clique for its self-preservation. These people stop at nothing in order to guard their privileges and power.<sup>72</sup>

Trotsky goes on to list the various instances of slurs that were used against him, his family and his friends. He outlines the growing anti-Semitic style of the government between the years 1923 and 1926 and dwells on the use by Stalin of camouflaged prejudice.

Under the direction of Stalin, Uglanov in Moscow, and Kirov in Leningrad, carried through this line systematically and almost fully in the open. In order the more sharply to demonstrate the differences between the 'old' course and the 'new', the Jews, even when unreservedly devoted to the general line, were removed from responsible party and Soviet posts. Not only in

the country, but even in the Moscow factories the baiting of the Opposition back in 1926 often assumed a thoroughly obvious anti-Semitic character. Many agitators spoke brazenly: 'The Jews are rioting'. I received hundreds of letters deploring the anti-Semitic methods in the struggle with the Opposition...

Again; if such methods are practiced at the very top where the personal responsibility of Stalin is absolutely unquestionable, then it is not hard to imagine what transpires in the ranks, at the factories, and especially at the kolkhozes. And how can it be otherwise? The physical extermination of the older generation of the Bolsheviks is, for every person who can think, an incontrovertible expression of Thermidorian reaction, and in its most advanced stage at that. History has never yet seen an example when the reaction following the revolutionary upsurge was not accompanied by the most unbridled chauvinistic passions, anti-Semitism among them.

The Thermidor represented the complete Trotsky attack on the evils of Stalin and his regime, and its use of anti-Semitism. The reaction to it by confirmed Stalinists was, as was to be expected, negative. Among the Trotskyites, it served to heighten their hatred of the conditions in Russia. In 1938, Trotskyites convened at a convention in Switzerland to establish a Fourth International which was to be independent of the Moscow centered Third International. The attempt failed to create the support that Trotsky and his followers desired. The Stalinist clique had successfully cut Trotsky off from control, and pressed their campaign to discredit him through the various charges and trials that were held in Moscow. The Thermidor fell on deaf ears and, in spite of its prophetic undertones, remained buried under the weight of Stalinist propaganda.

The prophetic nature of Trotsky's writings in the 30's is to be constantly noted. Tirelessly he fought for the world socialist revolution. With uncanny perception he isolated trends that would spell danger for the world and the world's Jews, and urged them to unite around the banner of internationalism.

Let us now consider how the Jewish question found its way into Trotsky's other writings in that turbulent decade of global uncertainty. The 1930's saw Trotsky fighting the battle for international socialism on a variety of fronts, but the obstacles to be overcome were just too stubborn. The decade saw decaying capitalism in the west; Stalinism and its particular brand of socialism in one country threatening to destroy that which he held dear in Russia, and a general tendency towards Fascist totalitarian solutions. Trotsky struggled valiantly against all these trends, and in doing so frequently concerned himself with the fate of the Jew within each situation. As the thirties advanced, and the Nazi takeover was consolidated, Trotsky more and more had to deal with the Jewish question.

Trotsky saw in Nazi Germany a confrontation that involved the future direction of mankind. Hitler's ultra-nationalism, racism and coercive techniques threatened man with a return to the Dark Ages. With Hitler, the rationalism of the 19th and 20th centuries was being challenged by the medieval myths of race and blood; myths that served to bolster the sagging

spirits of the German lower-middle classes. Thus Trotsky wrote: "Everything which society, if it had developed normally (i.e. towards socialism), would have rejected... as the excrement of culture is now bursting out through its throat: capitalist civilization is discouraging undigested barbarity--such is the psychology of National Socialism."74

Naturally Trotsky saw the rise of Nazism over against the decaying capitalism of Germany, and naturally he saw, in the victory of international socialism, the answer to the problem of threatening Fascism. He called on the members of the Fourth International to disclose the root causes of anti-Semitism so as to prevent its **recurrence**. Yet, when it came to the threatened Jews of Germany, he realized that they would not be saved by waiting for Trotskyite victories. "Immediate practical measures were required to save the Jews from Nazi butchers. With the defeat of the socialist revolution in Europe, nothing could have helped except a powerful international campaign to spotlight Hitler's actual plans, and to force open the doors of the Western countries most able to give asylum, especially the United States and England. Trotsky called for mass action and demanded asylum now for the threatened Jews. Such a demand, Trotsky argued, could unite all genuine opponents of Fascism - socialist or not - in a mass movement which might have saved millions from the gas chambers."75

The work of the American Fund for Political Prisoners proved to be a failure. The "realistic" approaches of labor, reformist, Stalinist and Zionist movements in favoring less active measures, doomed the movement to ineffectiveness. Despite Trotsky's concern for the immediate rescue of the threatened Jews, no socialist unity was forthcoming. Once again his optimism was sorely tested, his faith viciously tried.<sup>76</sup>

The rise of Nazism, the victories of Stalinism, the entire spectre of uncertainty that engulfed the world, plus the continuing frustration of his own position, allowed Trotsky to consider, in greater depth, his views on Jews and Jewishness. The reality of virile anti-Semitism was not to be denied. Yet the political facts only caused to breed continuing despair.

What then of Trotsky's stand on Palestine? Did he go through a change of mind; did he finally see some value in a territorial-nationalistic solution to the Jewish question? In an interview in February of 1934, he took up this question:

The question was put to Trotsky as to the possibility of Palestine as a Jewish homeland now that the anti-Semitism of Germany was a reality. He replied in the following manner:

Both the fascist state in Germany, as well as the Arabian-Jewish struggle, bring forth new and very clear verifications of the principle that the Jewish question cannot be solved within the framework of capitalism. I do not know whether Jewry will be built up again as a nation. However, there can be

no doubt that the material conditions for the existence of Jewry as an independent nation could be brought about only by the proletarian revolution. There is no such thing on our planet as the idea that one has more claim to land than another.

The establishment of a territorial base for Jewry in Palestine, or any other country, is conceivable only with the migrations of large human masses. Only a triumphant socialism can take upon itself such tasks. It can be foreseen that it may take place either on the basis of a mutual understanding, or with the aid of a kind of international proletarian tribunal which should take up this question and solve it.

The blind alley in which German Jewry finds itself, as well as the blind alley in which Zionism finds itself, is inseparably bound up with the blind alley of world capitalism, as a whole. Only when the Jewish workers clearly see this interrelationship will they be forewarned against pessimism and despair.<sup>77</sup>

Three years later in Mexico, Trotsky returned to the question of the Jewish homeland. In this interview, he reiterated his belief that Zionism was incapable of solving the problem operating under the umbrella of "rotting capitalism" and "British imperialism." Again he puts his trust in socialism and the attendant collapse of nationalism.

Socialism will open the possibility of great migrations on the basis of the most developed technique and culture. It goes without saying that what is here involved is not compulsory displacements, that is, the creation of new ghettos for certain nationalities, but displacements freely consented to, or rather demanded by certain nationalities or parts of nationalities. The dispersed Jews who would want to be reassembled in the same community, will find a sufficiently extensive and rich spot under the sun. The same possibility will be opened for the Arabs, as for all other scattered nations. National Topography will become part of the planned economy. This is the grand historical perspective that I envisage. To work for international socialism means also to work for the solution of the Jewish question.<sup>78</sup>

How ironic that his dream of decades ago is being brought to light under the banner of international capitalism. In July of 1940, a month before his death, Trotsky wrote again on the possibility of Jewish salvation in Palestine.

The attempt to solve the Jewish question through the migration of Jews to Palestine can now be seen for what it is, a tragic mockery of the Jewish people. Interested in winning the sympathy of the Arabs who are more numerous than the Jews, the British government has sharply altered its policy toward the Jews, and has actually renounced its promise to help them found their 'own home' in a foreign land. The future development of military events may well transform Palestine into a bloody trap for several hundred thousand Jews. Never was it so clear as it is today that the salvation of the Jewish people is bound up inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system.<sup>79</sup>

Much of the ideology voiced by Trotsky with respect to Palestine, can be found to be in line with Trotsky's views on the experimental national Jewish colony set up by Stalin in the area called Birobidjan. Stalin opened this area up for Jewish colonization in the late 1920's, and tried to populate it with Jews. The area, remote and hardly suitable to large-scale agricultural enterprises, never really amounted to the promised land within the Soviet Union, despite attempts by various international organizations to interest immigrants. In October of 1934, Trotsky replied to a letter sent to him by a group of Jewish Left Oppositionists which asked his views on the Birobidjan project.

In his reply, Trotsky noted that a worker's government is duty bound to create for its citizens the best possible conditions

for cultural development. If this involved the wish of the inhabitants to create their own schools, press and other institutions, then so be it. The key, of course, is that this be voluntary. In other words, people should have the freedom of mobility to choose areas of living and the right to develop institutions of their own once that area is found. This is the basis for the international society that will develop under a world controlled by the international proletariat, a world devoid of enforced national restrictions. Again, the key is freedom. "In the sphere of the national question there must be no restraint; on the contrary, there must be an all-sided material assistance for the cultural needs of all nationalities and ethnic groups. If this or that national group is doomed to go down (in the national sense), then this must proceed in the same way as a natural process, but never as a consequence of any territorial, economic, or administrative difficulties."<sup>80</sup>

Trotsky, it would seem, would have no objection to such a colony provided that it was freely arrived at and not created out of national political-economic motives. Such a suspicion seems evident when he mentioned the colony in the course of his Mexican interview in 1937.

On Birobidjan I can give you no more than my personal evaluations. I am not acquainted with this region, and still less with the conditions in which the Jews have settled there. In any case it can be no more than a very limited experience. The USSR alone would still be too poor to resolve its own Jewish question, even under a regime much more socialist than the present one. The Jewish question, I

repeat, is indissolubly bound up with the complete emancipation of humanity. Everything else that is done in this domain can only be a palliative and often even a two-edged blade, as the example of Palestine shows.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, Trotsky seemed to view the creation of Birobidjan with considerable suspicion. He did not seem opposed to it in theory, but he is opposed to any type of non-voluntary unit. The true salvation will come only in an international mosaic of voluntary groupings.

Throughout the turmoils of the thirties, and in the face of the disintegrating world situation, Trotsky remained faithful to his basic belief in the validity of international socialism as the solution to the Jewish question in various countries. Among the groups that responded to his pleas were Yiddish-speaking Communist workers in France and the United States. In contrast to the leftist Zionist factions in these countries, the Trotskyites saw the Jews as part of a revolutionary force which had a definite role to play in the battle for socialism's victory within their own countries. In letters to the workers within these countries, Trotsky urged them not to become a separate entity but to join with other workers as part of the international proletariat. In 1932 Trotsky wrote a letter to the Yiddish language Opposition paper in New York called Unser Kampf. The English language Militant published the same letter on June 11, 1932. In it, Trotsky urged the cooperation of Jewish workers with like-minded non-Jews so as to build a better international movement. Each group would bring its own uniqueness and thus build a greater whole.

The Jewish workers in the United States are a large and important part of the whole proletariat in the country. Historical conditions have made the Jewish workers susceptible to the ideas of scientific Communism. The very fact of the dispersement of the Jewish workers in a number of countries should instill in them, and does instill in them, the ideas of internationalism. In view of just this alone, the Communist Left Opposition has every reason to count on a big influence among the Jewish proletarians in the United States. What characterizes the Left Opposition primarily is its profound international character. Precisely because of this, it must speak in every national language. The existence of an independent Jewish publication serves not to separate the Jewish workers, but on the contrary to make available to them those ideas which combine all the workers in one international revolutionary family. You, it is understood, reject decisively and intransigently the old Bundist principle of federation of the national organizations. The Jewish workers won over by your paper must struggle within the general ranks of the Communist League and the mass organizations of the American proletariat. Insofar as your paper will develop and strengthen, it may also assume significance beyond the boundaries of the United States and Canada; in South America, in Europe and Palestine.<sup>82</sup>

As Trotsky surveyed the world situation in the late thirties, he could not help but grow increasingly alarmed. No amount of effort seemed to be enough to stem the growing tides of reaction and persecution. Anti-Semitism was running rampant throughout Europe, and signs of its enveloping the United States were becoming ever more sinister. Shortly after the formation of the Fourth International, Trotsky issued an urgent appeal to the American Jewish community. Ostensibly the appeal was for funds to help his movement combat the growing reactionary menace. In the course of that appeal, he sounded again his call for an international worker's alliance. Now, however, the call was even more pronounced, the level of fear even higher.

In Appeal To American Jews Menaced by Facism and Anti-Semitism, written in December of 1938, Trotsky cites the rising tide of anti-Semitism throughout the world, and even in the United States. As the world situation declined, so did the number of countries willing to aid the Jews. The next stage of the drama can only be the "physical extermination of the Jews". All attempts to aid them have failed. "Now more than ever, the fate of the Jewish people -- not only their political but also their physical fate -- is indissolubly linked with the emancipating struggle of the international proletariat."<sup>83</sup> Nothing short of massive world-wide organization and action would be able to save the Jews from a grim fate.

Unfortunately for the world, as well as for Trotsky and the Jews, there was to be no mass international movement of action, funds, or revolution. The world had already careened too far along its road to global conflict to stop for a breath of reason. The second world war found Trotsky still clinging to his ideals. In May of 1940, the Fourth International convened an Emergency Conference out of which came treatises on the relationship between imperialism and the world proletarian revolution. In this work, Trotsky attempts to see the dilemma of the Jews as a consequence of decaying capitalism. One may wonder if Trotsky does not feel something more than academic kinship to the Jewish problem. Like the Jews, Trotsky was an eternal refugee, bidden to wander the face of the earth in

search of a home and an identity, struggling, in the face of a decaying world to live, only to be viciously cut down. Does Trotsky's tragic life symbolize the historical experience of the eternal Jew? Ever searching for a home, for acceptance, for an ideal? He writes:

The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded. The question of admitting a hundred extra refugees becomes a major problem for such a world power as the United States. In an era of aviation, telegraph, telephone, radio, and television, travel from country to country is paralyzed by passports and visas. The period of the wasting away of foreign trade and the decline of domestic trade is at the same time the period of the monstrous intensification of chauvinism, and especially anti-Semitism. In the epoch of its rise, capitalism took the Jewish people out of the ghetto and utilized them as an instrument in its commercial expansion.

Today decaying capitalist society is striving to squeeze the Jewish people from all its pores; seventeen million individuals out of the two billion populating the globe, that is, less than one percent can no longer find a place on our planet! Amid the vast expanses of land and the marvels of technology, which has also conquered the skies for man as well as the earth, the bourgeois has managed to convert our planet into a foul prison....<sup>84</sup>

On August 21, 1940, Leon Trotsky was assassinated in Mexico, a victim of Stalin's tenacious determination to rid himself of his most hated rival...the eloquent spokesman for international socialism and tragic symbol of Jewish destiny.

NOTES...CHAPTER IV

59. Conquest, Robert. The Great Terror. p. 77
60. Deutscher, Isaac. The Non Jewish Jew. p. 74
61. Personal letter from Trotsky to Bukharin published under "Two Letters to Bukharin", Workers' International News. Vol. 5, No. 7, October-November 1942. p. 30.
62. Spiro, George. Marxism and The Bolshevik State. p. 815
63. Ibid., p. 823
64. Deutscher. The Prophet Unarmed. p. 376
65. Schwartz. op cit., p. 291-293
66. Alliluyeva, Svetlana. Only One Year. p. 153
67. American Jewish Archives. Box 1030
68. Watchman, "The Russian Enigma", Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, Feb. 19, 1937, p. 1
69. Deutscher, Isaac. The Prophet Outcast. p. 369
70. Ibid.
71. Trotsky. On The Jewish Question. p. 21
72. Ibid., p. 23-25
73. Ibid., p. 26-27
74. Deutscher. op cit. p. 154
75. Trotsky. op cit. p. 4-5
76. Ibid., p. 5
77. Ibid., p. 18
78. Ibid., p. 21
79. Ibid., p. 12
80. Ibid., p. 19
81. Ibid., p. 20-21
82. Ibid., p. 16
83. Ibid., p. 29
84. Ibid., p. 30

## V

A story of Rabbi Meir the saint and sage and Elisha ben Abiyuh, the heretic, called sometimes Akher (the stranger).

Once on a Sabbath Rabbi Meir was with his teacher, and as usual they became engaged in a deep argument. The heretic was riding a donkey, and Rabbi Meir, as he could not ride on a Sabbath, walked by his side and listened so intently to the words of wisdom falling from his heretical lips that he failed to notice that he and his teacher had reached the ritual boundary which Jews were not allowed to cross on a Sabbath. The great heretic turned to his orthodox pupil and said: 'Look, we have reached the boundary—we must part now; you must not accompany me any farther--go back!' Rabbi Meir went back to the Jewish community, while the heretic rode on--beyond the boundaries of Jewry.<sup>85</sup>

Leon Trotsky spent his life beyond the boundaries of the established order. Be it the Czars, Stalin, the BUND or Zionism, Trotsky went beyond parochial definitions of movements and civilizations to the frontiers of creativity. He saw socialism's victory within an international permanent revolution and a new Jewish identity as an emerging element in that dynamic process. The tragedy was the gap between the frontiers of Trotsky's imagination and the reality of twentieth-century history.

The realities of history placed Trotsky within a civilization of extreme flux where men and their ideologies clashed openly, and where the tools of repression and persecution were the norm. Anti-Semitism followed Trotsky to the frontier as it had followed his brothers into the Pale. The Jew, Jewishness and anti-Semitism were too much imbedded within the fabric of Russian culture to allow Trotsky a vacuum-like existence. Jews have never lived unaffected by the general culture; there are no

vacuums in Jewish history.

The struggle that resulted between Trotsky and Stalin brought, as we have seen, nagging confrontations between Trotsky and his Judaism. Despite his staunch faith in the ultimate struggle and eventual salvation of international socialism and of Judaism's solution within that struggle, Trotsky was to die never seeing even a glimmer of his fought-for dream. Content with his vision of a global upheaval that would transform mankind, he suffered the despair of similar futurists when the reality of glorified nationalism transformed his vision into a throbbing nightmare. There are no vacuums on the frontier either.

The tragedy and frustration of Trotsky has been noted by Scholars for years. Consider now, however, one man's reaction to Trotsky's struggle. The following is from a letter written by a lifelong Trotskyite who devoted much time and energy to the vision of the Fourth International in England:

Perhaps the element of Greek tragedy in Trotsky's life which is always noted is to be found, not in the fall of a titan and the death of all near to him, but in his attempt from the earliest days to ignore his Jewish heritage and all that entails, only to find it increasingly impossible to do so due to the unscrupulous use of anti-Semitism by his arch enemy (from about 1925). At the very end of his life...he discovered...the unique danger threatening the Jews--less than 1% of the globe's population being squeezed out 'from all its pores.' This after a lifetime of believing the Jewish problem to be only a component of the larger and infinitely more significant one of the decay of capitalism; and one that could only be solved in the larger framework of 'socialism or barbarism.' The moment one admits that Jewish survival, Jewish participation in the history

of the revolution, anti-Semitism, etc., are unique, the whole of the Marxist structure collapses.....

Poor Trotsky tried so desperately to achieve assimilation--not as is usually the case into the established society--but to create a new society into which he could assimilate. Unfortunately you cannot erase the old so easily. Popular anti-Semitism, interested anti-Semitism (Stalin etc.), the unsolicited fact that most of his friends were Jews...and damned by him by their support, all meant that he wore the yellow star despite himself. By 1940, he was recognizing the irrational nature of anti-Semitism and the uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy, but then his own tragedy came to a sharp end.<sup>86</sup>

And what of Trotsky's place in Judaism? As a prophet of an international cooperative society held together by an evolving economic order, he opened up new possibilities for as yet unrealized Jewish identities. The banishment of Trotsky from the ranks of Jewish heroes only served to confirm a view of Judaism that sees as its legitimate definitions the identity structures of a present or a past. Within such narrow lines, Trotsky never was comfortable. His concern for a new future, while never realized, nonetheless allowed him to serve as a spiritual catalyst for possible new Jewish futures, futures that saw the entire world as home, and all mankind as equal sharers in that home. The evils of nationalism, and for him capitalism, served only to constrict the possible emergence of an international identity.

Trotsky appears then as the prototype of the Midrash's Elisha ben Abiyah; the Jew who transcends the present systems, and by doing so, confirms the dynamism of being Jewish. Trotsky, like Elisha, traveled beyond the posted boundary, on to an uncharted

frontier from a Judaism that he found too narrow, too archaic and too constricting. Yet, to deny Trotsky's Jewishness because of his passage beyond the boundary would be to negate the evolutionary creativity that has indeed been the characteristic of all Jewish history. Trotsky and his parallels remain unique in their ability to break new ground into new civilizations creating new Judaisms. To break that new ground, to forge the new identities required the ability to function on the frontiers of civilizations, beyond the Pale of secure pasts and presents.

Trotsky, like Jewish revolutionaries of all ages, functioned not within a society, but on the borderlines of several. The genius to survive and create in such an environment marks Trotsky as the real revolutionary thinker that he was. Never content to make peace with the present, Trotsky lived and died on the intellectual frontiers of an internationalism that is still to be realized.

Deutscher brilliantly sums up the place of men like Trotsky, Marx, Spinoza and Freud within the continuum of Jewish history in the following manner:

They were a priori exceptional in that as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions and national cultures. They were born and brought up on the borderlines of various epochs. Their minds matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other. They lived on the margins, or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. Each of them was in society, and yet, not in it....They are all determinists because having watched many societies and studied many 'ways of life' at close quarters, they grasp the basic regularities of life.

Their manner of thinking is dialectical, because, living on the borderlines of nations and religions, they see society in a state of flux. They conceive reality as being dynamic, not static. Those who are shut within one society, one nation or one religion, tend to imagine that their way of life and their way of thought have absolute and unchangeable validity, and that all that contradicts their standards is somehow 'unnatural', inferior, or evil. Those, on the other hand, who live on the borderlines of various civilizations, comprehend more clearly the great movements and the great contradictoriness of nature and society.<sup>87</sup>

Seen in this light, we can now appreciate Trotsky as being representative of that type of liberating personality that extends the possibilities of Jewish identities to new and more challenging directions. Rather than symbolizing the destruction of Judaism, Trotsky can be seen as a man who laid the foundations for the creation of an international Jewish identity, an identity that would be freed from the destructive trappings of national loyalties and emotions. In many ways, Trotsky represents the still-to-be discovered Jew, the Jew that views no land as home, but sees all lands as home. The international Jewish identity is still a vision, an inhabitant of the frontiers of decaying national civilizations. It still awaits discovery; it still suffers from parochial fears that confuse freedom with assimilation. The vision of Trotsky internationalism still awaits man. As the twentieth century turns toward its final quarter, most of the elements that drove Trotsky to defeat remain. Yet, to deny progress would be to deny hope. The uniqueness that is Jewish survival has always clung to hope allowing the Trotsky's of every age to move beyond the boundaries of the present to search

for and create new Jewish futures. As long as this persists,  
the vision of Trotsky will live.

NOTES...CHAPTER V

- 85. Deutscher. The Non-Jewish Jew. p. 25, 26.
- 86. Personal letter from Mr. Melvin Durden of London, England dated November 5, 1971 in reply to a request for light on Mr. Durden's work in England in various Trotskyite groups.
- 87. Deutscher. Op. cit. p. 27, 35.

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