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The Fourth International and the Postwar Trotskyist Tendencies: A World History of the Trotskyist Movement

The last attempt to offer an overview of the history of Trotskyism (Robert J. Alexander's *International Trotskyism 1929-1985*)¹ is more than a quarter of a century old, and its alphabetical arrangement and inordinate size make it difficult to consult. Partisan histories (such as Pierre Frank's and François Moreau's, written from the point of view of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International) are mostly biased. Valuable contributions, such as Al Richardson and Sam Bornstein's volumes on the history of British Trotskyism (of which the key second volume was not consulted by Alexander), are not as widely read as they should be, because they were cast in a national framework. The current project will provide an outline of the world Trotskyist movement, chronologically arranged, that will take into account the major additions to the field since the writing of Alexander's work.

The book's central thesis is that the crisis of the Fourth International did not start with Michel Pablo in 1953 but ten years earlier, in 1943, with the abandonment of transitional politics in the face of the Italian revolution and the onslaught of the democratic counterrevolution in Western Europe under the aegis of American imperialism.² According to this analysis, the advent of "Pabloism" only gave a more explicit form to what had already been a strong adaptation to Stalinism under James P. Cannon and Gerry Healy, especially after the Tito-Stalin split but also earlier. The whole controversy over the history of the Fourth International has therefore tended to revolve around a false axis. The book will attempt to provide an account of Trotskyist history going beyond the mythologies that grant the monopoly of Trotskyism to any particular organization.

This implies, first of all, incorporating the insights provided by Richardson's journal *Revolutionary History* and by Pierre Broué's *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, as well as by the ongoing editorial efforts of Jean-Jacques Marie and Paolo Casciola. Large numbers of primary documents, particularly journals, have been made available online thanks to the efforts of Marty Goodman of the Riazanov Library Digitization Project,³ the Marxists Internet Archive collective,⁴ the association RaDAR (« Rassembler, diffuser les archives révolutionnaires »),⁵ the Fundación Pluma headed by Nora Ciapponi in Argentina,⁶ the Bibliothèque Numérique du CERMTRI in France⁷ and more mainstream initiatives such as the Internet Archive, Gallica and the IISG online archives.⁸ In addition, major works of historical synthesis, such

¹ Robert J. Alexander: *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985. A Documented Analysis of the Movement*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991.

² This builds on a previous work by the author; cf. *Strategy and Tactics in a Revolutionary Period: U.S. Trotskyism and the European Revolution, 1943-1946*. In: *Science & Society* 78 (2014), 4, pp. 484-512.

³ <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/>

⁴ <http://www.marxists.org>

⁵ <http://www.association-radar.org>

⁶ <http://fundacionpluma.info>

⁷ <http://www.bibnumcermtri.fr>

⁸ <https://archive.org>; <http://gallica.bnf.fr>; <http://www.iisg.nl/archives>

as Gary Tennant's history of Trotskyism in Cuba, Gregor Benton's *Prophets Unarmed* on Chinese Trotskyism, Charles Wesley Ervin's *Tomorrow is Ours* on the Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon before 1948, S. Sándor John's *Bolivia's Radical Tradition* on Trotskyism in Bolivia, and Osvaldo Coggiola and Horacio González's histories of Trotskyism in Argentina have since been published.⁹

One of the aims of the current project is to "deprovincialise" the Euro-American accounts of Trotskyism, focused on the imperialist countries, by restoring to the semi-colonial countries of Latin America, Asia, the Arab world and Southern Africa their rightful place. That will imply, for instance, summarizing the contents of a large number of works on Brazil only available in Portuguese. The two major barriers to the completion of the project are the linguistic limitations of the author (particularly regarding Arabic and Asian languages) and the paucity of secondary sources on key countries such as Peru. We therefore call on all the scholars and activists proficient in Arabic, African and Asian languages and interested in reconstructing the history of Trotskyism to contact us at the email address provided below.

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⁹ Gary Tennant: Dissident Cuban Communism. The Case of Trotskyism, 1932-1965, PhD Diss., University of Bradford, 1999, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/cuba/tennant/PhD/contents.html> Gregor Benton(ed.): *Prophets Unarmed. Chinese Trotskyists in Revolution, War, Jail, and the Return from Limbo*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2014; Charles Wesley Ervin: *Tomorrow is Ours. The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935-48*, Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 2006; S. Sándor John: *Bolivia's Radical Tradition. Permanent Revolution in the Andes*, Tuscon, The University of Arizona Press, 2009; Osvaldo Coggiola: *Historia del trotskismo en Argentina y América Latina*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones RyR, 2006; Ernesto González (ed.): *El trotskismo obrero e internacionalista en la Argentina*. 4 vols., Buenos Aires, Antídoto, 1995-2006.