Editorial

It is unsurprising that transnational approaches have become prevalent in more recent studies of world communism. As a methodology, it allows each of the authors in this issue to reflect on networks within and beyond the political borders of the communist movement, as well as offering insights into the political culture of individual countries. The first three articles look at the transnational networks which allowed Trotsky, during his years of exile after 1928, to continue to communicate his political message internationally – even if his circle of supporters was always limited – and to search for asylum in Western Europe, away from Stalin's Secret Police which monitored his every move in Turkey and already caused him to fear for his life.[1]

It was Trotsky's ability to write and, of course, to conceptualise Stalinism that left such a deep imprint in the study of the Russia Revolution. Even if they did not agree with Trotsky's overall analysis, let alone his politics, his methodological inspiration can been seen in the works of outstanding specialists on the Stalin era – including Sheila Fitzpatrick and Moshe Lewin.[2] Beyond academia too, Trotsky's writing left its mark. His autobiography, *My Life*, can be read as a call to the international communist movement to embrace him as Lenin's chosen heir, whose fight against Stalinism was the fight to preserve the true spirit of October 1917. His biographer Isaac Deutscher – although not in agreement with his subject in every issue – did much to shape the wider, enduring memory of Trotsky as the 'conscience of the revolution'.[3] In commanding prose, Deutscher described Trotsky's exile to Alma-Ata in 1928 then, the following year, his deportation across the Black Sea to Turkey in a manner encouraging the reader to see Lenin's inheritance leaving with him.[4]

Trotsky would have liked to return to Moscow as head of the international communist movement; but this was not to be, despite his ability to see the significance of the threat posed by Nazism which Stalin could

not. After Hitler's 'seizure of power' in 1933, Trotsky attempted to set up a Fourth International to supersede the Stalinised Third International; but this had very limited results.[5] In a common theme running through the following articles, it was Trotsky's friends beyond the narrow circle of his political allies who he depended on to make his political case in print and to appeal to western governments for asylum. After spending several years in Istanbul with his appeals to enter western countries rejected, he finally arrived in France in 1933, before having to leave for Norway in 1935 and Mexico in 1936. The urgency with which Trotsky felt the need to find asylum in Europe, and European governments' prolonged rejection of his appeals, is addressed with biting satire in his autobiography.[6]

Bois' article details Trotsky's friendship with Franz Pfemfert, the editor of the radical journal *Die Aktion*, and his wife Alexandra Ramm Pfemfert, a translator whose work included close collaboration with Trotsky to bring his autobiography to German readers. Long after the German Communist Party had abandoned Trotsky, Pfemfert – a dissident communist of strong opinions who championed 'council communism' – opened the pages of *Die Aktion* to him, where his writing shared the pages with the widest range of leftists whose only common theme was their hostility towards developments in Soviet Russia under Stalin. The Pfemferts' contact with Trotsky was limited to correspondence, which consumed a vast amount of Trotsky's time, especially in his years of exile. But the Pfemferts' home, bookshop and art gallery served as a transnational hub for overlapping networks of leftists internationally, some of whom were Trotskyists. The couple, however, had become personal friends, not political allies. Indeed Trotsky had requested that Franz Pfemfert stop discussing politics in his letters, lest the two men risked parting company. In 1933, the Pfemferts – like Trotsky before them – became exiles, in their case from National Socialism. They passed through Czechoslovakia and Paris before reaching Mexico in 1941, a year too late to meet Trotsky personally.

Liam McNulty then focuses our attention on Trotsky's unsuccessful attempt to gain entry into Britain. In July 1929, Ramsey MacDonald's second Labour government rejected Trotsky's application for a visa, setting a precedent that the Tory-led National Government followed. The incident provoked scare stories in the right-wing press and debates

in parliament, as well the behind-the-scenes interventions of the Foreign Office. The author's specific contribution is to use this affair in order to reflect on the political culture of the British left. McNulty persuasively argues that there was a common core of radicalism growing out of the nineteenth century, which spanned the Independent Labour Party (ILP), through the Fabians to the Liberal Party – and that some members of the CPGB (notably Ivor Montagu) shared these values before Stalinism eclipsed this more pluralistic domestic political culture in the mid-1930s.

Ole Martin Rønning then turns our attention to Trotsky's period of political asylum in Norway during 1935 and 1936 in order to reflect on the enduring historiographical theme of centre-periphery relations, expanding this to reflect on wider issues of domestic Norwegian political culture and its political borders. After an initially 'moderate' response to the Labour Party granting Trotsky political asylum, the impact of the Stalin's show trails – and their focus on the alleged 'counter-revolutionary' Trotsky – marked the culmination of the uprooting of the Norwegian Communist Party from its 'local' political traditions. In this process, a central role was played by Moscow-trained officials, who ensure that the party became a vehicle for transmitting Soviet political culture abroad. However absurd and fabricated Stalin's charges against Trotsky were, the Labour Party joined the attack on Trotsky, not least to avoid conflict with Moscow at a time of international tensions. We are also reminded of how, at the height of the 'Popular Front' era abroad, the Comintern apparatus was also being incinerated in flames of the 'Great Terror'.

Frederick Petersson then turns our attention to Willi Münzenberg, another important – if lesser know – German communist, who had joined Lenin in his exile in Switzerland before the First World War and, in 1921, been appointed to head the Comintern's campaigns to take communism beyond its core working-class membership internationally. He had impressive successes as a propagandist, perhaps nowhere more so than in his use of transnational networks to recruit support and win the sympathy of those beyond the party's ranks who were active in the anti-colonial movements of the interwar years. Münzenberg, like Trotsky, almost certainly met his end at the hands of Stalin's assassins as he fled from Paris in 1940. Finally, and fatally, he had declared: 'Stalin, the enemy is you!'[7]

Evan Smith's review article discusses recent studies of communist, anti-colonial and labourite movements which have drawn on transnational approaches. While these studies add to our existing knowledge of institutions like the Communist International, they also flags up independent-minded figures, such as the Trotskyist, CLR James, who fused black consciousness with marxism – and even reported on cricket for the *Manchester Guardian*.

Last, but not least, for the first time this journal carries an obituary. As a member of the journal's editorial board and, by far and away, the most influential historian of communism in twentieth century Germany, we present you with a tribute to Hermann Weber's scholarly achievement.

Gidon Cohen (Durham) & Norry LaPorte (South Wales)

Notes

1 Geoff Swain, *Trotsky*, Pearson: London, 2006, pp184-98.
2 Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as Civilisation*, University of California Press, 1999, pp5-6; Chris Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, Arnold: London, 1993, pp124f.
3 For an interesting review of the reissue of Deutscher's biography, which makes this point, see Neal Ascherson, 'Victory in Defeat', in *London Review of Books*, 26, 23, 2 December 2004 (online archive).
4 Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, Verso: London, 2003, pp1-5.
5 See, for example, J. Arch Getty, 'Trotsky in Exile: The Founding of the Fourth International', in *Soviet Studies*, 38, 1, 1986, pp24-35. Getty notes the political implications of Trotsky's highly partisan approach to politics. For a summary of the limits of the appeal of Trotskyism, see Robert service, *Comrades. Communism: A World History*, Pan Books: London, 2007, pp198-99.
6 Trotsky, *My Life*, Penguin: London, 1975, esp. pp589ff.
7 Bernhard H Bayerlein, *"Der Verräter, Stalin, bist Du!". Vom Ende der linken Solidarität 1939-1941*, Aufbau Verlag: Berlin, 2008.